

## **Obligations of faith: Love your neighbor**

### **Jas. 2:1-13**

Intro: This story, whether real or not, may at least in parable rivet our attention on an important Biblical subject--partiality.

In chapter two James gives us a practical example of how our faith in Christ affects our lives. He shows that the man who has been saved by faith is obligated to show his faith in genuine love for others.

### **A simple exhortation**

Do not hold (stop holding) your faith with personal favoritism. The Gr. word means "to lift up the face". From a Hebrew idiom conveying the idea of causing one to be happy by showing favor to him; thus by extension, to do so by showing partiality or discrimination.

We could not show faith in the Lord by doing what the Lord would not do!  
Ac. 10:34 (impartial in salvation), Rom. 2:11 (and in judgment)

### **A graphic illustration--v. 2-3**

James illustrates favoritism on the basis of economics.

Synagoge=assembly, not building. Another form of the word used in Heb. 10:25.

Clothes=with bright clothing vs. dirty, from much use.

You sit here.. you stand over there!

This one of many way discrimination or partiality may be shown. Other forms: race, education, age, nationality, morality, many others.

### **A needed condemnation--v. 4**

When God's people make distinctions such as these, (James uses a word meaning "self-divided" or "doubtful"), they are no longer motivated by love. Instead an unholy mix has taken hold of our lives.

When we show favoritism it indicates that our motives are not pure and that we are motivated by selfish considerations. We quit being people of love seeking to save others and become people of selfishness who judge others.

When we show partiality we become judges of who is worthy of our association and efforts rather than people of love toward all. Thus James says we become "judges with evil motives".

Do you ever find yourself torn in this way about how to treat certain people? Are there doubts about whether you ought to really love certain groups or classes of people? Do you look for reasons not to love them, but rather to condemn them?

Before James looks at the principle violated he makes what some have called a social argument.

### **An indicting interrogation (the social argument), v. 5-7**

Did not God chose the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?

This does not mean that the rich cannot be saved ; but that characteristically it is the poor who have the "poverty of spirit" to enter the kingdom! Cf. Lk. 7:22 Yet they were rejecting or dishonoring the poor!

Cf. 1 Cor. 1:26ff It amazes me how easy it is for us to ignore the people most likely to welcome the good news of the kingdom while doubling our efforts with those least likely to hear us! All need to hear the truth; but experience has taught us that the poor are more likely to obey!

Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? (Christ)

Often it was the aristocrat, whose wealth had enables him to buy power, that misused that power even against Christians. They would oppress the Christian, dragging him into court and blaspheming the name "Christian" which he wore!

### **A Scriptural explanation (the moral argument)**

Now James looks at the principle which partiality violates. What does God want from us? What are the obligations of faith?

We are obligated by our faith in Christ to love all men!

This is the teaching of the "royal" law (perhaps because it comes from the King or perhaps because Jesus said it is the greatest (Mt. 22:37; Lk. 10:26-28).

James uses the Greek word "agape" which in the Biblical context conveys the attitude of intellectual consideration with which we seek to meet the needs of those around us regardless of their worthiness to receive our blessings. To seek the highest good of another unconditionally. It was this love that God had for us! Rom. 5:9 And to that love we are called!

Thus if we "love our neighbors as ourselves" we are doing well! We are demonstrating saving faith. And in that faith we stand righteous before God. We are walking in the light and having fellowship with God!

However, if we show partiality then we stand condemned as sinners and are convicted by the royal law as transgressors.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all! What does James mean by this?

The royal law is the summation of all laws (Rom. 13:9). To truly obey it, we must be willing to do whatever God commands as a manifestation of love. To unfaithfully set it aside in one way is tantamount to violating it in every way! For all of the law is a unit that stands upon one and the same authority.

These Jewish Christians could readily see that the command "you shall not kill" or "you shall not commit adultery" were both more specific expressions of "love for our neighbor". One could not claim to be a keeper of the law because he did one but not the other. To violate

either was to violate the whole law. In a similar way, showing partiality was another way to violate the whole law and put one in condemnation. Even the law of Moses had taught this: Lev. 19:18, 15 Therefore, showing partiality made one violate the royal law and cause him to stand condemned as a sinner.

The point is not that we must obey God perfectly in every way to go to heaven and that we can never sin (salvation of perfect obedience); the point is: we cannot pick and choose which laws of God we're going to obey and still profess to be faithful, obedient people! If we are obedient to God we will strive to do all that he says!

### **A final admonition**

Speak and act as those judged by the law of liberty.

These Jews had been delivered from the enslavement of the Law by the gospel of Christ. As believers they were no longer under obligation to earn their salvation by perfect obedience; they were "liberated" by the gospel. Through faith they had come under the "mercy" of God. As recipients of God's mercy, they were obligated to show mercy and love to others, just as God had shown it to them.

However if they continued in partiality, it would manifest an unbelief that would put them instead under condemnation of law and cause them to lose access to the mercy of God. v. 13

Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant illustrates this kind of unbelief that results in condemnation (Mt. 18:28-32). And so Jesus taught in the model prayer:

Mercy boasts against (triumphs) over judgment. Difficult verse: but perhaps it suggests that to stand in the mercy of God is our triumphant boast at the judgment. Without it we are helplessly lost, but with it we may win the victory over sin through faith. Knowing that mercy is the source of our own salvation, we should show it toward others.

### **Some things that will help**

In every soul there is potential for spiritual greatness.

God loves all men and he sees spirits (hearts), not faces.

Remember that whatever privileges we have had are by God's grace and not right. We could have come into this world with all disadvantages that make people discriminate.

God has accepted us in spite of our deficiencies. How can we treat others differently.

**Conclusion: So then, the message of this section is that our faith in the Lord must express itself in genuine love for all men. We must seek their highest good, their salvation, granting them whatever mercy they may need because we ourselves have been the recipients of God's wonderful mercy. To refuse to do so is to make us transgressors of the law and cause us to lose access to God's grace.**