

The Sin of Partiality

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[0 : 00] Well if we could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, we turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the letter of James in chapter 2.

James chapter 2 and if we just read again at verse 1. My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. So as you know this evening we're continuing our study in the letter of James.

And as we said before, the letter of James is to be considered as a handbook to Christian living.

Because James' greatest concern in his letter, it's not for information but for application.

James wants us to be able to apply the gospel in our lives and live out our Christianity in a practical way. Because the information we glean, either from books or sermons or articles or lectures, all that information that we glean, he says that it's only useful to us if that information becomes application.

[1 : 31] It's no use to us only as information. Our knowledge of the Bible is no use to us if we can't apply it practically. It's no use knowing what to do and doing nothing with it.

The information that we receive, it has to be applied in our life and conduct as Christians. And the message which James wants to get across to us is that Christianity and being a Christian, it's not about believing certain doctrines or following certain traditions.

It's about having your life transformed by the power of the gospel. It's about living out your faith in a broken and fallen world. It's about not being conformed to the world, but being transformed by the renewing of your mind.

By taking all the information that we glean from God's word and turning it into application. And that was the greatest concern for James. We've seen this already.

Because those whom he was writing to, and we saw this in chapter 1, that James encouraged these persecuted Christians to whom he was writing, that living out your faith in a fallen world, it's not an easy task.

[2 : 45] It's not easy by any means. Especially because as new converts to Christianity, they had been displaced and they had been dispersed outside the land of Palestine.

They were outside of Israel. And they were living in this foreign land amongst people who worshipped false gods. And there were all these temptations around them to deviate from their newfound Christian faith.

And because these young Christians were living in a Gentile country, facing a hostile environment, all their lack of discipleship and their teaching, it highlighted issues of worldliness, of temptation, of gossip, of pride, of jealousy.

But the root cause of it all, as we said before, it all came down to immaturity. Immaturity. They needed to grow as Christians. They needed to mature in their faith.

And in chapter 1, James taught that the way in which the Lord brings us on in our faith, and enables us to grow and to develop and to mature, he does it through trials and temptations.

[3 : 53] Because the first thing James says about the faith of a Christian is that it's a faith that will be tested. If our faith is genuine, he says, then our faith will be tested.

But James said that in order to endure the trials of our faith, and in order for us to grow in our faith, then we not only have to listen to what God is telling us, we have to live it out in our lives.

We have to live out what God is telling us. We have to be, as it says at the end of chapter 1, we not only have to be hearers of God's word, but we have to be doers also.

We not only need information, but we also need application. Because if we're not willing to listen and to respond to the teaching of God's word, then we're never going to apply that teaching in our lives.

We're never going to grow and develop and mature in our Christian faith. And so as James now moves into chapter 2, and into the main body of his letter, and this handbook, you could say, to Christian living, the first subject that James raises is the sin of having prejudices and showing favouritism, the sin of partiality.

[5 : 10] But when you read it, or the title, The Sin of Partiality, the first question that comes into my mind is, why deal with this issue first? Of all the things to talk about, there's a number of practical issues which we could consider, and which James does consider, like the tongue, or prayer, or Bible reading, or how we live our lives, or our conduct, or worldliness.

And yet, why does he begin with the subject of favouritism, partiality? Why begin there? Well, one commentator made the interesting statement that James begins his application to the practical specifics by asking us what happens at the church door.

Because he says, the church is the most public point of contact between the assembled people of God and the surrounding world. As such, he says, it is a simple, practical test of the genuine nature of our faith.

How do we treat newcomers? How do we treat newcomers? And with that, James emphasises to us that if our faith is genuine, it will be consistent.

He says that if our faith is genuine, it will be considerate. And if our faith is genuine, then it will be compassionate. And there are the three headings for this evening.

[6 : 42] Consistent faith, considerate faith, and compassionate faith. Consistent faith, considerate faith, and compassionate faith.

So we'll look first of all at consistent faith. Consistent faith. Look at verse one. James says, my brothers, so he's talking to the church, my brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly and a poor man in shabby or dirty clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place, while you say to the poor man, you stand over there or sit down at my feet, have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

I don't know if you read it, but a few years ago, there was an article in the Daily Telegraph about a minister called the Reverend Derek Rigby.

And the article explained that Reverend Derek Rigby, he delivered a clear message to his congregation. Because one Sunday morning, as all the worshippers were coming to church, as they arrived in the church in South Wales, they found a tramp sitting in the doorway.

[8 : 13] And this tramp, he was sitting there drinking a can of lager. And the tramp, well, he had long hair, he had thick glasses, he had ripped clothes, he was dirty, he was stinking of alcohol.

But regardless of this tramp sitting in the doorway of the church, all the worshippers, they just passed him by. And they continued into the sanctuary. And after the tramp had finished his can of lager, he decided to go into church.

And he carried in many of his carrier bags that he had with him. And he sat in one of the pews in the church. And whilst he sat on one of the pews, in all his filth and his stench and the smell of alcohol and all that, no one spoke to him.

No one offered him any help. But as it came to the time of the start of the service, there was no sign of the minister. The Reverend Derek Rigby hadn't turned up.

And as the congregation got more and more restless, wondering, where's the minister? The tramp stood up, carrying his bags, walked to the front, took off his wig, took off his glasses.

[9 : 23] There was the minister, revealing the Reverend Derek Rigby. And in the article, Derek Rigby said, it was interesting to see the reaction of people, especially because I was totally ignored.

And you know, what a lesson that congregation received that day. And you don't need to worry, I'm not going to dress up as a tramp to prove the point. But it's a hard-hitting lesson on how we view other people and how we treat other people and how we judge other people.

Because we all do it, whether we do it consciously or subconsciously, we all make judgments of other people. And we always judge them by their outward appearance or their speech or the way they act.

And in one sense, it's only natural and instinctive that we make an assessment of someone by their outward appearance or the way they speak or the way they act. But again, James isn't speaking

about the information that we process about someone.

He's speaking about the application towards them. He's addressing us on how we treat people and how we deal with them as human beings who are made in the image of God.

[10 : 38] Later in his letter, as we go on, James will speak about the tongue and how we use the tongue to praise God and to curse men who are made in the image of God.

But here, James is raising the issue of how we treat people, people made in the image of God and we treat them based upon their outward appearance. And what James says is that this is a very worldly approach because the world is obsessed with image and appearance.

The world wears their wealth. they have this front and this facade of who they are and how much they have by all that they wear. Whether it's their shoes or their bag, their dress, their suit, whatever it is, the outward appearance is what's judged by everyone.

And James says that if we treat people only based upon their outward appearance or their speech or their accent or the way they act or the way they dress or whether they have tattoos or piercings or their social class, then this is a worldly approach, he says.

In fact, James goes as far as to say that it's completely ungodly. It's so unlike God. And that's what James emphasizes in verse 1.

[11 : 56] He says, My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. James says that if we have a genuine faith in Jesus Christ and we profess to be a Christian, if we profess that Jesus Christ is our Lord and that our salvation is all of grace and yet we show favoritism to those of a certain class or background or appearance, he says, we're no different to the world.

And we're deceiving ourselves to the genuineness of our faith. We may come across to others as a godly person or we may be spiritual or we may know our Bible inside out but James says that if we show partiality and have a prejudice towards certain people then we're being inconsistent in our faith.

We're being an inconsistent Christian because the faith we profess is a faith in God's unmerited grace.

My friend, what James is saying to us is that if we spend our time judging others and showing favoritism, then we're not humble. We're proud. We're full of pride because pride equals prejudice. Pride equals prejudice. Jane Austen may have written a novel called Pride and Prejudice but James is emphasizing to us the reality that as Christians who are called to imitate and reflect as he says the Lord of glory.

[13 : 35] If we're proud people, proud of our upbringing, proud of our family heritage, proud of our denomination, proud of our Bible reading, proud of our prayer life, proud of our knowledge and achievements, if we're proud people then that pride will inevitably produce in us the sin of prejudice.

But as Christians, says James, the faith we profess is in a God of all grace. The faith we profess is in a God who shows no partiality, no prejudice, no favoritism.

And that's the description which is repeated throughout the Bible. That the God whom we worship this evening and the God who has dealt with us, not as we deserved, and the God who has treated us with love and dignity, patience, he is described to us by the prophets and all the apostles as a God who shows no partiality.

He's a God of all grace. Because there are no boundaries with him. There are no boundaries of background or upbringing or race or gender or religion or social status or sexuality.

there's no boundaries. He's a God of all grace and his salvation is all of grace. It's all a work of God.

[15 : 01] It's nothing to do with anything or anyone except God. And this is why James describes the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of glory.

Hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. glory. In that title, the Lord of glory, he's reminding us of the wonder of our salvation.

That the Lord has revealed his glory to us in the person of Jesus Christ. And he's revealed it, not because we deserved it, or that we've earned it, or that we are entitled to it, but solely because of his unmerited grace.

grace. My friend, the Lord of glory, he came to us in the form of a servant, crossing all boundaries, in order to, as we heard in the prayer, in order to pluck us as brands from the burning.

And if the Lord of glory has done all that for us, but we are too proud to associate with those who have not experienced the grace of God in their life, if we're too proud by judging some of the people

in our communities as lowlives, or heathen, or rogues, or outcasts, then James is saying that we're not worthy to call ourselves a Christian.

[16 : 21] Because that attitude of prejudice, he says it's ungodly, and it's un-Christ-like. And we have to ask the question, where would we be tonight if it wasn't for the Lord of glory?

where would we be if it wasn't for him keeping us, and restraining us, and preserving us, and providing for us, even when we weren't aware of it?

Where would we be? My friend, we are Christians tonight, not because of anything good in us, but all because God is good. It's all because of the good in God.

Therefore, we have no right to judge or look down on anyone who is without grace and without God. Was it not Paul who looked at the world around him and all their worldly pursuits, and he said, therefore, but by the grace of God go I.

it's all of grace. And as Christians who have been called to live out our faith and as a follower of the Lord of glory, we must be consistent in our profession of faith.

[17 : 40] Because James is teaching us here that if our faith is genuine, then it will be consistent. But secondly, James says that if our faith is genuine, then it will be considerate.

consistent faith and secondly, considerate faith. Considerate faith. Look at verse 5. He says, listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into the court? are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

And so having illustrated and condemned our pride and prejudice towards others, claiming that such an attitude is inconsistent with the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the faith we profess, James then continues from verse 5 to explain why favoritism is wrong.

And James says that favoritism towards those who are rich or intelligent or powerful, it's wrong because God is gracious to all. And God is gracious to all not only in his provision of salvation, but also in his provision and protection of those who are poor.

[19 : 13] And we see God's provision and protection, you see it most of all in the Old Testament. because when God called the children of Israel to himself, they were a mixed people.

They were all of a mixed social status. There were some who were wealthy with lots of livestock and large families. There were others who were poor and outcasts and had nothing.

And yet the Lord made provision for both. And we see that in the book of Ruth. We all love the book of Ruth. You remember that when Ruth the Moabitess, she had lost her husband in Moab, she came to Bethlehem.

She had lost her husband, her only source of income. She came, she had nothing. She went to glean in the fields of Bethlehem. And she was gleaning the corn which had been left behind on the ground.

And it was left behind on the ground because God commanded that it was to be left for the poor. That provision was a provision that the Lord had commanded. But not only that, the Lord had put in all these protective precautions that as someone became poor that others couldn't take advantage of him.

[20 : 25] That's why Ruth was redeemed and the land was redeemed. It was to protect her. And the same was true for offering sacrifices. Those who were wealthy could offer a lamb or a bull, which was expensive.

But for those who were poor, the Lord made provision with birds. They could offer a pigeon or a turtle dove. And with all these provisions and protections from the poor, the Lord was emphasizing again and again that the offer of salvation, it was for the poor as well as the rich.

And this is the point that James is making here. God shows no partiality. He doesn't offer salvation to those who are rich and powerful, those who are second class or first class.

He offers salvation to those who are poor and weak and vulnerable. The Lord is gracious and considerate towards those who are less fortunate.

And when we look at the Gospels, when you go through the Gospels time and time again, we see that the offer of salvation is also, it's always to the poor. Because the poor, they were the outcasts.

[21 : 37] They were those who had no status in society. They had no standing with anyone. And yet Jesus is always gracious towards them. Jesus was considerate of them.

And he emphasized this in all his parables, many of his parables. You'll remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus was a poor man all his life who sat at the rich man's gate to be fed.

And yet salvation came to him because when he died, he woke up in heaven in the bosom of Abraham. But when the rich man died, he woke up in hell. And the same emphasis was made by Jesus when the rich young man came to Jesus and asked him, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said that he was to keep all the commandments. And the rich young man, well, he claimed, I've done that. And it's then that Jesus highlights his problem by telling the rich young man, go and give all that you have to the poor and follow me.

But the rich young man went away sorrowful because he had many possessions. His riches had made him proud and he was full of prejudice towards the poor. And it's at that point that Jesus says to his disciples, how hard is it for the rich to enter the kingdom of God?

[23 : 00] It's easier for a camel, he says, to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And there are so many examples in the Gospels that salvation is not just for the rich, the rich fool who built bigger and better barns but didn't build his life upon God.

There was the parable of the great banquet, just to name another one. The parable of the great banquet, the offer of those who were invited first, they were the rich.

rich. They were the high class. But they made their excuses. Bought a field, cannot come. Married a wife, cannot come.

And yet the offer was then extended to the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind. The offer of salvation. Jesus was reminding the people in his day that the offer of salvation is extended to everyone.

And the servants, they were commanded to go out into the highways and hedges and compel people to come in. And so the purpose of that parable and many of the illustrations was to emphasize that salvation, it's all of grace and it's being graciously offered to whosoever.

[24 : 21] And this is why the gospel is such good news because it's not confined to a certain class or type of people, it's for whosoever. whosoever.

And this is the point which James is making. That the offer of the gospel is to whosoever. If the offer of the gospel is to whosoever, then we should never confine it or restrict it or put barriers on it or conditions upon it.

Because it's God's offer of salvation, not ours. It's his offer. It's God's gracious act of redeeming lost sinners and we dare not stand in his way.

Rather, we should be like the servants in the parable, the parable of the great feast and we should be considerate in our faith towards everyone and compel them to come in that the master's house may be filled.

And you know, this is the issue. This issue which James is addressing, it's the very reason why all these parachurches were set up, these charities and parachurches, whether it's the Salvation Army or the Bethany Christian Trust or Christian Aid or the Samaritans, all these organisations, they were set up because the church wasn't welcoming to people.

[25 : 54] And we as Christians weren't doing what we were meant to be doing. the church was closing the doors on them. Like the man and the minister in the doorway, they walked past them.

And it's not a new problem. James was asking the same question in the first century. He says, verse 5, listen, listen, has God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?

And what James, Jesus and the whole Bible are not saying, they're not saying that it's only the poor who will be saved.

But what they are saying is that God does the opposite of what we think. God does the opposite of what we think. And you know, this is the wonder of who God is.

He's a God of opposites. He has chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith. He's chosen those who are foolish to be made wise unto salvation.

[27 : 08] He chooses those who are weak to be made strong in the Lord. Chooses those who are blind to see. John Newton, I once was blind but now I see.

Chooses those who are deaf to hear. Those who are lame spiritually to walk. Those who are lost without grace and without God. like the prodigal but found.

Those who are in darkness. Darkness of alcohol, drink and drugs. Whatever it may be. Brings them into the marvellous light of the gospel.

Those who are dead. Brought to life. My friend, we worship a God of opposites. A God who does in us and for us. Far above and beyond our asking.

Or our thinking. And he does it all according to his abundant grace. And as Christians, we are to imitate and reflect the actions of our God.

[28 : 12] We are to possess a faith that is considerate towards all people. Whosoever they are. Because if our faith is genuine, it will be a consistent faith.

And if our faith is genuine, then it will be a considerate faith. And lastly, we see that James says to us that if our faith is genuine, it will be a compassionate faith.

A compassionate faith. If you look at verse 8. He says, If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

You're doing well. But if you show partiality, you're committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

For he who said, do not commit adultery, also said, do not murder. If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

[29 : 19] And in these words, James confronts us with God's law, the Ten Commandments. But James refers to it as, as he says in verse 8, he calls it the royal law, which is the summary of the Ten Commandments.

And as you know, the summary of the Ten Commandments is love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself. And so the emphasis of the royal law is love.

It's a royal law of love. And the defining feature of a disciple of Jesus is love. By this, says Jesus, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

And what Jesus was saying and what the apostles repeat in all their letters is that the defining feature of a Christian is love. Because if our faith is genuine, then it will be a faith filled with compassion and mercy.

It will be a faith filled with love towards God and towards others. And James says that if we are really fulfilling the royal law of love by loving our neighbour, we're doing well.

[30 : 31] We're doing well, he says, because we can't truly love God unless we love our neighbour. And if we're not loving our neighbour, who is everyone, and we're showing partiality towards them or favouritism or prejudice, James says we're committing sin.

We're transgressing God's law. We're crossing the boundary line. We're violating the royal law of love. And James says that to violate the royal law of love, it's not just about failing to love your wife or your husband by committing adultery in your heart.

He says that violating the royal law of love by our favouritism or prejudice or discrimination or partiality, he says, it's murder. It's murder.

It's murder as Jesus puts it in the Sermon on the Mount. Murder in our heart. It's not compassionate. It's not loving. It's not merciful.

It's murder. It's murder. And so James then says in verse 12, so speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

[31 : 54] He says so speak and so act. Don't just receive this as information, he says. Make it application. Speak and act.

Live it out in your life. Make it part of your Christianity. Because if our faith is genuine, then we will speak and act according to the royal law of love. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength and your neighbour as yourself.

James says that this law, it's a law of liberty. It's not a law of bondage and slavery. It's a law of liberty. It has been given to us to set us free.

It's been given to us to teach us how to live as we were created to live. It's been given to us to guide us on how to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. It's been given to help us reflect the Lord of glory in our life.

Because the Lord of glory, the Lord Jesus Christ, he is our greatest example of someone who never showed partiality or prejudice or favouritism towards anyone.

[33 : 08] Because all the Gospels describe Jesus as one who moved with compassion. I love those words in the Gospels.

Jesus moved with compassion. And I'm sure I've told you before about my next door neighbour when I was growing up. She highlighted in her Bible every occasion in the Gospels where it says that Jesus moved with compassion.

And she said that they were the most comforting words in the Bible. Because she knew that there was no one out of the reach of Jesus. There was no one who was beyond hope.

And beyond the pain. She knew that Jesus was able to save to the uttermost. He moves with compassion towards everyone and anyone.

He moves with compassion towards whosoever. And we see that time and time again in the Gospels. Where Jesus crossed all the boundaries of the social spectrum.

[34 : 10] He went to those who were hated, like the tax collectors and the sinners. He went to those who were outcasts, like the lepers and the prostitutes. He went to those who were lost.

The multitudes, he described them as sheep without a shepherd. And yet he had compassion on them. He moved with compassion towards them. And the wonder of it all is that he moved with compassion towards you and me.

And this is what James is reminding us this evening. That if the Lord of glory moved with compassion towards us, then we need to move with compassion towards everyone else.

Towards those around us. We have to move with compassion towards those in our community. Regardless of who they are and what their background is. We have to move with compassion and bring Jesus before them.

That may take time. May take years. Just like it did with many of us. But that's why if our faith is genuine, it will be a compassionate faith.

[35 : 20] It will be a faith that's welcoming and accommodating. It will be a faith that sees that God's grace is not restricted or merited. It will be a faith that moves with compassion because, as James says right at the end of verse 13, mercy triumphs over judgment.

Compassion will triumph over judgment. Our love towards others will be evident to them by our compassion towards them. And they will see that we are genuinely concerned about them and their soul.

And they'll see in time, or we will see in time, compassion will triumph over judgment. That's the promise of God's word.

So, my dear friend, if our faith is genuine, then it will be a consistent faith. It will be a considerate faith. And it will be a compassionate faith.

It will be a faith that not only hears, but a faith that does. It will be a faith that not only receives the information, but also makes the application.

[36 : 37] It will be a faith that doesn't sit around and wait for people to come to church. It will be a faith that moves. A faith that moves with compassion towards them. In order that they too will see the wonder and the beauty of the Lord of glory.

And as James will warn us next time, if our faith is only a faith that hears, and not a faith that does, it's a dead faith.

If our faith is only a faith of information, but not a faith of application, then it's a dead faith. And so, my friend, let's take heed to the warning.

That if our faith is genuine, it will be a consistent faith. It will be a considerate faith. And it will be a compassionate faith towards whosoever.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for thy word, that it is the only rule to direct us.

[37 : 55] And Lord, when we stand before it, we realize that we need a lot of direction. We are those, Lord, who are so inward-looking, and we confess that we are not what we ought to be.

But we bless and praise thee tonight that we are not what we once were, that we are those who have been saved by grace. And Lord, we thank thee that we are those who are not what we are going to be in another world.

But help us, Lord, we pray tonight, and in the days that lie ahead, O that we would truly live out thy word, that we would be here as of it, and doers also, that we would apply it to our lives, that thou, Lord, wouldest enable us to pray, as the psalmist said, teach me thy way, and in thy truth, O Lord, then walk will I, unite my heart, that I thy name may fear continually.

O that we would truly serve thee, as we have been created to do, to glorify God, and to enjoy thee forever. Help us, Lord, we ask, for we are so weak, but we have a promise, that when we are weak, then we shall be made strong.

O help us to serve thee, help us to be bold for thee, help us to have a burden for those around us, to truly speak to them, to speak to them a word in season, that may awaken them from their darkness, and alive in their heart, to the wonder of Jesus.

[39 : 24] O Lord, do us good, bless us in our being together, bless us in our parting, one from the other, that thou wouldest go with us, that thou wouldest all follow with us, and follow in thy promise, that thou would never leave, and thou would never forsake us.

Do us good, we ask, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We shall conclude by singing in Psalm 65.

Psalm 65, page 297. Psalm 65, we're singing verses 4 and 5.

Blessed is the man whom thou dost choose, and makest approach to thee, that he within thy courts, O Lord, may still a dweller be.

We surely shall be satisfied, with thy abundant grace, and with the goodness of thy house, in of thy holy place. Down to the end of the double verse, marked five of Psalm 65.

[40 : 31] To God's praise. Psalm 66, we're singing verses 4 and 5.

We surely shall be satisfied, with thy abundant grace, and with the goodness of thy house, in of thy holy place.

O God of our salvation, Thou in thy righteousness, my fearful works unto our prayer, thine answer doth express.

Therefore the ends of all the earth, and those afar that be, upon the sea, their confidence, O Lord, will place in thee.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.

[42 : 39] Amen.