

The Sin of Partiality – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – James addresses the religiously sinful practice of partiality in the body of Christ
2. aim – to cause us to remember that all are saved by grace through faith regardless of class
3. passage – James 2:1-13

b. outline

1. The Definition of Partiality (James 2:1-4)
2. The Sin of Partiality (James 2:5-7)
3. The Cure for Partiality (James 2:8-13)

c. opening

1. the **continuity** of this letter
 - a. **note:** the strangeness of this week – a wedding, a funeral, a pre-recorded sermon ...
 - b. all is a reminder that the *gospel of Jesus Christ* (i.e. the advancement of his kingdom) *continues* even in times of great opposition (in this case, pandemic and “social distancing”)
 - c. **point:** the value of the letter of James to the church is how it has been *preparing* us for such
 1. I started this letter Dec. 1, 2019, when the term “social distancing” hadn’t yet been coined
 2. so, three (3) months of preaching was *predestined* to get us to this reality ...
 - d. namely, that the Christian life is *hard*, trials are an *essential* part of faith, but we must seek wisdom, humility, and steadfastness from the Lord
 1. faith, *by definition*, must endure through trials *or it is not actually faith*
 2. and, these trials of faith are actually good and perfect gifts of God *setting us apart unto him*
 - e. but, truth faith must be **consistent** – believers must be “doers of the word, not hearers only”
 1. **IOW:** a **genuine, saving faith** is “religion that is pure and undefiled” (1:27)
 2. the proper application of belief to practice (religion): (1) to speak consistently in our connection to Christ, (2) to act selflessly towards the most vulnerable in imitation of Christ, and (3) to remain unstained by the secular worldview around us as we think like Christ
2. the **current place** in the section
 - a. **2:1-13:** a *continuation* of the thought of **vv. 26-27** – *another* example of inconsistent religion: to show **partiality** towards others on the basis of class
 - b. James *defined* the concept in **vv. 1-4:** granting deference (or favoritism) to individuals based on their status *outside* of the church, something *other* than faith in Christ
 - c. James *declares* it as sin in **vv. 5-7** (and gives three [3] reasons *why*):
 1. **reason #1:** because it is *religiously inconsistent* in claiming that salvation is *only by faith*, yet granting deference to some based on a *different standard* (i.e. an outward one)
 1. **i.e.** the rich cannot come to God on a “better” basis than the poor for salvation

II. The Sin of Partiality (James 2:5-7)

Content

a. the sin of partiality

4. **reason #2:** because it “dishonors” the poor man (**v. 6a**)
 - a. **note:** the word used is *dishonor*, not “disfavor” – James *implies* a more “direct” sin against the poor man in this partiality (i.e. the *true sin* is *dishonoring* the poor man, not *favoring* the rich man)
 - b. **question:** why is the poor man dishonored – what “offense” is taken against *him*?
 1. it is *likely* that James is assuming *both men* to be believers coming into the assembly
 - a. unlike today, where both believers and non-believers gather in churches on Sunday
 1. thinking their “religious activity” is what is required of them ...
 - b. in 45AD, the *only* ones (likely) to come into a Christian assembly were converted people
 1. much like only Jews (or proselytes to Judaism) coming into the synagogue
 - c. thus, the two men are *fundamentally equal* in the eyes of God
 2. and, in his illustration, James was *specific* to note the “shabby” clothes of the poor man
 - a. in the church, **by faith in Christ**, both men should be considered utterly equal in the eyes of God *and man*, *regardless of their outward garments or socio-economic status*
 1. **i.e.** both rich in the sight of the Lord, both clothed in the same righteousness of Christ

- b. but, the spiritual condition of the men are “overlooked” in favor of their outward garments
 1. **i.e.** the poor man’s rich garments in Christ are ignored, which *dishonors him*
 2. **IOW:** the sin of partiality dishonors the poor man because it is a denial of the inherent beauty and richness of his garments *in Christ*, thus his *position* in the body of Christ
 3. **e.g. as a pastor**, I am not privy to what anyone gives, in order not to show favoritism
- c. **principle: partiality in the church focuses on the fig leaves men use to cover themselves rather than the righteous robes of Christ he covers us with**
 1. fig leaves = the man-made robes of self-righteousness used to cover shame (**Gen. 3:7**)
 2. favoritism for the “outwardly rich” is to dishonor the *true nature* inherent in those who are followers of Christ – it is an **inconsistent recognition of our true nature in Christ**
 - a. **sin #1:** it contradicts the core of salvation *by faith alone*; **sin #2:** it fails to recognize the *true nature* of all who have been converted by faith alone; **sin #3:** ...
5. **reason #3:** because it perverts the primary message of the church (**v. 6b-7**)
 - a. James asks two **rhetorical** questions – he knows the answer to both, but they make his point:
 1. aren’t the rich (whom you are favoring) the ones who *oppress you*, outside the church?
 2. aren’t the rich (whom you are favoring) the ones who *blaspheme* the name of Christ?
 3. **note:** James is probably referring here to “*the rich*” in *general terms*: not the rich in the church, but the rich in society – the *class* of people you are favoring *inside the church* who give you such grief *outside the church* – why would you favor such a *class* of people?
 - b. **remember:** in the O.T., the oppression of the poor by the rich was often an indictment of a people who failed to understand **mercy**, thus were ripe for judgment by *the Lord of mercy*
 2. **e.g.** as the N kingdom of Israel grew prosperous (c. 750BC), its wealthy often oppressed the poor, using them to advance their own position, often without mercy (**Amos 4:1-3**)
“Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring, that we may drink!’ The Lord GOD has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks. And you shall go out through the breaches, each one straight ahead; and you shall be cast out into Harmon,” declares the LORD.”
 - a. thus, the nation was exiled, **for it failed to practice mercy as it had received mercy**
 - b. all of the ways that God had brought it to that place were acts of mercy (**e.g. Exo. 16-17**)
 - c. **principle: partiality in the church perverts the message of the church: that what we truly need from God is his mercy – the primary need of humanity is mercy from God**
 1. Jesus said, “*blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*” (**Matt. 5:7**) – those who are willing to extend mercy to others are eligible to receive mercy from God
 - a. (**obviously**) to *be able* to extend such mercy is having *already received mercy* (**cycle**)
 - b. the rich (often) *fail* to show mercy towards others – their selfishness is their greatest sin
 2. favoritism for the rich is to pervert the *message of the church*, that what we truly need from God is mercy – it is an **inconsistent message of our true need in Christ**
 3. **question: is it possible that this pandemic is a form of “exile” imposed by God upon a people who have enjoyed great prosperity, yet have consistently rebelled against him?**
 - a. **i.e.** a form of evil designed to “awaken” the church to its primary message?
 - b. so, the *continuing* (**see above**) message of the gospel to this nation must be to *repent* – to turn from sin and seek the mercy of God (**Amos 5:14f**)
“Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to [have mercy upon] the remnant of Joseph.”

III. Be Cure for Partiality (James 2:8-13)

Content

a. the introduction to the royal law

1. **the next imperative: read v. 12 ...**
2. **the cure for partiality:** live out the “*royal law*” as those who are under it – live as one who has been set free under the “*law of liberty*,” who has been freed from the slavery of “*law*” (legalism) to a condition of actually being able to do what God has ordained for you to do
3. **IOW:** *as has been clearly seen up to this point in the letter*, **be what you are, live out your true nature, be consistent between what you are and what you do**
 - a. **i.e.** those who have been converted to faith in Christ, who are under the law of liberty, will not show partiality towards the rich (thereby contradicting the core of the faith), but will recognize the true nature of every follower of Jesus and proclaim the true message of mercy in Christ to all

4. **the fundamental truth:** the intention of faith in Christ is to make us free from the curse of the law *such that* we are now able to truly be and do what God has *preordained* for us (**Eph. 2:8-10**)
"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

b. the definition of the royal law (v. 8)

1. "royal" (*basilikon*) = regal; kingly or fit for a king; that which is supreme or highest
 - a. **e.g.** a basilica is a special church reserved for the highest members of the priestly hierarchy
 - b. the "royal law" = that aspect of the law of God which stands higher than all other parts
 1. **i.e.** the "spirit" of the law that is present within the *totality* of the law
2. James quotes this royal law from **Lev. 19:8**, "*you shall love your neighbor as yourself*"
 - a. Jesus answers the question in **Matt. 22:34-40** of which is the *greatest* commandment by quoting first from **Deut. 6:5** ("*love the Lord ... with all your heart ... soul ... and mind*") and then **Lev. 19:8**
 - b. so, why does James skip the first part of the Great Commandment to focus on the second part?
 1. because he *assumes* it – he assumes the reality of loving God by faith in Christ (**see below**)
 2. because he *focuses* on the *horizontal reality* in front of him – he is being pragmatic
 3. because he does not have access to the wealth of instruction by the other apostles (namely Paul in Romans) on the relationship of the Christian to the law – he just teaches what he knows
 - c. the "royal law" (**here**) = the summation of the *Second Tablet* of the Mosaic Law; a way of life consistent with the commandments of not committing adultery, not murdering, etc. (**note v. 11**)
3. James believes that the Christian *is fully capable* of keeping the horizontal aspect of the Great Commandment by virtue of being born again by the Spirit of God
 - a. **remember:** the action of regeneration by the Spirit is to implant a nature within the believer that loves the law and desires to fulfill it (**Ezek. 36:26-27**)
 - b. thus, for James, the royal law is simply the inherent nature of the Christian, lived out consistently
 - c. so, in terms of *partiality*, James believes such behavior is *inconsistent* with being a believer
4. **application: in this time of great fear and uncertainty, is your behavior consistent with the Great Commandment – are you demonstrating by your words, by your choices, by your actions, by your emotions, that you are still trusting in Christ above all other things?**
 - a. **pandemics bring out selfishness in us – Christians are to be selfless in these times**