

James 2:1-13 – The Sin of Preference– Part 4

1

Introduction

God is impartial and we are to be also.

In 2:1–13, James presents five features of genuine, Godlike impartiality:

- The principle (v. 1),
- The example (vv. 2–4),
- The inconsistency (vv. 5–7),
- The violation (vv. 8–11), and
- The appeal (vv. 12–13).

2

James 2:1-13

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. ² For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³ and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," ⁴ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; ⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

3

The Violation

James 2:8-9

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; ⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Partiality is also contrary to the "royal law". Verse 8 starts with a conditional "**if**". It might be better understood as "**because**".

Because you are keeping the royal law you are to love your neighbor as yourself.

"**Royal**" carries the ideas of supreme and sovereign, indicating the absolute and binding authority of the law.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

4

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The last six of the ten commandments can be summarized as loving our neighbor as yourself. We might understand this as treating others as you want to be treated. (Romans 13:8-10)

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

5

The Violation

James 2:8-9

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The particular royal law James focuses on is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," it is found in Leviticus 19:18 and is what Jesus Himself declared to be the second greatest commandment, next to "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37–39; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). Jesus also makes clear **who our neighbor is**. He is anyone whose need we can meet, just as the Good Samaritan selflessly and generously met the need of the man he unexpectedly came upon on the road to Jericho, who had been robbed and beaten (Luke 10:30–37). The Samaritan ministered to him personally and even provided for his further care by others until he was fully well.

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"You do well" could be translated, **"You are doing excellently."** To love others as we love ourselves is to do more than just love satisfactorily. It is to love as God loves and as He wants us to love.

Verse 9 also contains a conditional **"if"** but the Greek wording **indicates assumed action**. It can be understood "If you show partiality, and you do, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors."

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The Greek word translated **"partiality"** is not speaking of occasional favoritism but of **habitual**, blatant partiality. Those engaging in it were committing serious sin and were convicted by the law as transgressors (cf. Deut. 1:17; 16:19). James uses two different words to describe the seriousness of this partiality. **"Sin"** which means to miss God's mark and **"transgressor"**, one who goes beyond God's appointed boundary. One carries the idea of not living up to God's royal standard, while the other indicates a disregard to God's law and doing as they please.

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The Violation

James 2:10

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

If we break one commandment, we are **guilty of breaking all of it**. To break any of His commands is to defy God's will and His authority, which is the basis of all sin. From our viewpoint, we often view sins as big or little. But breaking even "one of the least of these commandments" (Matt. 5:19) shatters the unity of God's holy law and turns the guilty person into a transgressor. (Galatians 3:10-13).

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The Violation

James 2:11

For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James quotes from the Ten Commandments. He chooses two of the most serious social sins which demanded the penalty of death. He chose those in order to illustrate the extreme sinfulness of partiality.

When Israel did not trust in God, but chased after false idols, God held them guilty of "**spiritual adultery**". In the same way, when one does not trust God to meet their needs but attempts to manipulate and use others it also is spiritual adultery.

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The Violation

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Jesus also taught in Matthew 5 that if we **hate** our brother, we are guilty of murder. If we see our brother in need and we turn our backs upon him, we have demonstrated hatred, and God holds us guilty of a heart attitude of murder. Remember that the poor man was most likely a believer so that attitude of hatred and murder is also directed towards God (Matthew 25:45).

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The Violation

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The Jews tended to regard the law as **a series of detached commands**. To keep one of those commands was to gain credit. To break one was to incur debt. Therefore, a man could add up the ones he kept and subtract the ones he broke and, as it were, emerge with a moral credit or debit balance.

The idea is that acceptance or rejection by God depends essentially on the moral standing of the person himself. If he does more good than bad, he is accepted by God. If the scale tilts the other way, he is rejected. This is an unbiblical notion. James clearly states if we break just one commandment, we are guilty of violating the whole Law.

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The Violation

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God’s standard is perfection. Jesus declared, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48). God will accept nothing less. But because no sinful human can possibly attain to that perfection, God has graciously provided for our failure through the atonement of His sinless Son. (Rom. 5:1, 6, 8, 10–11).

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The Appeal

James 2:12-13

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James appeals for believers to fully consider the danger of divine judgment. The goal is for them to renounce the sin of partiality, asking the Lord’s forgiveness and cleansing.

To “speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” is to say, “**Live and act as a true believer** who has been saved by God’s grace and who will be judged on the basis of Christ’s imputed righteousness. That righteousness frees the believer from the law of bondage and judges him under the redeeming **law of liberty**, God’s Word of the gospel, frees the repentant sinner from the bondage of sin (cf. John 8:31–32).

14

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God will render to each person according to his deeds (Romans 2:6-11). One of James's major themes is that a person's real faith will be manifest in and through his works (2:26). If God looks at our life and sees that we have handled trials and temptations in a godly way, that we received and obeyed His Word, and that we have not lived a life of favoritism, that will be evidence of our salvation. Good works cannot produce redemption; but genuine redemption produces obedient and holy living that will be characterized by good works. Living faith will be demonstrated by a holy life.

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The Appeal

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So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The gospel is the law of liberty because it frees those who place their faith in Jesus Christ from the bondage, judgment, and punishment of sin and brings them ultimately to eternal freedom and glory. It frees us to obey and serve God, to live faithfully by the power of His indwelling Spirit, and it frees us to follow Jesus willingly out of love rather than fear.

James warns that judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy. In this context, the one who has shown no mercy seems to refer to unbelievers. Their lives are characterized by partiality, hardness, selfishness, and lack of concern for others—in short, lovelessness. They will not be blessed or receive mercy, for they have not been merciful (Matt. 5:7).

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The Appeal

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So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

“Mercy triumphs over judgment” carries the idea that mercy “glories” or “boasts” against judgment. Where mercy and judgment seem to conflict, mercy wins. The good news for every child of God in Christ is that God’s mercy toward us will triumph over His judgment of us (see Romans 8:1). Our sins may argue against us, but Christ is our loving Advocate who argues for us and prevents us from receiving the judgment we deserve. We, therefore, are to display God’s type of mercy toward others.

James is telling us that God will judge us with mercy, and we also should judge others with mercy. Being merciful is an act that shows our thankfulness for all God has done, and it is made possible through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling.

Remember the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21-35

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So What ...

Partiality is inconsistent with the Christian faith because it is contrary to the nature of God.

Partiality is inconsistent with the purpose and the plan of God in choosing the poor of this world to be spiritually rich.

Partiality is inconsistent with loving your neighbor as yourself.

Let us take time to evaluate our lives. Are we showing partiality? Jesus identifies with the outcast that He makes it plain that how we treat the “least” is how we treat Him!

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