

Faith Without Works is Useless

An Expository “Journey” Through the **Epistle of James**

10- The Sin of Partiality

May 16, 2021

James 1:26-2:13

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose 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. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

To the Glory of God

Now you don't get this from the English, but when looking at the Greek- **James 1:26** is the beginning of a single Issue that James wanted to make the Church in Jerusalem aware of- back in the 1st Century. And that single thought goes all the way down to Chapter 2 verse 13. And that tells us that the Chapter Divisions in our Bibles are NOT inspired and thus- they are NOT infallible. So, if anything, Chapter 2 *should have* begun with verse 26 of Chapter 1.

And the Issue that James wants to bring to the forefront here- is the "Sin of Partiality". Or what we would call, in Alabama English, "*Making meat out of one and fish out of another*". It is preferring people based on certain Characteristics they have- like Educational Level; Degree of Sophistication; Culture; Race; Political Affiliation; Nationality; or Financial Where-with-all. But this Sin is also the *refusal* to love certain people- who do not share what you deem to be important.

Partiality is the very *epitome* of Self-righteousness; it is the *essence* of Arrogance; and it is the *manifestation* of Human Pride. It destroys the "one another" aroma of the Christian Church; and makes impossible- the Command of Jesus to love each other in the way that He has loved us.

But Partiality also deceives us- because it DOES allow for Love to exist- to some degree. But only for those who share what we value. And that really isn't Love at all- but a cheap imitation. Because Partiality is, in its basic form- spiritual Anarchy; spiritual Rebellion; and spiritual High Treason- because it is in violation of the very basic tenets of Christianity- which is real, genuine Love. And this is why the Apostle Paul said this in **Romans 12:9a**:

Let love be without hypocrisy...

... where the word, "**hypocrisy**" comes from a Greek word (*anupokritos*; Strong's #505) that has to do with *pretending*; or *to simulate something else*. So, when you combine this word with "Love" you're talking about the artificial; fake; plastic kind of love that very shallow and surface people have- that is forced and contrived- but NOT real and genuine. So, Paul was saying, "*Don't let your Love be fake; or contrived. Don't pretend that you love- when you really don't. Don't let what you have be nothing but a simulation of real, genuine Love.*"

Now the opposite way to look at this is from what the Apostle Peter wrote in **1Peter 1:22:**

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,

Here, Peter said that the Love we have for our fellow-believers in Christ- MUST have two Characteristics:

1. Sincerity
2. Fervency

Now however else you may want to describe this Love- we should agree that this is certainly NOT a casual; inconsistent; laid-back; unconcerned; on again off again type of Love. No, Love like this is real and genuine. In fact, Love like this is supernatural. It is miraculous. It is NOT “of” this world. And so, people, who have never experienced the Miracle of the New Birth, DO NOT and CANNOT love like this.

This kind of Love comes from people who have done what Peter talks about in the first part of verse 22:

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls...

... which has to do with ONLY saved people. Only saved people purify their souls by striving to obey the Truth.

So, after we have been born from Above- we then begin to read and study God’s Word- because part and parcel to being saved- is that we have an overwhelming Desire to please the Lord and to cast off Sin and to know what God’s Will is. And Peter says here that as we do that- as we struggle against the lusts of our Flesh to obey the Truth of Scripture- we purify our souls. Okay so, what does a “purified soul” look like? Peter said,

... for [unto] a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,

So, Peter says that we purify our souls- through Obedience to the Truth- UNTO- two things or to bring about two Results:

1. We *truly* (sincerely) love the Brethren

2. We passionately (fervently) love the Brethren- with a pure motive- without out any pretense (from the heart)

Now I said a while ago that Love like this is both supernatural and miraculous and it comes from the New Nature. Love like this is NOT normal or natural to human beings. Okay, but how do I know that is true? Because of what Peter said in the very next verse:

1Peter 1:23

for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

... and the first word in this Verse is “**For**”- which in this case means: *Because*. So, Peter said,

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for [unto] a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, FOR [because] you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

So, Peter taught that the REASON we “**purified [y]our souls**” (through our ongoing effort to obey the Truth) was we have been born again. And the RESULT of our purified souls is that we now “**love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart**”. And what CAUSED all this to happen?

... you have been born again...

So, being born again is what CAUSED us to “**purify our souls**” (through our ongoing effort to obey the Truth). And having our souls purified is what CAUSED us to “**love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart**”.

... and that means that part and parcel to the New Birth is this fervent and honest Love for ALL the Brethren.

Now what we need to understand, dear friends, is that the Love that Peter talks about here- is directed to: “the Brethren”- which are our Brothers and Sisters in Christ- those who have also experienced the Miracle of the new Birth. And that tells us that the radical transformation of our Natures (brought about by the Miracle of the New Birth) is the “genesis”; or the “origination” of this Love for the Brethren. So, the single criteria as to WHY we are told to Love these people- is because they too belong to Jesus.

So, it isn't because they are wealthy. And it isn't because they are political Conservatives. It's NOT because they smell good; or wear the right cologne; or because they went to the right schools; or because they have neat and tidy lives. It also isn't because they don't have any sin in their lives that they are struggling with. No, the single reason as to WHY we are told to love these people fervently and honestly- is because they are saved and are our Brothers and Sisters in the Kingdom of God.

But as you read the Bible- you see that not only are we COMMANDED to love the Brethren- we are COMMANDED to love ALL the Brethren. Every single one of them- *regardless* of their depth; or where they might be in the process of Sanctification. And we are COMMANDED to love ALL the Brethren- ALL the time. And a close study of Scripture reveals that we are to love these Brothers and Sisters MORE than we love anyone else- INCLUDING our own natural family. Look what Jesus Himself said in **John 13:34&35**:

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Now notice a few things about what Jesus said here. First, the phrase, "one another" has to do with believers. ONLY believers. And secondly, Jesus said for us to love other believers to this degree:

... as I have loved you ...

So, to the very SAME degree that Jesus loved us- we are to love all other believers. So, this is NOT simply your average, run-of-the-mill kind of Love. This isn't what Brittany Spears sings about. No, this is a SELFLESS Love- a PERFECT Love. And because this is *impossible* for us to accomplish this kind of Love in our own strength- we must be careful that we do not use our "exemption card" and wave our hands and say, "*Well, that's impossible, so, that doesn't apply to me*". Because while this is a Love that is simply *impossible* for us to accomplish- *completely* and *continually*- we CAN accomplish this kind of Love- *periodically* and *partially*. And because we can do that- we SHOULD!

Now back in the mid- 18th Century, America's greatest Theologian, Jonathan Edwards, got into trouble about this Issue. Back then Edward's church was involved in an ongoing debate about just who should partake of the Lord's Table. And some, who advocated infant baptism- were saying that since babies were

baptized- then as soon as they could- baptized infants should partake of the Lord's Table- even though they weren't saved.

But Edwards rejected that logic- and said that Communion was reserved ONLY for saved people. But the part that got Edwards into trouble was that he added that while ONLY saved people should partake of the Sacrament of Communion- ALL saved people should be allowed to partake of the Lord's Table- even the Indians!

Well, the starched and ironed members of his church were highly offended that their Pastor was advocating that they should sit in Church next to those barbaric Indians. I mean, they smelled bad; they dressed funny; and they grunted all the time. They weren't educated and some of the members of Edwards' church actually had family members, who had been murdered by the Indians.

So, there was great Hostility toward the Indians by many of those, who said they were redeemed. And frankly, most of the people of Edwards' church really didn't care whether some of the Indians were saved or not. They weren't about to "normalize relations" between themselves and the Indians!

But then to add insult to injury- Edwards went beyond merely advocating that the people of the church should have to rub shoulders with the Indians. He was also saying that, since these uneducated and uncultured savages were saved- they should also be allowed to eat the Bread and drink the Cup of the Lord with the polished and sophisticated members of polite society of 18th Century New England.

Well, that was just too much. So, America's greatest Theologian was fired from his church. And they told Edwards, "*You want to give Indians the Lord's Table- so, go live with them!*" And he did.

Now all through the 2,000- year History of the Church- saved people have been separated from other saved people for any number of reasons. For example,

- The Rich want nothing to do with the Poor
- The Strong have no affinity with the Weak
- The Educated have nothing in common with the Uneducated
- The Cultured are offended at the Uncultured
- Men want to be separated from the Women
- The Young have no connection to the Old

... and back in the 1st Century- the big divide was between Jews and Gentiles. Today, we might add other areas where believers may be divided from other believers- such as:

- Race
- Politics

One of our Giants of our Faith- Augustine- taught that Women had no business worshipping God together with Men. He said that Women were nothing but a distraction; and did nothing but make it hard on Men to avoid Temptation; and keep their minds on God. And to put his money where his mouth was- Augustine had himself castrated.

But the problem Augustine had was NOT with Women- but with his own Flesh. He had been a wicked womanizer before his Conversion and he never married.

Now I'm not throwing rocks at Augustine. Those of you, who regularly attend this church know that I am in awe of this man; and consider him to be the greatest Christian Thinker- certainly of the first 1,000 years of the Church and possibly even the entire History. But he was a man, who had clay feet. And in addition to *over-emphasizing* the Sacraments at the expense of the Scriptures- Augustine had the very problem that James speaks about here.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

Now Augustine had NO problem with Jews and Gentiles. He also had NO problem with the Rich or the Poor. His problem was Women. So, even though he was 99 & 1/100% pure- he failed in this one area. Okay, but doesn't Augustine get credit for being *almost always* Right? Well, let's see what James said about that from verses 9&10:

... if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

So, "Partiality" is the Sin James is speaking about here. So, just what is, "Partiality"? Well, the dictionary defines it like this:

Partiality: The State of being partial. A favorable bias or prejudice. A special fondness, preference, or liking.

So, this is preferring one thing above another. It is favoring one thing or one group over another. But by that Definition- every human on earth is guilty- because EVERYBODY prefers one thing over another. We like this- but not that. We favor this- but not something else. We are partial in the way we dress; and in what we eat; and in where we shop; and in how we cook; and in how we raise our

children; and in what we enjoy. So, is that wrong? Are we all supposed to dress alike? Or act alike? Or eat the same things?

I mean even God Almighty is partial. Don't we believe in Sovereign Election? Doesn't the Bible teach that God "sets His Love" upon those He chooses to save- NOT based on ANYTHING they have or have not done- but based solely on His Own Divine Prerogative? And isn't that the very *epitome* of being partial? Let's look at what God the Holy Spirit "moved" the Apostle Paul to write in **Romans 9:17-21**:

17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."

18 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

Now in verse 17, Paul is quoting from **Exodus 9:16** as rendered from the "Greek Septuagint"¹. And the point that Paul is making in **Romans 9:17** was that the ONLY reason Pharaoh was alive and had his authority was so God could judge him through the Miracles performed through Moses- so that God's Reputation would spread across the world. And this means that God never intended to save Pharaoh- which is why Paul said this in verse 18:

So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

And the Question that naturally comes from such a startling Statement like that is found in **Romans 9:19**:

"Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

¹ The Greek Septuagint was the 39 Old Testament Books written in Greek rather than Hebrew. This is the version of the Old Testament that was common during the 1st Century in Israel. Our modern English Bibles translate the Old Testament from the original Hebrew which explains why some of the quotes of the Old Testament from the New Testament writers differs from what our Old Testament reads.

In other words, why does God judge those who aren't saved- if Salvation is due to God being partial to the ones He chooses? No human can initiate his own Salvation. So, if God doesn't act with "Divine Partiality" and "set His Love" on you- you CAN'T be saved. And since that is true- why does God then damn the Lost?

Now this is a very good Question and one that deserves a very good Answer. And Paul gives that Answer in verses 20&21:

20 On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?

21 Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

Now the fact that Paul begins verse 21 with the word, "or" means that verse 21 is simply another way of saying what he said in verse 20. So, this is NOT two different Answers. Paul is simply restating in verse 21 what he already said in verse 20.

So, what is the Answer to the Question of verse 19?

... does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

Now notice that Paul does NOT debate about whether God actually does what he said in verses 17&18. Paul makes no apology for Sovereign Election. And by quoting from **Exodus** in **Romans 9:17**- Paul is saying, "*This is the way God has ALWAYS operated*".

Notice carefully what Paul's logic is in verse 21. He is asking the Question:

Does God not have the RIGHT to do this?

To "do" what?

... for God to operate in Divine Partiality". Remember, Paul wrote,

So then He [God] has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.

...and the phrase, "**whom He desires**" illustrates the Partiality by which God operates in Salvation.

Now notice that Paul is NOT asking, “Does God operate in Divine Partiality in Salvation?” Because manifestly God DOES. He also does NOT ask, “Does God have the POWER to operate in this Divine Partiality?” Because again- God obviously DOES. No, Paul is simply asking, “Does God have the RIGHT to do this?” In other words, “Is God sinning by operating in Salvation with Partiality?” or “Is God unjust by being partial in how He saves lost people?”

And, of course, the Answer is, “NO, God is NOT unjust. God is NOT sinning to operate with Divine Partiality!” You see, because He is God- He has the Right to do WHATEVER He wants to do. But wait! There is one more piece to this that we MUST say. We must *also* say that because He is God- He ONLY wants what is Right. So, God DOES NOT act capriciously.² He isn’t arbitrary; or mean; or rude; or unkind. No, the Bible reveals that God is Good. In fact, God is Love. So, God- acting with partiality in Salvation is Correct. It is Proper and Right. It is the way that God SHOULD act.

Now some would then conclude that, even though James tells us not to act with Partiality- that it is somehow okay for God to do what we are told NOT to do. But that is a faulty way to conclude this Issue. But before I give you the correct Conclusion- I need to give one more example to prove my point. So, please go with me to **2Corinthians 6:14-18**:

**14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?
15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?
16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.
17 "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.
18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.**

Now this is the foundational Passage that describes what is called, “Christian Separation”. And even though many have abused and misinterpreted this way of life throughout Church History- the Truth of Christian Separation” stands firm. It is a biblical Concept. And it is from this Passage that we get several very practical things like:

² *Capricious* is to act in sudden and unaccountable ways due to a change of mood.

- Christians should NOT marry unbelievers
- Christians should NOT go into Business with unbelievers

Now another way of looking at this is that we are to live our lives with “Partiality”. We are to *prefer* one Group over *another* Group. And, by the way- this is a Commandment.

“But wait a minute, Brother Blair! Didn’t James just tell us that operating with Partiality is a Sin?” Yes, he did. *“Yet you just told us that God operates with Partiality and that we should too?”* Yes, I did. So, let me explain by taking you back to what James actually said.

James 1:26&27

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Now first of all- this Passage about sinful Partiality does NOT begin with Chapter 2. It begins with James teaching us about what “Pure and Undefiled Religion” looks like. And then James teaches us about two aspects of genuine Salvation:

1. The Tongue
2. Our Disposition toward the weak

James was “moved” by God the Holy Spirit to teach that the way we talk and our relationship with the weakest members of the Church determines whether we are truly saved. So, notice that he never mentions anything about us performing Miracles; or speaking in tongues; or prophesying; or having the gifts of Healing. James never mentions having great Faith so that we can “call things into existence” or “move mountains” either. No, James concentrates on how we talk and our connection to the weak.

So, if you think that what you say or the words you use don’t matter to God- you are a rebel. As a “bought and paid for” bondsman of the Lord Christ- it matters how you talk. The Bible says it does. And if you think that you are somehow exempt from a relationship with widows and orphans- you are a rebel. As a “bought and paid for” bondsman of the Lord Christ- it matters about your disposition toward the weakest among us. The Bible says it does.

So, take heed to yourself and make sure that you pay attention to these two aspects. Because if you think you are strong in Faith because you can preach or teach or because you understand the Bible or because you operate in the Gifts or because you have been healed- and you neglect the tongue and widows and orphans- you are deceived and whatever Religion you have- is both Impure and Defiled.

And don't you dare use the fact that you are busy studying the Bible; or because you are in the Ministry; or because you are in Seminary as an excuse as to why you do not tame your tongue; or tend to widows and orphans- because God will not take too kindly to you using Him as an excuse as to why you are disobedient to the Bible.

There is a Principle that I learned a long time ago that I would like to give to you this morning:

You do NOT have to be Disobedient to one Part of the Bible in order to Obey another Part

... and if it *looks* like you do; or you *think* you do- then you are off- base and you are *confused* about what God requires of you or how to go about to obey what God requires.

But notice that only AFTER James tells us what Pure and Undefined Religion looks like does he begin to teach about the Sin of Partiality. And the connection here is clear:

Do not neglect the weak ones in order to “hob nob” with the strong ones.

And only after he tells us *that*- does James move into his Teaching about the “Sin of Partiality” in Chapter 2 where **James 2:1-5** says,

- 1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.**
- 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,**
- 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"**
- 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?**

5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

Now look closely at the phrase, “**hold your faith**” in verse 1. James tells us NOT to “**hold our Faith**” in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. The King James says,

James 2:1

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

So, what does it mean to: “**hold our Faith**” (NASB) or “**have not the Faith**” (KJV)? Well, John Calvin taught that this phrase has to do with how we “live out” our Christian life before God and Man.³ So, our Faith in Jesus; our Belief in Jesus; our Salvation- CAUSES us to live in a certain way. And as we continue to read and study the Bible- we understand more and more how to “live out” what we say we believe. And so, as a believer, James *infallibly* forbids us to live in a way that exemplifies what he calls, “Personal Favoritism”. And then James applies this Teaching to two different groups of people:

1. The Rich
2. The Poor

**2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,
3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"
4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?**

Now keep in mind, as we go through this- that James is NOT referring to ALL poor people. He is specifically referring to SAVED people- who happen to be poor. And this is a very important distinction. Now how do I know that? Look what he said in verse 5:

³ John Calvin; *Commentary on James*; PC Study Bible formatted electronic database Copyright © 2005-2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

Notice three phrases in this Verse:

1. **to be rich in faith**
2. **heirs of the kingdom**
3. **those who love Him**

... and all three pertain to ONLY those who are saved.

Now there is a false Teaching about the Poor that began with the Roman religious System- many centuries ago- that says ALL the Poor are in Favor with God; and ALL the Wealthy aren't. And this Teaching was so powerful that many, many wealthy individuals gave away their *entire* fortunes- NOT because they genuinely cared for the Poor- but simply to classify themselves as *being* "Poor"- so they could EARN Heaven. So, by *impoverishing* themselves- they were trying to buy their way into Heaven.

For example, in **Luke 6:20**, the Gentile medical doctor infallibly quoted Jesus as saying,

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

... and the interpretation of this was that ALL the Poor were "blessed" by God- for no other reason than they were Poor. Now there are two problems with that interpretation:

1. What classifies a person as being, "Poor"
2. **Matthew 5:3**

The Reality is that- right now- you are *poorer* than somebody else. That's true. But it is also true that- right now- you are also much *richer* than somebody else. But this wasn't about people being "poorer" than others- it was about being "Poor"- which to this false religion meant, "completely destitute". So, you could not have ANY means to support yourself- if you wanted to EARN Salvation.

And when God the Spirit "moved" on the Apostle Levi- he *clarified* what Jesus meant by using the term, "Poor" when he wrote this in

Matthew 5:3:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

... which has NOTHING to do with financial or material Wealth.

This describes an individual, who has been gifted by God to be able to understand that- spiritually speaking- he is lost; and has produced no spiritual Value for himself to God- by all that he has done to try to be “Good”. So, a person who is, “poor in spirit” is a person who has been given a God-given Humility about his own Condition before God. And it is this Humility that brings the elect into true, Holy Spirit Conviction- which brings him to a place of Repentance over his Sins- so he may be saved. So, the “Poor” that Jesus was referring has NOTHING to do with our material or financial Status in this Life.

The Truth is that some of the most arrogant and Self-righteous people on earth are those that could be classified as “Poor”. And some of the most humble and generous people on earth are those who could be classified as, “Wealthy”. But our material and financial Status has NOTHING to do with Salvation or living a godly life or loving Jesus. All of that is a Gift from God- to His elect.

And so, when James clarifies that the “Poor” he is talking about are those who have been chosen to be rich in Faith; and those who are the Heirs of God’s Kingdom; and those who love God- it is clear that James was talking about those who are genuinely saved- and yet happen to be Poor.

And it is also clear that the Wealthy people that James was talking about in this Passage are those who are lost and who happen to be rich. Look again at the end of verse 6 and the beginning of verse 7:

... Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

Saved people NEVER drug other saved people into Court. And saved people NEVER blasphemed the Name of Jesus either. So, the “Sin of Partiality” that James is teaching about in this Passage is when saved people cater to the wealthy lost people at the expense of the saved poor people.

Now why would a genuinely saved person cater to the wealthy lost? Well, in context- back in the 1st Century- wealthy people had the Power to bless the saved or to have them arrested and thrown in jail. We need to remember that, back then- Christianity was an illegal Religion. The Romans tolerated the Jews- but they did NOT tolerate the followers of Jesus. Why? Three reasons. The Roman Authorities looked at the “little Christs” (Christians) as being three things:

1. Atheists
2. Cannibals
3. Anarchists

The 1st Century Christians were looked at as being “Atheists” because they only worshipped one God. The Romans were poly-theistic pagans, who worshipped multipole gods. So, the notion that there was just one God- was crazy to the Romans. Now interestingly, the Romans also persecuted the Jews about this Issue as well.

The Romans also persecuted the Followers of Jesus about what they misunderstood about what Jesus meant when He said,

John 6:54

He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

... so, the Christians were falsely accused of being cannibals.

But the main Issue that brought terrible Persecution against the Christians of the 1st Century was the charge of being Anarchists. The Roman Government forced the people they subjugated to look at Caesar as being a god. And the Romans would require “Loyalty Oaths” for those, who worked in Government. But when they tried to force the believers to accept the Deity of the Roman Emperor or take those Oaths- the Christians would categorically reject it. And rightfully so. So, in spite of the fact that Christians were the most honest, kind, faithful, and hard-working people in the Roman Empire- the Roman Authorities always looked at them with a jaundice eye- thinking that at any moment- the Christians would kill them and try to take over the Government.

Now look, it is human nature to want to be rich and to own things. I have never met anyone who wants to make LESS money. Every generation wants to live better than the previous one. We want our children to have an easier time than we did. It is also human nature to look at wealthy people as being important and connected. And the people of the early Church were doing both.

But even though these are aspects of human nature- we are repeatedly warned in the Bible about the danger that Wealth and Prosperity brings to our souls. The Apostle Paul gave one of these Warnings in **1Timothy 6:9b&10:**

9 ...those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Now in my nearly 50 years of being in the Church- I have never met the first person who would admit to “loving money”. It is as though believers in the 21st

Century have all magically escaped the worldly seduction that the Bible says Wealth brings to ALL human beings- because very few within the modern church even prays about this.

So, none of the people- who are the most financially and materially prosperous people in the History of the world- are attached to money? But remember- this was an Issue back in the 1st Century- *without* Capitalism; and *without* Free Enterprise; *without* the ease at which wealth is accumulated in our day; and without pied- pipers putting gas on the fire of our fleshly inclination to covet- all day long on the Hay, Wood, and Stubble television network. So, the Reality is that we need these Warnings infinitely MORE than they did.

Now the writer of **Hebrews** gave us another Warning in **Hebrews 13:5&6**, when he said tied us loving money with NOT trusting in God, when he said:

5 Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"
6 so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

Now these infallible Warnings are why I condemn the Doctrine of the so-called, "Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Movement". They teach that the accumulation of Wealth is not only NOT a problem today- but that it is a Sign of genuine Godliness. And they teach this to such a degree that if a person is NOT financially prosperous- he is labeled as having little or no Faith. But it is very hard to accept that Man-made Teaching when you take these biblical Warnings to heart and not merely wave our hands- thinking we are somehow exempt from them.

But not only are we warned about the insidious Danger that Money and Prosperity brings to us- James was faithful to also warn us to NOT look at rich people as being a Source of either Safety or Help.

So, what we see here is that the ONLY Partiality that is NOT Sin- is making a distinction between the Lost and the Saved. Now we are repeatedly told from cover to cover to treat EVERYONE with Dignity and Respect- precisely because EVERYBODY was created in God's Image. Yet we are also told to treat our saved brothers and sisters- with a *unique* and *special* Love. And this Love is reserved SOLELY for those who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth.

So, while we should NOT be mean or ungodly to ANYONE- we are to have *special* Love and *special* Kindness and *special* Patience and *special* Mercy- with those who will be with us forever in Heaven. And there are a number of reasons why. But one of the most important is that when the lost unsaved world sees the

Love that we have within the Church- it will provoke them to jealousy and create a desire within them to experience this kind of *special* Love.

So, the “Partiality” that Paul taught in **2Corinthians** within the concept of “Christian Separation” is ONLY between those who are lost and those who are saved. But differences in Race, Ethnicity, Nationality, Culture, or Financial or Political Considerations should NEVER cause us to treat our brothers and sisters in Christ differently. And we should NEVER prefer lost people over saved people. So, if we allow those earthly differences to cause us to operate in Partiality- James says we are sinning.

Now quickly look again at verses 8-12:

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

Now part of being human is to think that if I’m *trying* to obey God and periodically slip up here and there- I’m still okay. But James slaughters that notion by telling us,

... whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

So, even if I am doing a real good job of NOT committing Adultery or NOT engaging in Theft or Blasphemy- I am still sinning *horribly* before God- if I operate with Partiality when dealing with my fellow- laborers in Jesus. And this is *especially* true- if I prefer the wealthy lost over the poor saved.

Now the reason James and other biblical writers sets the bar so high- is because it forces us to deal with not merely our own outward acts- but also the motivations of our hearts. The only reason I would “make meat out of one and fish out of another”- *especially* as it pertains to the saved poor and the lost wealthy- is if I have forgotten two things:

1. How spiritually bankrupt I am- without Jesus
2. The many Warnings about Wealth

But if these two things are ever-present in my mind- it will be very hard for me to operate with this “Sinful Partiality”.

Finally, look again at verse 13:

For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Now one of the hall-marks of genuine Christianity is Mercy. We are all sinners, who deserve the Damnation of God. We have sinned *willfully and repeatedly* against God- and yet- He has shown us Mercy. And that Reality humbles us. And if you really understand that- showing Mercy to others- who have wronged you- is easy.

But one of the hall-marks of spiritual Maturity is the ability to show Mercy to people without Compromising with the Truth. Weak and immature people can't show Mercy to those who are genuinely wrong. Because the ONLY thing that is important to them- is the Truth. And because they are immature- they don't understand that part of what it means to have the Truth; and part of what it means to walk in the Truth- is the ability- and the desire- to show Mercy to those who have done wrong- *especially* when they have done wrong to you.

It doesn't take the Power of the Holy Spirit to simply get away from people you don't like. Any sinner can do that. It doesn't take the miraculous transformation of the New Birth- to be angry with people who have wronged you. Pagans do that all day long. But it DOES take the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to genuinely love your enemies; and to do good to them; and to pray for them- without being bitter toward them. And it DOES take the Miracle of the New Birth to show Mercy to someone who has legitimately done wrong- *especially* when they have wronged you.

But we are NEVER more like God- than when our lives are characterized with Mercy. And we are proving that we are strong and not weak; that we are mature and not immature- when we can show guilty people Mercy- without compromising with the Truth.

James tells us here that the way that God will judge us will be without any Mercy- unless during our journey here with Jesus- our lives were typified with Mercy shown to others. And always remember that you don't have any reason to show someone Mercy- unless they NEED it. And only guilty people NEED Mercy.

Now the normal response to preaching like this is, “*But, Brother Blair, guilty people need to repent!*” and that is true- guilty people DO need to repent. But if you don’t show guilty people any Mercy- then YOU need to repent too- because James says you are sinning. So, there is a way to show guilty people Mercy and NOT compromise with Truth. But some would say, “*But that’s enabling them!*” And my response to that Statement is two-fold:

1. The Concept of “enabling” people is a Man-made psychological term that cannot be found ANYWHERE in the Bible
2. The Bible commands believers to show Mercy to guilty people

.. so *regardless* of what Man says- showing Mercy is being godly. And that means that showing guilty people Mercy- is NEVER wrong.

But now look at the last phrase in verse 13:

... mercy triumphs over judgment.

Now be careful that you DON’T see this as, “Mercy TRUMPS Judgment”- as though Mercy is more important than Judgment- because James didn’t say that. He said, “Mercy TRIUMPHS OVER Judgment”. In other words, “Mercy REJOICES AGAINST Judgement”. OR “Mercy GLORIES OVER Judgment.” And to this John Calvin said,

" ... God's mercy alone is that which delivers us from the dread and terror of His judgment. he takes rejoicing or glorying in the sense of being victorious or triumphant; for the judgment of condemnation is suspended over the whole world, and nothing but mercy can bring relief... mercy itself, in a manner, triumphs, and it alone reins- when the severity of God’s judgment gives way every time sinners are saved...”⁴

Amen. Let’s pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.