



A Systematic Expository Study on the General Epistle of JAMES

Study 8: THE PERIL OF PARTIALITY IN THE CHURCH

James 2:1-13

James, the inspired writer of this Epistle was concerned about the life of the brethren. He begins this section with "my brethren". From the very beginning to the final paragraph, he addresses his message to the brethren. (James 1:2,16; 2:1; 3:1,10,12; 4:11; 5:9,10,19,20). He describes the true evidence of genuine salvation, tells us how a true brother in Christ lives and then calls us to self-examination to know if our profession of salvation is real or false. He has already spoken about patience and perseverance in trials, tests and temptation, joy and dependence on God in our low estate, the origin and source of temptation, submission to and obedience to the Word of God, love for and support of the poor and needy, control of the tongue and separation from the evil in the world. We can test our experience and profession of salvation in these practical areas to know how scriptural our testimony of salvation is.

This study deals with another important and practical issue. What is to be the christian attitude and the practice of the Church on favouritism or respect of persons? How is the christian or the Church to treat the poor and react to the rich? What is "the royal law" which is to govern our behaviour to the brethren and to our neighbours? Here is another test for how genuine a christian or a Church is.

RESPECT OF PERSONS CONDEMNED

James 2:1-4,9; Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:17; Proverbs 24:23; 28:21; 1 Timothy 5:21; Job 34:19; James 3:17

"**Respect of persons**" is a phrase that means favouritism or partiality. The Bible condemns it as sin. "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:9). One of God's attributes is impartiality (2 Chronicles 19:7; Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34). If we are children of God we too must be impartial, fair and just to all men. In regard to salvation, usefulness or judgement, God is impartial in His dealings with us (Romans 2:9-11; Colossians 3:25). Even Christ's enemies knew that He was impartial; there was no respect of persons with Him. (Matthew 22:16; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21). A good test of our salvation is to know how conformed to Christ we are. Both the Old and New Testaments call us to be like God and be impartial.

There is no place for favouritism in the heart of God, in the life of His children or in the Church. To show favouritism, to allow oneself to be unduly influenced by a person's social status or prestige or power or wealth is to be different, very different from Christ and to offend God. Partiality of judgement and favouritism of treatment in the Church is condemned as sin. "The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the Maker of them all" (Proverbs 22:2). "He that oppreseth the poor reproacheth his Maker" (Proverbs 14:3 1). James draws a picture of two men who are visiting the Church - one is rich and elegantly dressed with a gold ring in the finger, the other is poor and shabbily dressed. Then he concludes that if we are unfair and partial to them, we do wrong. Those who are guilty of evil discrimination manifest anti-christian behaviour.

THE RICHES OF POOR CHRISTIANS

James 2:5-7; 1 Corinthians 1:26-28; 3:21-23; 2 Corinthians 4:15; 6:10; Revelation 2:9; Isaiah 29:19; Luke 16:22,25, Ephesians 1:18,19; Revelation 21:7

"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?" (James 2:5). Christ's message and attitude to the poor are revealing. In His first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, He read, "He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). He sent to John and said, "The poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:5). In Luke 6:20, He said, "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the

kingdom of God". The gospel offered so much to the poor and demanded so much from the rich. Many poor people repented and believed in Christ and were swept into the kingdom, and into the Church of Jesus Christ. Only few of the rich were humble enough to repent, believe and be saved. The wealth of the rich did not give him special advantages to get him saved. The unbelieving rich men who "oppress the poor and blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called" will be judged by God, without partiality.

James was not condemning riches, he was condemning the unbelief and wickedness of the rich who had no faith in Christ and no sympathy for the poor. In the early church, there were some faithful, humble, obedient, consecrated rich men in the Church (Acts 2:45; 8:27,36-38; 13:7,12; 17:11,12). The poor people in the Church were also faithful, humble, obedient and consecrated (2 Corinthians 8:2-5).

THE ROYAL LAW PRACTISED BY CHRISTIANS

James 2:8-13; 1 Peter 2:9; Leviticus 19:18,34; Matthew 22:39; Romans 13:8,9; Galatians 5:14; Matthew 7:12; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:22

What is "**the royal law**"? "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (James 2:8). Why is it the royal law? It is a law given by the King of kings; it is a law that makes us live to please the King; it is a law that makes men kings and is fit for kings. It is a law fit for those who are royal, and able to make men royal. To keep this great law, the King has to live within us, making each king of himself, to live like a king among men.

Our lives then will be controlled by love - the love of God in the heart. This is true liberty; not liberty to hurt others, but liberty to be free from selfishness and to show love, mercy and compassion to others.

*If you are blessed by these bible study outlines, we' d like to hear from you.
You can email the pastor@deeperlife-liverpool.org.uk with your comments.*