

Failing to love is sin (2:8-11). James now focuses on the true heart of the matter: Keeping God's law to love others. If you want to do well in God's sight, you must keep the law to love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:25-37). This is described as the royal law in that it comes from the King and it is greater than other laws because of how much it impacts (Matthew 22:36-40). Favoritism is, therefore, not just a violation of the law forbidding such, but also a violation of the law requiring love. If you do show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted as a lawbreaker (transgressor). Concerning the breaking of God's law, James shows it is serious to break any of them – demonstrating that every law comes from the same God. Therefore, if a person keeps every law God has given and stumbles at one point, he/she is still guilty of being a lawbreaker. And, remember that James has taught that sin results in death (1:14-15). So, showing favoritism is a serious matter to God (as is every sin)!

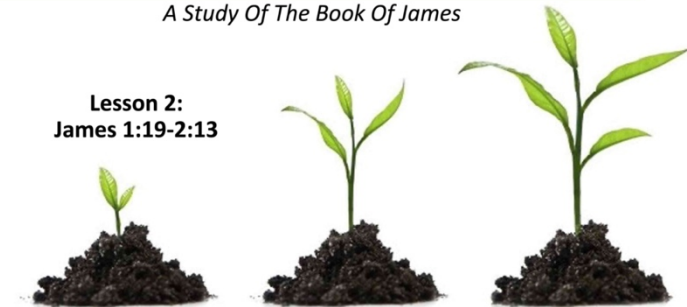
Judge mercifully (2:12-13). Every person will stand before Jesus Christ and be judged by the law of freedom (i.e. the New Testament, that offers freedom from sin through Jesus, 1:25; 2 Corinthians 5:10; John 12:48; Revelation 20:11-15). So, it is essential that we speak and act with this on our minds and remember this day is coming. We do not want to be found as being guilty of showing favoritism on this day! Then, we must remember the mercy of the Judge. Although Jesus will punish the lawbreakers, He will also show mercy (pity) on some. But, you must never expect to receive mercy from God if you are not merciful in how you treat others (Matthew 5:7; 6:14; 7:1-2). Namely, James is showing that favoritism lacks mercy in judgments! Because mercy triumphs over judgment, we must aim for showing mercy (knowing that we all depend on God's mercy) and not be guilty of merciless judgments (in showing favoritism or anything).

Conclusion

We have seen that God requires obedience to His word rather than just hearing His saving message. In addition, it is not fitting for a Christian to show favoritism in how he/she treats and judges others. In the next lesson, we will study James 2:14-3:12.

"That You May Be Mature And Complete"

A Study Of The Book Of James



Lesson 2:
James 1:19-2:13

We have established that the author of this letter is likely James (who was the Lord's brother) and he is writing to Christians scattered in various places, who James was helping to become mature and complete. Then, he encouraged them to find joy through trials and view God as the giver of every good and perfect thing rather than the source of temptation.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn that Christians must obey God's word rather than just hear what it says and about the sin of showing favoritism in a study of James 1:19-2:13.

The Need For Obedience (1:19-27)

Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger (1:19-20). Contextually, the instructions of this text appear to apply primarily to how we hear God's word (see vv. 18, 21), with a secondary application that can be made to how we hear others. First, we should be quick to listen to what God says by giving Him a fair hearing and not having our minds made up before we hear. Second, we should be slow to speak by never answering something with our own conclusions and judgments before we have thoroughly heard what He has said (Proverbs 18:13). Third, we should be slow to anger when we hear God's word and give God's word a full and honest hearing without being blinded to the truth by our own emotions. The danger of irrationally rushing ahead to judgment, speech, and anger is that it does not result in people being right with God.

Humbly receive the implanted word (1:21). If you want to give God's word the right opportunity to work in your life, you must strip off all the moral filth and evil that are so prevalent in this world (like old clothes) so it has no part in your Christian life (Romans 13:11-14). This is a full commitment to get rid of anything that is morally filthy according to God's law that He considers to be evil (wicked). Then, you must humbly (meekly)

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Written by Eric Krieg

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receive the word of God that is planted in your heart (Luke 8:5-8, 11-15). Although this one could respond to God's word in other ways, he/she intends to receive the word and is willing to hold his/her strength to do what he/she desires under the proper control so as to let God's word have the priority. Receiving God's word in this way (not allowing anything to hinder how it can work in your life) will result in the salvation of your soul (Romans 1:16)!

Be doers of God's word (1:22-25). God is not just interested in how you hear the word. Rather, to experience the saving power of God's word, people must be doers of the word (putting it into the appropriate action, Matthew 7:24-27; 1 John 2:3-6). This means that we must not just be hearers only who are merely informed according to the teachings of His word; but to be transformed by the teachings of His word! Just being a hearer of the word rather than a doer results in Christians deceiving themselves (thinking knowledge is sufficient for pleasing God without obedience). To illustrate the point, James speaks of someone who looks in a mirror but goes away without fixing what was wrong. This is what the hearer who is not a doer is like (i.e. hearing God's word but not acting in obedience to its message). In contrast, James speaks of the one who takes the appropriate action. First, while the previous man looked, this one looks intently (with great effort to see what is shown) into the perfect law of freedom (God's words in the New Testament). Note that this word is perfect (Psalm 19:7-9; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), is the law people live under today (Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Romans 8:2; James 2:12; Romans 13:10), and offers freedom from sin (John 8:31-32; Hebrews 8:12). Second, while the previous man looked and went away, this one perseveres in it by spending both quality and quantity of time hearing/studying the word. Third, while the previous man went away and forgot what kind of person he was, this one is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer who works to make the appropriate applications to his/her own life. As a result, this is the one who will be blessed in what he/she does by pleasing God and having eternal life in Heaven rather than experiencing God's vengeance (John 13:17; Hebrews 5:9; Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Practice pure and undefiled religion (1:26-27). James now demonstrates that the nature of pure and undefiled religion completely shapes everything about our lives. Although a person may think he/she is religious (professing to believe in, worship, and serve God), James demonstrates this one's religion is useless if he/she does not control his/her tongue (i.e. like a horse that is uncontrolled by a bridle). Note that this is also true about more than just failing to control the tongue (i.e. if there is any area he/she does not allow God to control by obeying Him).

Such a one has deceived himself/herself so as to think he/she pleases God. Then, James identifies two things as being necessary for pure and undefiled religion that is acceptable to God (other scriptures identify additional things). First, James identifies looking after orphans and widows in their distress (need). So, God has given individual Christians the responsibility to do what they can to help alleviate the needs of these individuals (Galatians 6:10). Second, James identifies keeping oneself unstained from the world. So, God wants each Christian to get away from sinful things so as not to be stained by sin in the slightest way (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The Sin Of Showing Favoritism (2:1-13)

Do not show favoritism (2:1). God directly forbids favoritism. Although James will focus on favoritism between rich and poor, the prohibition is not limited to this. For, favoritism is inconsistent with faith in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ (who died for everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social status, etc.).

An illustration of favoritism (2:2-4). James's illustration surrounds two visitors who come into a Christian meeting/assembly (Greek word for synagogue; used here for a meeting of the church). One man enters wearing a gold ring and fine clothes (indicating wealth and possible social status). He is viewed in a favorable way and given an honorable seat. Another man enters wearing filthy clothes. Though he is permitted to stay, he is not viewed favorably and is put in a less noticeable and honorable seat. James concludes that they had made distinctions between these two purely based on judgments from their outward appearances. So, they demonstrated their evil thoughts about what was more honorable.

Keeping the right perspective (2:5-7). James reminds all Christians to keep the right perspective of people and judge righteously based on their actions (fruit, Matthew 7:15-20; 12:33; John 7:24). James's point is not to shift favoritism from the rich to the poor, but to stop the practice of making judgments based on external appearances alone. For example, they should have remembered that God has chosen the poor who love Him to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. And, while rich people can undoubtedly be saved, more poor people tend respond to the gospel in obedience than rich (Matthew 19:23-24). Therefore, they should not dishonor the poor! In contrast, they should have remembered that the wealthy often oppress those who are poor. These often reject the name of Jesus and blaspheme it. So, while this does not accurately describe every rich person, making distinctions and judgments based on external factors alone (i.e. appearance) fails to take many things into consideration.