

## JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part eight

Teaching #1818 - Sunday, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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### HOW TO KEEP YOURSELF IN THE LOVE OF FATHER GOD

**James 2:1-13** - "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. [2] For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, [3] and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," [4] have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? [5] Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? [6] But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? [7] Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? [8] If you really fulfill 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 but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. [11] For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. [12] So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. [13] For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

The last verse of chapter one of James forms a natural bridge to our text today - **James 1:27** - "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." Compassion for the helpless is one of the cornerstones of *pure* and *undefiled* religion, and James is concerned that this church, or group of churches, may be acting in direct contradiction to this principle. Immediately our minds are brought back to the truth James stated so pointedly in **1:22** - "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." He doesn't want these people thinking more highly of themselves than they ought. There is something going on in their church that betrays a true commitment to Father God.

#### 1) **HEARING AND DOING THE WORD MEANS LOVING AND TREATING PEOPLE THE WAY JESUS WOULD - ALL PEOPLE**

Hearing the Word puts us *on line* with the Father's values. Genuine faith isn't a shapeless set of convictions. It's a visible, doable, liveable way of being, with a specific shape and identity. James will now give one example of this:

**James 2:1** - "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."

I remember seeing a National Geographic documentary on the Titanic. It was released when the movie of the same title was at its popularity peak. They interviewed a old woman who was only a young girl as the ship was sinking. As her life boat was being lowered, she described seeing a very wealthy man - a multi-millionaire - walk to the side of the sinking ship after all the other lifeboats were filled and gone. He took out his bill-fold and emptied all his money into the ocean. "Useless," She hear him say, "totally useless."

Wealth is only impressive to short-sighted people. James saw *Christians* in these scattered congregations, most of whom were very poor, or perhaps he saw the *leadership* in these churches, treating the wealthy as though their wealth made them something special.

Certainly James isn't calling on these churches to *despise* the rich. That would be as unchrist-like as despising the poor. But James is calling for *Biblical realism*. He is asking - or commanding - the people to see material wealth with the eyes of that man on the Titanic. If you look toward the *end* of all things, there is nothing *distinctive* about wealth. It can be *used* for great things in Christ's Kingdom. You truly can lay up treasure in heaven. But money makes no one great by its mere possession or selfish investing.

In the very first verse James lays down the general principle that will govern the teaching of the next twelve verses - "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." "Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," and "showing partiality" - these are two things that won't mix. They are like the oil and the water in a salad dressing. You can shake them together all you like, but they only *appear* mixed. Eventually, they separate into their own state.

James talks about their ***“faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory”*** (2:1). James is obviously ***reminding*** here. Faith in Christ is accepting God's glorious gospel of mercy through the death and resurrection of His eternal Son, Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ ***begins*** and is ***sustained*** as God gives His grace and mercy to only one class of people - ***undeserving sinners***. But as precious as that truth is, it's not the whole story. There is something even better. Sinners who repent and turn to Jesus - sinners who ***“hold faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”*** not only get ***saved***, they become ***“my brothers”*** (2:1). And James' point in using that term is obvious in this context. If your family gets together at Christmas and you tell the son who is a doctor to sit at the table and carve the turkey, while the son who is unemployed is told to sit in the corner on the floor, you have one sick family gathering.

There is something that binds brothers together, but it's not social status or income. It's common parenthood. It's being of the same ***roots***, the same ***family***. Partiality has no place among brothers.

All of this is nailed down in principle in the very first verse of this second chapter. Don't be deceived in your heart. Don't kid yourself about hearing the Word if you show favoritism to one class or group of people. You can't ***“hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”*** and live by the ***“partiality”*** of this world's value system. You can ***profess*** faith in Jesus Christ and live any way you want. But, says James, you can't ***“hold”*** to true faith in Christ as Lord and show favoritism.

Resist the natural, fallen tendency to be impressed by the wrong things in people. Be careful in this. Test yourself. Are you more impressed with someone's ***net worth***, or the depth of their ***character and likeness to Jesus Christ***. Which do you talk about more? Net worth is a pathetic measuring stick for a human being.

2) **WHEN WE MAKE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE ON THE BASIS OF EXTERNAL APPEARANCE AND STANDING WE BECOME WORSHIPERS WITH POLLUTED MINDS**

**James 2:2-4** - ***“For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, [3] and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” [4] have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”***

Whether James is describing a situation that actually happened in this church, or is just using an illustration to make his point more vivid, the message is the same. In some terrible way this church was really playing up to the wealthy and denigrating the poor. There's a hint in the next two verses that the ***reason*** the church favored the rich wasn't so much ***admiration*** as it was ***fear***:

**James 2:6-7** - ***“But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? [7] Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?”***

Remember the make up of this church. Most of the people were poor as a result of being driven from land and home. They were ***scattered*** - **James 1:1** - ***“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.”*** And they were ***“dispersed”*** because they refused to renounce Christ. And their scattered, nomadic condition made them vulnerable to the few who had wealth and power. The rich had real clout in their church communities and, at least some of them, loved to use it.

The poor were easy targets for high interest loans and law suits when debts couldn't be paid. The rich could actually seize the land of the poor if they fell behind in payments. Those with the power could be further encouraged in their sin because what they were doing wasn't ***illegal***. It was just ***sinful***. And, as always, we are usually more motivated to ***keep the law*** out of fear of punishment, than we are to ***be Christ-like*** out of a fear of grieving the Holy Spirit.

Then James does something truly shocking, but you have to have eyes to see it. Notice, it's not the sin of the rich exploiting the poor that's being dealt with in these verses. James' words of condemnation are addressed to the ***church for tolerating*** the same class distinctions that carried weight in the world around them. The church wasn't ***“doing the Word”*** on this point. She was afraid to be different. She was caving in to the power values of the world. The church was willing to compromise the gospel for the sake of not irritating those with the money and the power.

"The poor can't hurt us. If they leave the church, no one will notice. Sit them anywhere. But who wants to aggravate the millionaire? Give them the best seats. We don't want any more trouble than we've had already!"

Look again at the way James wraps up **verse 4** - “...have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

When I talk to you about “*evil thoughts*,” what do you think of? Lewd internet sites? Dirty novels? Pornographic movies? James isn’t thinking along those lines at all when he cautions against these people having “*evil thoughts*.”

But he knows the church. He knows our capacity to be disgusted at *some* evil thoughts, while tolerating *others*. When you and I form judgments of people by *what they wear* and *what they possess* it’s pornographic to Father God. He is as repelled by it as we are by *child pornography*. Yes, there is more than one way to be captivated and dominated by “*evil thoughts*.”

Think of this. The book of James isn’t a long letter. In this letter we’ve seen James give *five verses* to the importance of hearing and obeying the Scriptures. Later on, he will give *five verses* about the importance of prayer and faith and healing. Yet, in this short New Testament letter, James will give *thirteen verses* to this issue of partiality in the church. That’s *thirteen verses* of caution and warning. This is James’ way of saying we are all to  *dwell on this idea, give it a longer, slower look than we usually do*.

Partiality exists in the church when pastors and teachers *fail to deal with the clear teaching of certain passages of Scriptures because they fear the teaching will be unpopular with some of the members*, or when people of means *make their financial gifts conditional upon using them as they would like*. When this happens people start to think they are *buying shares* in the church rather than *giving unto the Lord what is rightfully His sin the first place*.

Sins of partiality are death-dealing to the spiritual life of the church, says James, because of the way they nest so deeply in the *mind*. They don’t just hurt the one discriminated against. They twist and numb the thinking of the whole church. That’s what James means when he says we become “*judges with evil thoughts*” (2:2). Probably James means a church can still expend great amounts of moral heat and energy fighting some sins, and all the while be blind to its own failure in the way it splits up the members of the body of Christ.

More than once God had to remind even very holy people how He does His work in this world:

**1 Samuel 16:7** - “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

### 3) OUR CHURCH WILL BE BLESSED BY THE LIFE OF THE “IMPLANTED WORD” AS WE CONTINUALLY ANCHOR OUR HEARTS IN GOD’S GRACE

**James 2:5** - “Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?”

What is James’ point here? Is he saying God is just as partial as we? Did God just pass over the rich and ignore their needs? Why did God start things out with the “*poor in the world*?” Paul unfolds the answer for us in great detail:

**1 Corinthians 1:26-31** - “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

God laid the foundation of the church in very poor humble ways so the kind of situation James writes about would never happen. *All* will be treated alike when we learn to “*boast in the Lord*” - when we learn to look on the heart rather than the clothes or the cars or the houses. Both the poor and the rich will be deepened in character and Christ-likeness. Both will learn to appreciate God and one another in fresh, Scriptural ways.

In this beautiful house of worship called Cedarview Community Church, the only thing that really matters is what you *are* in

Christ, and what you are *becoming* in Christ, and that you understand this is all of God's *grace*, and that He gets all the *credit and glory*. There will never be partiality in a church like that.

4) **WHEN CHRISTIANS FORGET GOD'S GRACE AND SHOW PARTIALITY TO BROTHERS AND SISTERS THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST IS BLASPHEMED BEFORE THE WORLD'S EYES**

**James 2:6-7** - "But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? [7] Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?"

Of course, when the church dishonors the poor, it does them a terrible injustice. That's the most *obvious* tragedy, but it's not the *greatest* tragedy. The greatest tragedy is that people who look at the church won't see Jesus living there. They will conclude either that He's not alive or that He makes no difference in the practical things of life. The cross of Christ is emptied of power and effect. Those outside see nothing in the church but *their own* values with a little religion squirted over the top, like chocolate syrup on a sundae.

And then James says something quite shocking. He says Jesus' Name is "*blasphemed*" (2:7). Can you imagine that? Apparently Jesus' Name isn't just blasphemed at the movies. I can blaspheme Jesus' Name while my hands are lifted in worship. I can blaspheme His Name while I'm reading the Scripture out loud with Pastor Chris. I can blaspheme His Name while I listen to my Christian Education teacher.

Whenever I don't treat *all* the members of this body of believers as equal recipients of fresh, undeserved grace, whenever I make judgments against some of them in my heart, and most importantly, whenever I don't extend the same grace to *anyone* in the church that I constantly receive from Jesus Christ, I *blaspheme* the Name of Jesus Christ.

No wonder the world won't be drawn to a Jesus the church blasphemes. Why would they? If those who know Him *best* don't honor Him, why would those who know Him *least*?

5) **WHY ONE SIN WEAKENS THE WHOLE LIFE BEFORE GOD**

**James 2:8-11** - "If you really fulfill 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 but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. [11] For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."

It's not hard to see what James is doing here. When I make a list of sins that grieve the Holy Spirit and deny Christ, the sin of partiality isn't even on it.

We are pretty good at evading the subject of our own guilt before the law of God. That's what these verses are all about. Any kind of "*partiality*" is clearly called "*committing sin*" (9). This is not said to put us all under a cloud of discouragement and condemnation. But, it is said to keep us relentless in our pursuit of holiness.

To do this, James reminds us God doesn't grade by percentages, like you get 65% in holiness and Joe gets 79%. James wants to have us picture the will of Father God as *all of one piece*. He wants to keep us on the stretch for holiness of heart and mind. He wants our lives to be "*perfect, complete, and lacking in nothing*" (1:4). All of us have some sins we are nauseated by. And we have other sins we never even think about.

And it's these internal sins of attitude and perspective that are easiest to ignore. Remember how the Pharisees did this very thing? Jesus caught them red handed as they glossed over huge issues of *compassion* and *justice* (just the kind of things James is addressing). They ignored these things by concentrating on *outward* expression of fastidious holiness in more visible matters:

**Luke 11:42** - "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."

Of course, if you're going to ignore justice and compassion it helps the conscience if you tithe mint and rue. It's an old trick of human nature that never washes with God. The law is all of one piece. It's not a *list* on paper. It's the *voice* of a Person.

The whole law comes from one God.

**James 2:10-11** - "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. [11] For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."

It's a bit like saying a chain is safe to use because there is only one weak link in it. Would you allow yourself to be suspended from a helicopter if I told you the chain only had one weak link in it. Do all the other strong links matter at that point?

6) **HOW TO KEEP YOURSELF IN THE LOVE AND MERCY OF FATHER GOD**

**James 2:12-13** - "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. [13] For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

James closes this section with instructions on how to treat the people you rub shoulders with in the church. Instead of *judging* people by their dress and wealth, we're to remember that we are all going to be *judged*. "Remember that you are going to be accountable before God. And God will want to see that we've been as merciful with others as he has been with us."

"**Mercy triumphs over judgement,**" says James. It did in our redemption, and it will work just as richly in God's House. The way you dwell in God's mercy is to extend it to the least and the lowest in His family. This will keep us all *"humbly receiving the implanted Word"* rather than being *"double minded"* and *"deceived in our own heart."*