

The Letter of James
Bible Study Session 05
James 2:1-13

Greek NT

1 Ἀδελφοί μου, μὴ ἐν προσωπολημψίαις ἔχετε τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης. 2 ἐὰν γὰρ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς συναγωγὴν ὑμῶν ἀνὴρ χρυσοδακτύλιος ἐν ἐσθῆτι λαμπρᾷ, εἰσέλθῃ δὲ καὶ πτωχὸς ἐν ῥυπαρᾷ ἐσθῆτι, 3 ἐπιβλέψητε δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν φοροῦντα τὴν ἐσθῆτα τὴν λαμπρὰν καὶ εἶπητε· σὺ κάθου ὧδε καλῶς, καὶ τῷ πτωχῷ εἶπητε· σὺ στήθι ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου, 4 οὐ διεκρίθητε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἐγένεσθε κριταὶ διαλογισμῶν πονηρῶν;

5 Ἀκούσατε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί· οὐχ ὁ θεὸς ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ πλουσίους ἐν πίστει καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας ἧς ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν; 6 ὑμεῖς δὲ ἠτιμάσατε τὸν πτωχόν· οὐχ οἱ πλούσιοι καταδυναστεύουσιν ὑμῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλκουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς κριτήρια; 7 οὐκ αὐτοὶ βλασφημοῦσιν τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς; 8 Εἰ μέντοι νόμον τελεῖτε βασιλικὸν κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν· ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε· 9 εἰδὲ προσωπολημπτεῖτε, ἁμαρτίαν ἐργάζεσθε ἐλεγχόμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου ὡς παραβάται. 10 ὅστις γὰρ ὅλον τὸν νόμον τηρήσῃ πταισῆ δὲ ἐν ἐνί, γέγονεν πάντων ἔνοχος. 11 ὁ γὰρ εἰπὼν· μὴ μοιχεύσῃς, εἶπεν καὶ· μὴ φονεύσῃς· εἰ δὲ οὐ μοιχεύεις φονεύεις δέ, γέγονας παραβάτης νόμου. 12 Οὕτως λαλεῖτε καὶ οὕτως ποιεῖτε ὡς διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας μέλλοντες κρίνεσθαι. 13 ἢ γὰρ κρίσις ἀνέλεος τῷ μὴ ποιήσαντι ἔλεος·

Elberfelder

1 Meine Brüder, habt den Glauben Jesu Christi, unseres Herrn der Herrlichkeit, ohne Ansehen der Person! 2 Denn wenn in eure Synagoge ein Mann kommt mit goldenem Ring, in prächtigem Kleid, es kommt aber auch ein Armer in unsauberem Kleid herein, 3 ihr seht aber auf den, der das prächtige Kleid trägt, und sprecht: Setze dich bequem hierher! und sprecht zu dem Armen: Stehe du dort, oder setze dich unten an meinen Fußschemel!, 4 habt ihr nicht unter euch selbst einen Unterschied gemacht und seid Richter mit bösen Gedanken geworden?

5 Hört, meine geliebten Brüder: Hat nicht Gott die vor der Welt Armen auserwählt, reich im Glauben und Erben des Reiches [zu sein], das er denen verheißt, die ihn lieben? 6 Ihr aber habt den Armen verachtet. Unterdrücken euch nicht die Reichen, und ziehen nicht sie euch vor die Gerichte? 7 Lästern nicht sie den guten Namen, der über euch angerufen worden ist? 8 Wenn ihr wirklich das königliche Gesetz `Du sollst deinen Nächsten lieben wie dich selbst nach der Schrift erfüllst, so tut ihr recht. 9 Wenn ihr aber die Person anseht, so begeht ihr Sünde und werdet vom Gesetz als Übertreter überführt. 10 Denn wer das ganze Gesetz hält, aber in einem strauchelt, ist aller [Gebote] schuldig geworden. 11 Denn der da sprach: `Du sollst nicht ehebrechen, sprach auch: `Du sollst nicht töten. Wenn du nun nicht ehebrichst, aber tötest, so bist du ein Gesetzes-Übertreter geworden. 12 Redet so und handelt so wie [solche],

NRSV

1 My brothers and sisters,^a do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?^b 2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.^d Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? 8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 9 But if you show partiality, you commit 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 the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you 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

NLT

1 My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? 2 For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. 3 If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, 4 doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

5 Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? 6 But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? 7 Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear? 8 Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 9 But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law. 10 For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. 11 For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder." So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law. 12 So whatever you say or whatever you do,

to the one in poverty
 -- --- say,
 "You stand over there,
 or
 --- sit on the floor by my feet,"

- (39) ^{2.4} **are you not discriminating among yourselves**
 and
- (40) **have become critics**
 with evil reasoning?

- (41) ^{2.5} **Listen,**
 my dear brothers!
- (42) **Has not God chosen the poverty-stricken of this world**
 to be rich
 by means of faith
 and
 -- -- inheritors
 of the Kingdom
 which He promised to those loving Him?

- (43) ^{2.6} But
you have insulted these in poverty.

- (44) **Do not the rich exploit you**
 and
- (45) **-- -- -- themselves drag you**
 into court?

- (46) ^{2.7} **Do not they slander that good name**
 by which you are called?

- (47) ^{2.8} However,
 if you keep the royal law from scripture,
 "You will love your neighbor as yourself,"
you do well;

- (48) ^{2.9} but
 if you show prejudice,
you commit sin,
 being convicted by the Law as transgressors.

- (49) ^{2.10} For
whoever would keep the whole law
 but
stumble in one point
stands guilty of all.

- (50) ^{2.11} Now
He who said,
 "Do not commit adultery,"
also said,
 "Do not commit murder."

- (51) But
 if you do not commit adultery,
 but
 -- -- -- commit murder,
you stand as a transgressor of Law.

- (52) ^{2.12} **So speak**
 and
- (53) **so act**
 as those going to be judged by the Law of liberty.

- (54) ^{2.13} For
judgment without mercy will be given
 to him
 who did not show mercy;

- (55) **mercy triumphs over judgment.**

Summary of Literary Structure:

The rhetorical structure of this passage is rather easy to determine -- and becomes the basis not only for 2:1-13 but also for 2:14-26 as well. The author begins with a **warning** against seeking to combine faith and prejudice (core statement 38 in verse 1). Remember the foundational ancient Jewish axiom of true religion: the vertical (toward God) and the horizontal (toward others) relationships must work in harmony with one another; contradiction between these two negates both. This axiom is then **illustrated** negatively with the example of economic discrimination in Christian worship practices (core statements 39 and 40 in verses 2 through 4).

In typical ancient rabbinic fashion, the **author elaborates** and defends both his warning and illustration in core statements 41 through 55 (vv. 5-13).

The development of the defense begins with a chiasmic pattern followed sequentially at the informal level: **rich man** (A, v. 2a, 3a); **poverty-stricken man** (B, v. 2b, 3b); **the charge** (C, verse 4); **the poverty-stricken** (B', vv. 5-6a); **the wealthy** (A', vv. 6b-7). In each segment of the second set (B' and A'), the contrast is between God's treatment of these individuals, and the initial Christian readers' treatment of these individuals. This provides the validation for the accusation of discrimination leveled in segment C, and comes as the first leg of the defense.

This can be charted out as follows:

* A vv. 2a, 3a, - rich man

* B vv. 2b, 3b - poverty-stricken man

* C v. 4 - accusation of discrimination

* B' vv. 5-6a - the poverty-stricken

* A' vv. 6b-7 - the wealthy

A - B Actions of discrimination described

C Charge of discrimination leveled

B' - A' Validation of the charge

The charge of discrimination rests on the hypocritical nature of the opposite ways of treating these two visitors at church who came from the opposite ends of the economic spectrum. The way they treated the rich visitor wasn't wrong, but in treating the beggar the opposite way, they erred profoundly from scripture principle. The second set of declarations (B' - A') carry the idea forward in a manner typical of the ancient step parallelism in the Jewish wisdom tradition.

Verses 7-11, the second leg of the defense, attempt to answer an anticipated objection to the first segment of his elaboration in verses 5-6 regarding treatment of the wealthy. The author senses that an objection may be raised against his views with a self-justifying assertion that their treatment of the wealthy was according to scripture principle. The author first agrees with the treatment of the wealthy, but reminds his readers of another important scripture principle regarding the poor, which they ignored. The response argues that selective obedience to scripture principles won't work. It's comparable to trying to justify murder by saying that no adultery has been committed. That is, one chooses to "love his neighbor" and disregards the divine mandate not to treat the poor with contempt. Both principles stand side by side in God's Torah.

Finally, in verse 12, an application of his arguments is made in the form of a dual admonition to speak and act appropriately to what has been set forth. This admonition is reinforced with a warning about eschatological judgment in verse 13.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

Application of the Text:

- 1) Describe various forms of discrimination that occur in our society.
- 2) How do you relate to other people? Especially, those who may be noticeably different from you?
- 3) How does your church treat various kinds of people? Especially, when they visit the worship services?
- 4) What is a typical attitude of very poor people toward Christianity today?
- 5) What is a typical attitude of very rich people toward Christianity today?
- 6) What parts of the Bible do you consciously ignore?
- 7) What scriptural principles do you least enjoy trying to follow?
- 8) How often do you reach out to others in concrete expressions of mercy and compassion?
- 9) Do you think very often about facing God in final judgment and being held accountable for everything that you've said and did in this life?