

The Reaction of Faith: Partiality

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[0:00] James, that's where we are tonight.

We continue on in our study and we're moving to chapter 2. And the heading for all of chapter 2 is this, Two Tests of Genuine Faith.

Two Tests of Genuine Faith. And just to kind of bring us, well, not so much up to date, but help us to understand how chapter 2 fits with chapter 1, because it does.

And James has already kind of given us a clue, kind of a lead-in to the subject of chapter 2. He concluded chapter 1 with what he believed to be the essence of pure and undefiled religion.

And, of course, he's right. He's right because the Holy Spirit inspired him to write it this way. So we know that what he said was pure and undefiled religion. And we talked a little bit about this last time as we kind of brought it to a close, chapter 1 to a close.

[1:15] And we could call this, this pure and undefiled religion, we could call this genuine faith, the genuine faith. Not genuine faith in the sense of faith being directed towards something like faith for this day and faith for that and faith for health.

And that certainly is a part of it. What I'm talking about is the faith. The faith. Our relationship with God through Christ.

We've been born again. We're his children. It is the faith. And it's the genuine faith. And so that's what this pure and undefiled religion, I think that's how it could be defined.

And so first, genuine faith possesses practical compassion. Now this is just review. You don't have this on your notes because I'm just kind of identifying once again how chapter 1 closed and then we're going to move into chapter 2.

Talking about he ended it with genuine faith or pure and undefiled religion and that kind of religion, true faith, possesses a practical compassion for people. Which means acts of care for those in need.

[2:33] Now James just gives an example of that. To visit orphans and widows in their trouble. He's not suggesting that visiting orphans and widows is the end of our obligation for compassion.

And a person could conceivably say, well I don't know any orphans and I don't know any widows. So what am I going to do to have a pure and undefiled religion? By the same token, you know, I do it faithfully.

I visit orphans and I visit, care for widows in trouble. And so that's the end of my obligation. No, he's just giving an example that points to an overall reality, the reality of genuine faith.

Acts of care, care, have compassion toward those in need. And then second, genuine faith possesses personal holiness. Personal holiness acts of discipline for spiritual maturity.

Spiritual disciplines keep oneself unspotted from the world. Unspotted in the sense of the unstained and of the sin and the philosophies, the way of thinking of the world and the loves and affections of the world and so forth.

[3:55] All right, so that's genuine faith. Or as James put it, pure and undefiled religion. Now, that brings us to chapter 2. That's a good lead up to chapter 2 because chapter 2 continues that same subject.

Pure and undefiled religion. And continues that subject with two tests. Two tests of genuine faith. We'll get through one of those tonight.

And then the second one we'll take the next time. It's going to be a few weeks, but we'll get to it. So let's get this first one. Here's the first test. The first test is the reaction of faith to partiality.

Where do you stand? As a professed believer in Christ, child of God through faith in Christ, where does that faith you say you have stand in regard to partiality?

And the key verse, of course, is verse 1, right on the front end of it. My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

[5:05] Or if we could use the word favoritism. Or King James has respecter of persons, I think is how it's put. But we know what we're talking about here.

So it's pretty clear, especially as you read on through the chapter. The second test, and I'll go ahead and just name it here, and we'll get to this next time.

The interaction of faith and works. So you have the reaction of faith to partiality. And then the second test is this interaction of faith and works. Verses 14 through 26.

And the key there is, again, on the very first verse of that section, verse 14, what does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works.

So there's this interaction between faith and works. That's a test of genuine faith. And we'll get to that by and by. Alright, here's the first one.

[6:04] The reaction of faith to partiality. That's number one. Or how we could identify or label the first 13 verses of chapter 2.

First of all, the prohibition of partiality. God doesn't like it. We're not supposed to do it.

There's a prohibition against it. Here in verse 1, and it's stated just really very clearly, My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality or favoritism.

So there is the prohibition right on the front end of what's going to continue to be instructions in regard to partiality.

Let's just pick that verse apart a little bit. My brethren, James liked to open up various sections in his letter with those words or something similar.

[7:04] And when he says, My brethren, it is a reminder of the intimate relationship James has with his readers, for one thing, but also their mutual relationship or union with Christ.

Now, why would James open this with these words? Because he's about to teach some pretty critical things.

And we can kind of look behind the scene there and figure out that this apparently was an issue in the church. It certainly is an issue today.

It's a partiality, favoritism toward one and to the rejection of others. And so he just wants to remind them, I'm about to really get on you here.

But I want you to remember that we're brothers and sisters in Christ. We have an intimate relationship together, intimate spiritual intimacy. And also remind you that we're in this thing together.

[8:11] It's a mutual union with Christ. So that's just a very diplomatic way to begin this section of the chapter. Then when he said, Do not hold the faith with partiality, it's kind of a strange kind of phrase.

It's not that hard to figure out what he's talking about. But what I want us to understand is that this is a command. This is in the form of a command. And it really is a very strong prohibition.

We could word it this way. In fact, I think the ESV words it this way. Show no partiality. So using a little economy of words and also bringing out the force of what James is commanding, show no partiality.

Don't just kind of work on this. And hopefully you do better with this. No, just get rid of it. No partiality whatsoever.

He says, Do not hold the faith with partiality. And that word reveals the incompatibility of the two things.

[9:23] What two things? Faith and partiality. Those things don't go together. So when he says, With partiality. Do not hold your faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with partiality.

He is making a clear dividing mark between these two things. And he's going to continue to say, even in clearer words, that those two don't go together.

They're inconsistent, incompatible. The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, that phrase, the Lord of glory, which of course further identifies Jesus Christ, is not a reference to the Lord's faith.

So you're not holding his faith per se. You say, well, what's the faith of Jesus, you know? It's not so much the idea of being, you know, let's follow his faithful example, though certainly that's a true enough statement.

But what he's talking about is the faith. The faith. So, not just, you know, faithfulness or the faithfulness of Christ.

[10:41] It is the faith, all that it really is. That faith, if you have it, that genuine faith, there's no room for partiality in that kind of faith.

So here, see, we're just getting the very strong prohibition. The very word partiality is from the Greek word that mean, should have an S on there, to lay hold of one's face.

Now, that doesn't sound very gentle, does it? It doesn't mean grab it with your hands. It's not talking about a physical thing. It's talking about just simply what you see on the outside.

What's visible. Partiality is based upon what's visible. The idea being we make a judgment based upon what we see on the outside of the person. You know what I'm talking about.

We take one look at a particular person, and we think we know who they are, what they are, or whether they are desirable or undesirable, or, you know, what kind of character they may have.

[11:52] We make all kinds of judgments based upon outward appearance. Do we not? I think we do. I know we do. All right, so that's the idea behind this word partiality.

It's not talking about evaluating a person based upon the fruit of their life, spiritual fruit. Come in. Not talking about that. Talking about just simply looking at a person, evaluating them based upon what they look like.

And that's what this word partiality means. And he's saying again that partiality and genuine faith have nothing to do with one another. They're totally incompatible.

Like Samuel said, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. He's at the heart. So here's the problem we have. So here's the prohibition against partiality.

Then we move from there to the illustration of partiality. So now he said no partiality. It's incompatible with faith.

[13:00] Now let me give you an illustration of what happens, what typically happens. And this kind of scenario is very, I mean, this is still up to date today.

I mean, this kind of stuff still happens today, doesn't it? For if there should come into your assembly, your church, actually the word is synagogue. It could apply to the Jewish place of worship, even Christian place of worship.

It's simply the assembly. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, you sit here in a good place.

I mean, in those days they had what were called the chief seats, the seats at the front. They were usually for, you know, people of some importance.

That was very typical in the synagogues of that day. And so you're saying to the rich man, at least you perceive that he's rich because of his gold rings and his fine clothing, and you also see the poor guy.

[14:13] So you say to the rich guy, you sit here in the very best place in the house, and then you say to the poor man, again, based solely upon what you see visually, you say to the poor man, stand there.

You stand there. And the implication being, you stand at the back here someplace. I mean, we don't have a seat for you. You just stand back here. Or, you know, we can't offer you a chair.

If you want to just sit down on the floor, it would be fine. Sit here at my footstool. That's the wording in the Greek text. It kind of comes out that way. Not that you're necessarily suggesting that that person be a footstool, but sitting where the footstool normally is.

And so you see the lack of, totally a lack of disrespect here, just simply based upon the outward appearance of the person. This is partiality. This is an example of partiality or an illustration.

All right, so the assumption, we can make a few conclusions about this or assumptions. The assumption is just based on the text itself, is that both of these men are strangers.

[15:24] They're not members of the church. They're not familiar. Family members are, you know, connected in some way. They're just two total strangers who come in, and one wears gold rings, fine clothing, the other wearing filthy clothes.

And so they're just strangers that come in. So what are we going to do? What's the church going to do? Also, nothing is said about their spiritual condition before God, so that's not the issue here.

Remember, the partiality is based upon just simply what you see, and making judgments based upon what you see. Now, a little later, we're going to see that James ties the judgment, what we see, and the judgment made ties it to the heart of the person making the judgment.

But nevertheless, it's what's on the outside that we're looking at here. So they could be believers.

They could be unbelievers. Christian, non-Christian. They could be pagans. You know what? It doesn't say anything about the spiritual condition. So the people of the church or a person in the church or the leadership of the church is not basing any kind of judgment upon known spiritual realities.

[16 : 45] It's just all simply superficial. The partiality is strictly based upon the outward appearance of each man. All right? Gold rings, fine apparel, filthy clothes on the other.

Now, these are very obvious, but I just want to make sure that we understand what James is getting at here. The point of the illustration, then, is really pretty clear.

It is to compare the difference in the treatment of each man based upon partiality, based upon outward visual things on the outside.

One of the great dangers of the church is look for people who can help us instead of people who we can help.

Is that not right? We're more comfortable with that. What could they contribute to our church financially?

[17 : 58] Or, you know, maybe professionally. Maybe there's leadership qualities that we know about a certain person, and we kind of want them to come so they can be contributors.

So we focus more on that than we focus on people who need help, people we can help. Too many Christians want to be blessed instead of being a blessing. It's just so easy to slip into that kind of comfortable place as believers.

We've got our church, and we know all the people here, and, you know, and when someone visits, we may know something about them, and we're right off with them.

You know, they'd be good if they could be members of our church. Just think of the things that they could do, the contributions they could make. It's just too easy to get into that kind of way of thinking, and that's what was happening in the church that James was writing to, the believers there.

Further, some churches seem to build their fellowship out of those who can contribute something rather than finding those who need help. And I think that's an implication here from the teachings of James.

[19 : 15] Third, the interrogation of partiality. Two questions. Have you not shown partiality among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

So he's kind of moving beyond just a hypothetical and just a teaching moment for his readers.

Now he's getting very personal, and he asks these two questions. So here we know that he is actually addressing some specific problems identified in the church.

So two questions. The first question deals with actual conduct. Have you not shown partiality among yourselves? That's conduct. You have shown partiality.

That's something that's seen. And among yourselves. That's something that's active among yourselves. I mean, this is not just simply, he's not just simply addressing a possible way of thinking, a certain mentality, a certain struggle, you know, inside.

[20 : 24] He's talking about things that are actually happening. You have shown yourself to be partial. And these are acts. It's active among us.

So, you know, the answer to the question is, he's really, they're really rhetorical questions. He's using these questions to state a fact, a fact of something very serious that was existing in the church.

The second question deals with character. All right. So he deals first with what's observable, what's on the outside. And then the question, the second question deals with what is on the inside, where all this comes from.

And it's interesting how he puts this. Judges with evil thoughts. Judges with evil thoughts.

I actually need to include the word become. You have become. Judges with evil thoughts. Judges with evil thoughts.

[21 : 29] Now, when he says you have become, he's talking about you have appointed yourself as a judge. You're self-appointed. You have become self-appointed judges.

Judges with evil thoughts. Every time you make a judgment based upon outward appearance, and then you act according to the judgment that you've made, and how you relate to a person, and so forth, you have made yourself a judge.

Strictly based upon, well, not strictly, as we're going to see, but at least initially, based upon outward appearance. Then when he says your judgment, or this whole thing of evil thoughts, he's saying

that your judgments come from an evil heart.

All right, so it's not just a mistake. You know, well, I saw a certain thing, came to a certain conclusion. You know, you can see things, and right off, you can't help but make some mental conclusions about things, you know, that may or may not be correct.

It's not just that kind of a scenario. The scenario is that you have made the judgment a certain way because of evil in your own heart.

[22 : 56] And so the particular situation, you know, you make a conclusion about the situation, it's just simply the occasion for what's in the heart to be revealed.

And so when you act upon, you know, that conclusion, then it proves that that was in your heart to begin with. You know, you have a certain partiality for what you perceive to be a certain kind of person.

And, you know, there are all kinds of things that are involved in that, from prejudices to, you know, just a host of things.

The contradiction of partiality, that's number four. It is a royal contradiction.

A double contradiction, actually, according to these verses, verses 5 through 7. One, partiality contradicts the sovereignty of God.

[24 : 02] And that's his point, primarily with verse 5. He said, listen, my beloved brethren. By the way, I had one commentary tell me, it's interesting when you, you know, with James, he'll say beloved or my brethren and then extend it to listen, my beloved brethren.

It's not because he's becoming more friendly, he's becoming more peeved with people. You know, he's getting a little angry, a little hot under the collar. So instead of saying, you idiots, you know, he just kind of expands a little bit more on his desire to let them know that we're brothers.

But it's almost, I guess if you were to translate this into some kind of physical act, he would be taking his hands and grabbing his shoulder and shaking. Don't you understand?

Listen, my beloved brethren. Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him? The idea here is the sovereignty of God. It was by, and you can't deny this from the scriptural record, it was by the sovereignty of God that the gospel was directed first to the poor and the common. All you have to do is look at the disciples themselves, the apostles, the ones that Jesus selected to be his apostles, fishermen and tax collectors, just common people.

[25 : 30] And really, you can go back even further than that. Just think how Jesus came into this world and through what kind of family he came. He didn't come, you know, with the wealthy and the rich.

He came through a peasant girl, poor, you know, the wife of a carpenter. And Jesus himself, of course, led very humble life all throughout his life, of course, including his ministry.

And so, you know, and the gospel flourished among the impoverished slaves. Many of the early believers in the first century church were not only poor, but many of them were slaves.

And this is where, by the sovereignty of God in his providence, this is where he directed the gospel to the very poor. So how then, here's the contradiction. How then could we look upon people and make certain value judgments based upon their economic status?

You know, and in a sense despise, though we wouldn't put it in those words, but in a sense despise the poor and the needy who might come to our church.

[26 : 55] How could we do that when it was the very sovereign purpose of God to first present the gospel to the poor? And you can't hardly read the New Testament without running into that reality and how God responds to the poor.

It doesn't mean that the salvation was only for the poor. It doesn't mean that just because you're poor, you're automatically saved. It's not talking about, in this sense, talking about, you know, a contradiction in valuing the wealthy above the poor when it was God who first valued the poor way above the wealthy when the gospel entered into the world.

Essentially, James is saying God made a choice and he chose the poor, but you choose the rich. That's the contradiction that he's presenting here.

Also, it is according, we could also, I think, understand it this way, it is according to the sovereignty of God that no one comes to salvation except through poverty of spirit. You say, is that an added extra step in salvation?

No, that's what faith is. True faith is, you know, like the song, Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. We don't come boldly, you know, with self-aggrandizement and thinking that we can be a real contributor to God if he'd save us.

[28 : 23] We come as poor, wretches, sinners, and we come humbly. So, in two senses of the word poor, actual poor, impoverished, God showed extreme mercy to the impoverished when Jesus came into the world.

And really, you can go all the way back through the Old Testament and you find that one of God's chief complaints toward his people, Israel, was injustice toward the impoverished among them and slaves among them.

So, it's a big deal with God. And so, you can see then how being partial for the wealthy and the rich, you know, the up-and-comers, the educated, the, you know, the cream of the crop, to have a partiality toward them and not the opposite is total contradiction with God.

The second contradiction or the second part of this double contradiction is partiality contradicts the solidarity of God's people, the unity, fellowship of God's people.

Verses 6 and 7, But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

[29 : 48] Here's the idea. To reject the poor just because they are poor. And, on the other hand, same token, to accept the rich just because they are rich is an assault upon the solidarity, the fellowship, unity, the fellowship of the church.

It is, in this sense, that it is to prefer the very class of people from whom comes most of our troubles.

It certainly was true in the early church. Still, to some extent, true today. Now, in case we misunderstand here, I am not saying that God's mercy is not extended to the wealthy and rich.

I mean, there were some very wealthy people in the New Testament. You think of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Those are two men that always come to mind when we think about that. But there were others who were very wealthy.

And God's grace was extended to them. God doesn't extend His grace to a person just because of their class. That didn't have anything to do with it. But He's trying to make a distinction here to show us an extreme contradiction.

[31 : 08] We're preferring a certain class of people just because of what that class is, wealthy, rich. We're preferring the very class of people who are the ones who oppress and who bring us into legal battles and persecute us for the name of Christ.

And you say, this is a contradiction, isn't it? I mean, this doesn't make any sense. There's no preferred class of people in the church. Right?

Of course. All right, number five. Where are we at? We've got some time. The violation of partiality. Not violating partiality, but the violation that comes out of partiality.

What does it violate? Well, partiality violates three laws. And I say three laws because of how James kind of lays this out for us.

There's just one law. It's God's law. But there are other laws or maybe the word, I'm trying to think of a better word, principles at work.

[32 : 24] That also could come under the heading of law. But there are three that are mentioned here. One, obviously the law of God. But it's narrowly defined here.

Verse 8, if you really fulfill the royal law, he says. The royal law according to the scripture. And then he names the royal law.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. So if you fulfill that royal law, you do well. But what makes this a royal law?

Loving your neighbor as yourself is God's royal law because of its supreme position in God's law. And how we know it has a supreme position in God's law because Jesus told us so.

Jesus called it the second greatest commandment in that dialogue in Matthew 22, 39. What's the first and greatest commandment? Right, right.

[33 : 27] And then the second is likened to the first. Love your neighbor as yourself. And on these two hang all the law and commandments. So that makes them very, very important.

They are the royal law. Now, it doesn't mean that the others are of lesser importance. In fact, he's going to tell us here in a minute that to break even one of those is to break all of it.

But these are, maybe we could think of them in this sense. When you think of the Ten Commandments and how they're divided between those laws governing our relationship to God and then those laws governing our relationship to mankind, then you can see how these then could form the broad categories of the whole law.

Our relationship with God, love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. And you can see how the Ten Commandments fall under those two.

So this is the royal law. And so how does partiality violate that? Well, the royal law prohibits any kind of partiality in the church.

[34 : 42] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. That removes all possibility of partiality. Who's my neighbor? Everyone. Anyone that I come in contact with.

And, I mean, we have the parable of the Good Samaritan to teach us the lesson there on who's my neighbor. And so the royal law then makes it impossible, if you're going to obey it, makes it impossible to be partial, show any favoritism based upon any number of things.

Partiality is therefore sin. Right? Sin is breaking God's law. So if partiality breaks the royal law, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, then it's sin.

It's sin. And those who practice it will be convicted by the law as transgressors of the whole law. I've kind of summed up then verses 9, 10, and 11. And I'm not going to read it now.

You've got it in your notes. But that's, in a nutshell, what those three verses are saying. Partiality is sin. Partiality is sin. Those who practice partiality will be convicted by the law, the royal law.

[35 : 57] Love your neighbor as yourself. As transgressors of the whole law. So if he goes on to say, you break one, you've broken it all. You've broken them all. The second law is the law of liberty or freedom.

I think some translations have the word freedom. Verse 12. So speak and so do. So what you say is what you do.

As those who will be judged by the law of liberty. And what law is that? The law of liberty. Well, it's really kind of difficult to explain.

And so that's why I'm going to let William Barclay explain it. Now let me give a bit of a disclaimer.

I'm not a real fan. Never have been a real fan of William Barclay. He was an expositor and a theologian.

But he didn't believe in the virgin birth. But I didn't mean everything he said was wrong. And I think he's got it right. And this helps us understand this law of liberty. Let me read it. You can read it there in your notes. The Christian lives under the law of liberty or freedom.

[37 : 02] And it is by the law of liberty he will be judged. Let me translate what I think that means. What I believe that means. You're going to be judged not simply by the jot and tittle of the law.

But by the very spirit of the law. The Christian is governed by the inner compulsion of love. That's the law of liberty. I don't obey because I've got to do thus, such, and other, this other, in order to be in with God.

I obey because I love Him. I don't love everyone who comes into the church because I'm supposed to do that. I do it because I genuinely love them. That's the law of freedom.

That's the law of liberty. And we're going to be judged upon that law. He follows the right way, the way of love to God and love to men, not because any external law compels him to do so.

And what he means there is, I mean, we do have laws. Love your neighbor as yourself. He's talking about specific, you know, like in comparison to the Jews and the Pharisees who had this whole list, almost endless list of ways to obey the law.

[38 : 28] You know, all these little procedural things that they're to do, you know, rituals and formulas and do's and don'ts and all these things that aren't even in Scripture.

We don't obey love your neighbor as yourself. And we're not obeying because we're following some set of rituals or rules. We obey that because we genuinely love them.

We have a freedom. That's the law of freedom, liberty, liberty to love people, genuinely love them. And that's what we'll be judged on. So it's not enough just simply to, you know, to go through the motions of reaching out to, you know, maybe someone who is in need, giving them honored seats or whatever.

It's not just simply enough to do the opposite of what James is saying some are doing. It is that you're doing it in the law of liberty. You genuinely love them.

So we don't do it because any external law compels him to do so, nor because any threat of punishment frightens him into doing so, but because the love of Christ within his heart makes him desire to do so.

[39:40] Now remember, what are we talking about here? We're talking about the test of genuine faith. And that's what genuine faith is. Partiality is a complete contradiction to genuine faith.

And it breaks not only God's royal law, it breaks the law of liberty, freedom. And then there's one more somewhere there, the law of mercy. The law of mercy.

And this particular law says this, For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

There's a lot in that passage. And not just real easy to translate the meaning. But it really is quite simple, just on the face of it, the surface of it.

And Jesus repeatedly taught this principle. I've listed these verses and didn't give you the passages. Can you think of what some of these are? Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

[41:00] Forgive and be forgiven. Judge not, lest you be judged. I don't remember the Matthew 18. Huh?

Right, right, right. That's right. Those are just really restatements of the same principle. And so, your judgment is without mercy.

God will not give you mercy if you don't show mercy. And we're not talking about salvation here. It's not a passage that's in that particular realm of doctrine.

We're talking about relationship with God. And if you don't forgive, God's not going to forgive you. And you're going to be out of fellowship with Him until you get that right. If you don't show mercy to the one who's in need, then when you go to God and say, I'm in need, He's not going to give you mercy either.

Until you get that figured out, get that taken care of. And so, you see, it's a violation then. Partiality is a violation of the law of mercy.