

# James Part 5 – Study Notes

## Introduction

James was looking for Christian men and women who would remain faithful. He taught what authentic faith looks like. In this second section of the manual of hands-on Christianity James transitions his teaching from **real faith produced genuine stability** to **real faith produces genuine love**.

Today we are looking at issues of partiality and prejudice. James' intent is to transform people into spiritual warriors who set the standard of faithful living in a world of corruption and compromise. So often people draw quick conclusions about people based merely on what they first see or hear.

**Prejudice.** Our English word stems from a Latin noun that emphasises a prejudgement of someone, causing us to form an opinion before knowing all the facts. We quickly make up our mind about something.

James 2:1 *My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.* James begins by saying faith in Christ and partiality are incompatible. James addressed fellow Christians, who have been taught solid theology. But for some reason their attitude that accompanied their faith didn't match. The Greek word translated *personal favouritism* communicates how we see a person's outward appearance.

Partiality and prejudice can go in two directions: positive or negative. On the one hand, by merely looking at the outside characteristics, we can miss fatal character flaws in a person masked by attractive attire, and the way they speak. On the other hand, we can too quickly condemn a person based on outward appearance, failing to see the Christ-like character and abundant spiritual fruit in a person's life. James addressed the problem of prejudice shown in the first encounter with a person.

James 2:2-4 *Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup>If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," <sup>4</sup>have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

In the earliest days of Christianity, especially for Jewish believers, the place of meeting was called a synagogue. In some cities some Christian Jews were still able to meet in a synagogue, until unbelieving Jews expelled them. They then met in convenient places called synagogues to describe their assembly. This represents our places of worship today.

In James' illustration two men stand out as the church is gathering to worship together. One is expensively dressed. In the Near East, it was customary for a person of exceptional wealth or nobility to wear jewel studded garments of fine fabric. Their garments announced that they were influential powerful men who could change your life. The other was an exceptionally poor man in dirty, shabby clothes. No Jewels or silk to influence anyone.

In this illustration the person is blinded by bling, so the rich man gets V.I.P treatment. *You sit here in a good place.* There were preferred seats in a synagogue for people of importance. Seating for men ran along the two sides of the synagogue and women and children sat in the balcony. The best seats were closest to the pulpit.

Whilst the extremely rich man is shown to the seat of honour the extremely poor man doesn't even get a seat. The poor man is told *to stand over there, or sit down by my footstool.* In other words to stay out of the way! The illustration is about the person judging the rich man as being better than the poor. Let's be clear there is nothing wrong with being rich and there is nothing wrong with being poor. The problem James addressed here is the motive that affects the behaviour.

In verse James 2:4 *have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?* , James announced the verdict; the person is guilty of discrimination. He has, *made distinctions*, and become a judge with evil motives. Maybe he played favourites for personal gain, thinking it would win them favour

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with an influential person. Maybe they thought about great financial gain that could come to the church through such a wealthy man.

James said this type of prejudice is **sin**. There can be no class distinctions in Oasis Christian Centre. These prejudices can have no place at OCC.

Acts 10:34 *Then Peter began to speak: I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.* Peter had shown personal favouritism. He had treated Jewish believers better than gentile believers. He then realised that God wants everyone, regardless of nationality or ethnic orientation, to hear the gospel and believe. Whilst society makes distinctions amongst people, God's love and grace are available to all, and can be received by anyone.

James continued to explain why prejudice and partiality are wrong for Christians. He gave two reasons: Logical and Biblical.

**Logical:** James 2:5-7 *Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?* James asked two rhetorical questions, which showed much about the situation in which the Jewish Christians found themselves. Firstly the rich and powerful were persecuting Christians, dragging them before the authorities. Second, the rich and powerful were blaspheming God's name. Reading between the lines the poor were not involved in this kind of persecution. Showing favouritism towards the rich and mistreating the poor, therefore, made no logical sense.

**Biblical:** James 3:8-11 *If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. <sup>9</sup> But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup> For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.*

James pointed his readers to Scripture, which excludes all partiality. His text comes from Leviticus 19:18 *You shall love your neighbour as yourself.* This is the basis for fulfilling the Royal Law. Treat people in the same way we want them to treat us. Christ called this the second of the two greatest commandments, after loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

To break this Royal Law is like breaking all of them, and vice versa, if we break any of the others, we have broken this one. For this reason, prejudice, which refuses to love equally, breaks the great commandment.

James 2:12-13 *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, <sup>13</sup> because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.* James says let Scripture be our standard! Let love be our law! Let mercy be our message! James' words should challenge our attitudes and change our actions.

We need to let Scripture be our standard. Prejudice and faith in Christ do not mix. Love needs to be our law. When we meet people we can ask ourselves this question – how can I best love this person in word and action? How can I build this person up? How can I show this person grace and mercy? Yes, we do need spiritual discernment when we meet people, but we must not treat people unfairly based on prejudices. Remember *Mercy triumphs over judgment.* Friends, let mercy triumph over judgement in people's lives.

It may be today that we need to look and see if we show prejudices against our fellow believers and do something about it today.