

RESPECT OF PERSONS

James 2:1-13

We are now entering a new section of the Epistle of James. We will find some words that need to be weighed and obeyed. We shall discover that James is still insisting on a Christlike life as proof that our Christianity is real.

Again, James uses the expression, "My brethren." He is about to exhort them not to be a respecter of persons, so the very expression, "brethren" had a tendency to put them all on one level. It was a reminder to them of what the Lord Jesus had said, "For one is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." Matthew 23:8. In this glorious brotherhood of Christianity, it is highly inconsistent to favor one above the other because of mere external differences.

James sought to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ of glory. Christ is "glory" in ages past, for He Himself said, "The glory I had with thee before the world was." Christ was "glory" in His earthly life, for we read in John 1:14, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, (the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." Christ will come again in glory, for Matthew 24:30 says, "They shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." James sought to give Christ the glory due His Name; he wanted to make Christ the center of all glory. Christ is the all-glorious One. We who have faith in Him must not rob Him of His glory.

Genuine religion in the heart will express itself in holiness of life, in a lofty morality composed of personal purity and earnest devotion to the glory of God. The primary or fundamental element in the Christian religion is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. "The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" should be rendered "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Faith is objective and not subjective. It is not the faith of Christ that is under discussion, but the faith of the readers in Him. James is discussing the reader's faith in Christ. This faith in Christ is for salvation, then it is a principle by which to live day by day. To own Christ as Lord is to admit that we owe Him our obedience. James condemned a professed faith that does not produce good works. He insists that faith in Christ be a producer of a good life.

James is not rebuking believers for revealing the glory of the Lord, but he is reprimanding them for glorying in men because of some supposed wealth which their supremacy in riches or in honor may give them. In glorying in men, because of their human possessions or accomplishments, they are getting their minds away from Christ, Who alone is glorious. It is still true that to the extent that man is exalted God is debased.

James tells us in verses 2-4 that some of the early Christians were glorying in man rather than in the Lord. They were honoring the rich and despising the poor. Knowing the glory which we have in the Lord should keep us from glorying in man. Therefore, "Let no man glory in man." I Corinthians 3:21. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." I Corinthians 1:31. When man is lifted up, in that measure, the Lord is not exalted.

To show respect of persons was a great fault among the Jews. A rich man was always highly honored; a learned man, too. The Pharisees sought the praises of men. They delighted to sit in the uppermost seats, and to be called "Rabbi, Rabbi." Matthew 23:5-7. This same spirit has prevailed and gripped many since their day.

James wanted to put a stop to all of this in the Christian assemblies. He thought that Christians were not to favor a man because of his wealth, or education, or social standing. The thing that should lift a man in the eyes of the Christians is his spiritual worth. God is no respecter of persons, so His people should not be either. Christ was no respecter of persons, and His apostles condemned it. If we keep our eyes fixed on the Lord of glory, we will not be in much danger of showing respect of persons. He favored the poor

and lowly rather than the high and mighty. He seems to delight even now to take the poor and the unknown and use them to confound those who are high in this world. Those who do show respect of persons have their eyes on something else besides the Lord of glory. While we are to show "honor to whom honor is due," Christians are to pay honor to spiritual worth rather than to worldly standing. Of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ let not respect of persons be a characteristic.

In verse two and three James gives a very graphic picture of showing respect to persons. Someone had shown great respect to a rich man and great disrespect to a poor man. Perhaps this had happened often, and James may have seen it take place. Evidently rich men did come into the assembly of Christians. The fact that James mentions the case in the form of a supposition would indicate that such occasions were rare. As a rule, the rich are not much concerned about things of the Lord. Not many of the rich are willing to humble themselves and receive Christ as their Saviour.

According to these verses, the standard of excellence among men is a respect to him that hath gay clothing and disrespect to him that wears poor clothing. Those who maintain this attitude judge the one in poor clothing as being worthless. They have respect for the rich and disrespect for the poor. Clothes may be an indication of some things but one cannot judge character by them. Sometimes a filthy soul has a body beautifully covered. Today clothing does not at all indicate that one so bedecked is an honorable man. Wealth is not always obtained in an honorably manner. Of course, not all rich are bad any more than all poor are good. Fine clothes do not make a person better or worse.

James pictures the poor man entering the assembly. He should have been favored if the Christians had been Christ-like. The Lord Jesus always sought out the poor and needy and helped them. These Christians should have thought, "Here comes a poor man into the meeting. He has a tough time out in the world, so we shall be extra kind to him." This poor man had on humble and plain clothing. Like the rich man with his fine clothing, the poor man's clothing made him none the better or none the worse. A man who can afford only overalls may be just as noble and godly as the man dressed in a \$100 suit. Because God does not accept the outside appearance for the inner reality, neither should we. A man is not a child of the devil because he is rich or poor. It is a tragedy when a church is ashamed of the poor, for Jesus Christ, our Lord, voluntarily became poor for our sakes that we "through His poverty might become rich."

James has no desire to stir the prejudice of one class against another. Christians should love both rich and poor alike. The royal law of heaven forbids the respect of persons. It is an act of sin and is very injurious to any church in which it exists. Any church that is controlled by a clique is doomed. A church is only of use when it is opened to the people who need to hear the glorious gospel of Christ.

If you practice respect of persons, you certainly fail to reflect the divine image. Your conduct is directly opposed to the will of Him Whom you call your heavenly Father. Church history proves that mainly from the class of those whom the world, according to its standards of reckoning, counts poor, God in His sovereignty has chosen men and women to be, through faith, truly and enduringly rich, and to be heirs of the blessedness and glory of the heavenly kingdom.

Many secretly prefer outward show to inward spirituality, and things that are temporal to things that are eternal. The world's way and the Christian way are different. Let us not be like the world. The world thinks it the part of wisdom to look sharply to personal interest. Worldlings have no scruples about taking every advantage of others, and think it the wise thing to court the favor of the prominent and the influential. A Christian need not do these things. If he is watching out for the Lord's interests, he can safely leave his own interests in the hands of the Lord.

"Judges with evil thoughts" has reference to the evil thoughts within the judges who were showing respect to the rich and despising the poor. Evil thoughts of greed or pride prompted them to show respect of persons.

It has always been the delight of the Lord to pick up the obscure, the lowly and the poor, and use them to His glory. When we are rich in faith we can draw on the bank of heaven.

James calls this law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," "the royal law." Love should be the sovereign law of our conduct, and is sovereign above all laws. Love is a law of liberty. When one loves he serves, not because compelled, but willingly.

Verse twelve warns us that we shall be judged both according to our words and our deeds. This judgment will be by the law of liberty. How we act is the final proof of what is in our hearts. It is the fruit on the tree that tells what kind of a tree it is. Our words and our actions prove whether or not we really belong to Christ.