

International Bible Lessons Commentary
James 2:1-13

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, February 9, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, February 9, 2014**, is from **James 2:1-13**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

James 2:1-13

(James 2:1) My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

James addressed some of the problems, temptations, and sins that can be faced in the church and among all those

who call themselves Christians. New believers especially needed to turn from the ways of the world and to the ways of Jesus Christ their Lord. Those who “really believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” will make every effort to act in ways that reveal the principles upon which Jesus Christ intended to build His Church and establish the Kingdom of God. God the Father and Jesus Christ never showed or show favoritism or partiality toward anyone, because God is no respecter of persons (see Acts 10:34). Furthermore, if Christians love others as Christ has loved them, then they will not show favoritism but love each person equally as created in the likeness of God.

(James 2:2) 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,

James used the word “if” in this verse to indicate something that may happen or be done or something someone may do. In James 2:3, the word “if” indicates a possible consequence “if” something happens. A well-dressed person who is obviously rich “may” come into a church (perhaps a home church, a large church gathering, or a Bible study group). A poor person who may be obviously dirty (perhaps from recent hard, dirty work or deprivation) may come to the same place at the same time. “If” this happens, there is a danger of treating the rich person with greater respect than the poor person.

(James 2:3) 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,”

In the church, some people may be tempted to try to please the rich person most especially, because he is rich and may contribute financially or in other ways to the church. Knowing the poor person may not have anything of material value to give and may need something material from the church, or knowing the dirty person may make someone feel uncomfortable, some in the church may be tempted to treat the poor person with disrespect or with less respect than they treat others. In the church especially, James warned against treating rich people better than poor people. In the church, Christians should show love to rich and poor alike.

(James 2:4) have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

No follower of Jesus Christ should treat others unequally just because of their financial status and the clothing they can afford, especially when they come to church. Believers need to be very careful not to treat others differently based solely on their outward appearance. God created every person in His image and therefore equal in His sight. Everyone is equally entitled to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Bible without being disproportionately honored or mistreated because of their appearance. People judge with evil thoughts when they treat people unequally because of their wealth or status in

the world. The Apostle Paul wrote against making “distinctions among yourselves,” saying, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). If we do not truly love others as God loves us and as Jesus expressed the love of God for others, then we may have evil thoughts toward others.

(James 2:5) Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

Jesus cared for both the rich and the poor according to their real needs, both material and spiritual. God has chosen many poor people to be “rich in faith”: the poor can have an abundant faith in God, knowing God is their only hope and God has an inheritance for them in His Kingdom. Riches and the things of this world can crowd God and following Jesus out of the lives of some rich people. Jesus felt sad when the rich young man walked away from Him because he preferred his riches to following Him as Lord (see Matthew 19:21-24). Whether rich or poor, God has promised an inheritance to those who love Him, but too many people love money instead of God. Jesus said it was hard or difficult, but not impossible, for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God.

(James 2:6) But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?

If you have done what James described in the previous verses, then “you have dishonored the poor.” Too many people with a worldly attitude may be surprised to learn that it is possible to dishonor the poor, but the poor can be dishonored in many ways, including giving the rich preferential treatment over the poor in the church. Christians must not dishonor rich or poor, but treat all believers as valued children of God. Much can be learned from those who are “rich in faith,” whether rich or poor. Rich Christians (including rich unbelievers) should not oppress others or drag others into court to increase their power or wealth. The rich sometimes unjustly use their wealth to profit from those who cannot afford to defend themselves. Christians should never do what the worldly rich do by taking advantage of others. Though hard or difficult, some rich people have entered the Kingdom of God; they have used their wealth with compassion; because Jesus is their Lord, they have supported of His mission on earth.

(James 2:7) Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

Some rich people too often trust supremely in themselves and their riches instead of God. Jesus’ standard of behavior and morality are often ignored and ridiculed by those who use their riches to act contrary to the express

will of God in the Bible; who use their riches to fulfill their pleasures knowing that Christians do not live that way. The name of Jesus is invoked over all who have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and some rich people curse Jesus and Christians and use their resources in attempts to destroy Christians, Christian churches, and Christian influences.

(James 2:8) You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The royal law of love for God and others will move believers to try to live as Jesus lived before the world. When believers love themselves, they can think of how they would want to be treated if they were poor and dirty and going to church, and then try to treat the poor in ways that avoid unjust partiality toward the poor and the rich when trying to do what God would want to help the poor. When the followers of Jesus Christ love others as they love themselves, they will naturally and supernaturally treat each person as of equal importance to themselves; they will never mistreat or take unjust advantage of others. They will not show partiality.

(James 2:9) But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Those with a “this-worldly attitude” will show partiality, because showing partiality toward the rich and powerful is

to their selfish advantage. For political or other selfish reasons, some will show partiality toward the poor. Some will show partiality toward the poor because they want to “look good” before the world or they want the support of the needy masses. Showing partiality or favoritism is a sin, a violation of the law of love, a transgression. Those who claim to follow Jesus should never show partiality, and if they discover that they have shown favoritism, then they need to repent of their sin and ask the Lord Jesus to help them live and act with love toward all people.

(James 2:10) For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

To fulfill the whole law is to love God totally and completely, which enables believers to rightly love others and themselves in ways approved by God and the Bible; otherwise, some think love for others means approving, ignoring, or not judging what others do no matter how they break the laws of God and harm others and themselves. Those who do not have true faith in Jesus Christ may come to think that love has no moral standards. Jesus preached, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). God expects people to obey the whole law at all times and love at all times, and since people have not obeyed God everyone needs the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for their sins and faith in Him as their Lord and Savior in order to become right with God. Those who follow Jesus also need the indwelling Holy Spirit to help them love and live pleasing

to God. No one can be saved by obeying the law, but God still expects everyone to love Him and their neighbors; and when believers fail to love rightly, He expects them to repent and not make excuses for their disobedience.

(James 2:11) 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.

Some people are very selective about what parts of God’s law they will obey and what parts they will disobey. The selective obedience and/or selective disobedience of God’s law will make people transgressors of God’s law. In this verse, James noted two of the Ten Commandments as examples; therefore, everyone should understand that God expects everyone to obey the Ten Commandments, which sum up the moral law, which is the law of love, which still applies to everyone today. James warned everyone against transgressing the law of God in any way. People should not misunderstand and think that confining a murderer and restricting him from committing murder is showing partiality toward those who do not murder. Partiality would be giving a rich murderer a lighter sentence than a poor murderer just because one is rich and the other is poor.

(James 2:12) So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

The law of liberty is the law of love. When someone truly loves God from their heart and when they truly follow Jesus because they love Him, they have been liberated from slavery to sin and they have been freed to follow the Holy Spirit in the way they treat others. In this way, they experience liberty or feel liberated from focusing on the law while at same time they do not violate the law of God or the Bible's teachings because the loving Holy Spirit within them guides and empowers them to obey the Scriptures.

(James 2:13) For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Jesus Christ showed mercy when He died on the cross for us while we were still sinners. His love, grace, mercy, and sacrifice will make the salvation of everyone who trusts in Him as Lord and Savior possible. Jesus makes our forgiveness, our sanctification, our righteousness, and eternal life possible; therefore, believers have many reasons to love Jesus and others, to pray for others, and to show mercy toward others so they can come to saving faith too. If we do not show mercy toward others that may indicate we have not truly received Christ as our Lord and Savior. Mercy gives people the opportunity to repent, come to saving faith, and change; therefore, showing mercy can do more for people than passing judgment upon them: "mercy triumphs over judgment." However, James reminded his readers in this verse that judgment is

possible and some will receive just judgment with no mercy.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How might showing favoritism make someone think that you do not “really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ”?
2. In addition to showing favoritism toward the rich, in what other ways might the church show partiality?
3. What possible mistake or mistakes can a church make when attempting to be impartial?
4. Why may it be difficult for a poor person to become a Christian? Why may it be easy for a poor person to become a Christian?
5. Why may it be difficult for a rich person to become a Christian? Why may it be easy for a rich person to become a Christian?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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