



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

Lesson 4 James 2:1-13 Commentary New American Standard Bible

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [International Bible Study Commentary](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Study Forum](#).

(James 2:1) My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

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 *this world* and to the ways of Jesus Christ their Lord, *the Way*. 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. Thus, they can draw some to Jesus.

God the Father and Jesus Christ never showed and never show favoritism or partiality toward anyone, because God is no respecter of persons. In Acts 10:34, Peter said, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all.” In 2 Corinthians 5:15, Paul wrote, “And He [Jesus Christ] died for *all* [did not show favoritism], so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.”

When Christians love others as Jesus Christ has loved them, they do not show favoritism but love each person equally as people created in the likeness and image of God, as people Jesus Christ came to save from sin and death. In the context of this verse, the word “love” means being *unselfishly* concerned about others and wanting what is best for all concerned. Remember: Paul wrote about Jesus Christ dying so Christians can live unselfishly: “that those who live might live no longer for themselves” (see above).

Without showing favoritism or partiality, what is best for all concerned may include showing mercy to one person and giving them the just ruling they seek because they have been wronged and deserve justice, while showing justice as mercifully as possible toward the person who wronged them to right a wrong in the best possible way. Showing such love in different ways to different people in different circumstances is not showing favoritism. Love demands that sometimes we show justice to one person and mercy toward another. Mercy and justice are two parts or attributes of love that must be shown without partiality. In a just court of law, we expect the criminal and the victim to be treated with justice and mercy without showing favoritism toward one or the other.

We will naturally love members of our own family more than we love a stranger; this is not favoritism or partiality. But Christians should not act unjustly toward a stranger and show partiality toward member of their family who has wronged a stranger. Those of *this world* show such partiality and favoritism toward members of their family, toward those in their political party, club, sometimes church, and others. James says Christians should not do this, and if a Christian shows partiality, it is natural for those of *this world* and Christians to ask themselves, “Do they really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?”

Whenever we sin or begin to practice sinning, we should always ask ourselves, “Do I really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?” If we ask ourselves this question and go to the Lord Jesus Christ for help to do right, to love, and to live holy, we can receive strength and wisdom to act right.

(James 2:2) For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

James used the word “if” in this verse to indicate something that may happen in a church or be done in a church or something someone may do in a church that is definitely wrong and can show that the those in the church really do not believe “in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” 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. This is an example of showing favoritism or partiality that can tempt a rich person to become proud and a poor person to think that God, Jesus Christ, or Christians do not love them or feel any concern for them and their needs. The sin of showing favoritism can bring more harm than we may realize.

(James 2:3) and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,”

In the church, some people may be tempted to try to please the rich person 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. These are examples of selfish partiality and of not doing what is best for all concerned. 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. Neither should the church show favoritism to the poor and demand that the rich person give of

his wealth to the poor. As God leads, rich *Christians* will give to the poor.

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

No follower of Jesus Christ should treat others unequally because of their financial status or outward appearance, especially when they come to church. Believers especially need to be very careful not to treat others differently based on their outside 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 or made to feel uncomfortable because of their outward appearance.

People “judge with evil thoughts” when they treat people unequally because of their wealth or poverty or status in *this world* rather than because of the content of their character and their behavior as fellow followers of Jesus Christ (some who call themselves “Christians” may need to be lovingly, rightly, mercifully, and justly avoided). The Apostle Paul wrote against true Christians 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 Christ expressed the love of God for others, then we may have evil selfish thoughts toward others. We may need to ask ourselves, “Do we truly believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?”

(James 2:5) Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

Jesus cared for both the rich and the poor according to their real needs—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 man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

James continues to speak of the rich of *this world*, not of rich Christians (who do not act this way). 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, as fellow brothers and sisters of their Lord Jesus Christ. 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. These are examples of ungodly selfishness. 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 without partiality.

(James 2:7) Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

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 as revealed in the Bible; who use their riches to fulfill their selfish 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) If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well.

The royal law of love for God and others will move believers to try to live as Jesus lived *in this world* 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 are committing 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 and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

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 He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit 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, or a murderer in the service of some rich and powerful people, a lighter sentence than a poor murderer just because one is rich (or serving powerful people) 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 merciless to one 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, justice, 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 be an indication that we have not truly received Jesus 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 because they have shown no mercy to others.

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?

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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and lgp@theiblf.com.