

James 3

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James 1:26 – 2:13

There are three themes we have observed here that demonstrate true Christianity. Our speech, our treatment of others, and our purity.

1. THE OUTWARD PROBLEM

James has two outward problems in mind here. Both deal with our interaction with the poor and with the law. After an opening statement in 2:1, he goes straight into a story. In short version two men walk into church. One is rich and one is poor. They are treated differently. The details of the story are obviously not as important as what James is trying to point out.

The sin of partiality is the sin of judging based on accidentals and externals and, as James noted, it always bears down on the poor and disadvantaged.” The point is obviously that we should not judge people merely on external appearances. This is not the same as saying that we should not make discernments. A case in point is that we should PREFER the elderly and give respect where respect is due.

I said that James mentioned two outward problems. The second is the Law. Most of us think of the law of God like a pile of stones; taking one or two away does not matter too much. James says that the law is more like a pane of glass. You can't crack it or take any away without damaging it. It is a PIECE – not PIECES. The contrast here, then, is between really KEEPING THE LAW OF LOVE (2:8) and the pretense of doing so.

-Deuteronomy 10:17-19

-Leviticus 19:15-18

Let's stop for a minute. James is saying that God does something that we must do. He has chosen the poor, just like He has chosen the rich. The word chosen means deliberately gone after.

Secular humanists who are progressives and social liberals will often try to help others. However, they have a real problem and that is what they do contradicts what they believe about life – evolution. But Christians believe individuals are created in the image of God and bear His stamp.

Still further, if you look at a map you will see a very definite correlation between the poorest countries and the growth of the gospel. Rich countries often decline in the

spread of the gospel. James is doing us a favor here – helping us to take a good look at ourselves.

2. THE INWARD PROBLEM

Now comes the penetrating question: “HAVE YOU NOT THEN MADE DISTINCTIONS AMONG YOURSELVES AND BECOME JUDGES WITH EVIL THOUGHTS?” He makes us deal with the real issue. It is evidenced by our actions, but it is rooted in our thinking and belief system.

What is going on here? We all want glory and to be well thought of. One of our biggest fears is to be considered meaningless. We seek to avoid this by:

-our clothes

-our status

-our money

But why do we do this? What are we really worth anyway? Unless you answer this question from a Biblical perspective of a “sinner saved by grace,” you are missing the point of the Gospel. If you believe the Gospel, you will avoid two errors:

-You will not try to accrue your status from things that will fade away

-you won't rank people in a way that uses a false calibration system

The Bible is clear when it comes to the solution of the inward problem of creating worth and meaning in the wrong places and the outward problem of actually helping people in need because we love them.

3. THE SOLUTION

You might have missed it. I would have. James writes this in 2:1: MY BROTHERS, SHOW NO PARTIALITY AS YOU HOLD THE FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE LORD OF GLORY. It is easy to miss because it seems like such a “DO/DON'T SECTION.” But James does not say that the solution to the problem is STOP IT. It is more like He says, “WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?” Have you ever used that line on your teenager after they did something really crazy? **ONCE AGAIN, WE SEE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THINKING AND DOING. AND HERE IT IS – JESUS GLORY!**

FIRST, James is attributing to Jesus the splendor that is due to God alone. That is tremendous. When we think of Jesus' glory, we have to think of how that was shown to

us. When someone is full of glory and they set that glory aside to help someone who has no glory, THAT IS GLORY. Does that thought not affect you? It should, because James says **LISTEN MY BELOVED BRETHREN, HAS NOT GOD CHOSEN THOSE WHO ARE POOR IN THIS WORLD TO BE RICH IN FAITH AND HEIS OF THE KINGDOM, WHICH HE HAS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM?** God loves the downtrodden. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN.

THE WORLD'S MEASURE OF VALUE IS DIRECTLY OPPOSED TO GOD'S.

However, the kicker of this passage is in verse 12. SO SPEAK AND SO ACT AS THOSE WHO ARE TO BE JUDGED UNDER THE LAW OF LIBERTY. (13) FOR JUDGEMENT IS WITHOUT MERCY TO ONE WHO HAS SHOWN NO MERCY. MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGEMENT.

A great passage to cross-reference here is Matthew 7:17-23. When Jesus looks at the fruit of your life, what does He see? Does He see a heart that makes distinctions based on evil thoughts? Does He spot partiality? Does He see a longing for a new community? Are there signs of sacrificial giving? Is there a concern for the poor? Does He see a heart for the lost? Is there a priority toward His glory and praise?

Fruit does not make a tree healthy. However, a healthy tree does bear fruit at the proper time, in the proper amount, and in the proper way.

In that beautiful hymn "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" (verses 5 & 6)

He speaks, and listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice
The humble poor believe

Hear Him, ye deaf, His praise ye dumb
Your loosened tongues employ
Ye blind, behold your Savior come
And leap, ye lame, for joy.