



Lesson 5 March 18, 2010

Rich Man, Poor Man – Part 2

Your Beliefs Are Showing

James returns to the subject of wealth and poverty which he introduced previously in chapter one, but he now examines it through a different perspective – the evil attitudes of partiality and condemnation on the part of believers in the church toward the rich and toward the poor. Yes, there is the well recognized problem of the imbalance of wealth throughout the world, and the problem unfortunately extends into the church, as well. James confronts those distinctions and divisions within the body of the church generated by money or its lack, and he therefore challenges the believer to put his faith into practice by eliminating partiality and respect of persons through the act of loving his neighbor as himself.

1. In verses 1-4, James commands that faith be without partiality to all people (v 1), either the rich man or the poor man (v2), for if favoritism is offered to the rich and lack of respect is shown to the poor (v3) then that partiality, or respect of persons, reveals evil thoughts (v4) or attitudes. How do these verses underscore these ideas and confirm the need for humility?

Leviticus 19:15

Luke 14: 7-14

John 7:24

Jude 16b



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2. In verses 5-7, James reveals the heart and concern of God toward the poor as he has chosen them to be heirs of the kingdom, if they love Him (v5), but James condemns those who despise the poor and reminds the reader that the rich oppress and exploit the poor (v6), thereby blaspheming the name of Jesus (v7). What similar thoughts are expressed in these scriptures?

Psalm 72:12-13

Isaiah 10:1-2; 11:4

Amos 4:1-2

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

3. In verses 8-13, James commends those who, loving their neighbors (v8), fulfill the royal law but warns that those who show partiality are guilty of sin (v9) and consequently transgress the whole of the law (v11) even though offending in only one point (v10). Consider that if only one link in a chain of ten links fails, the chain fails; likewise, anyone who breaks any law is deemed to be a lawbreaker. James then expands his commentary on God's law by describing it as the perfect law of liberty by which we will be judged (v12), be it word or deed. He concludes this section of the text with an emphasis on the believer's need to speak truth and to do (a doer of the word) through loving others as self since the Lord will be merciful to those who are merciful – mercy is always better than judgment (v14). How do you think these verses relate to James' points?

Proverbs 21:13

Micah 7:18

Matthew 12:36-37



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Colossians 3:23-25

Personal Application

James addresses the need for Christian perspective in the believer's quest for spiritual maturity, and that perspective often demands a radical change in thinking. Unfortunately, we are all subject to biases and prejudices, conscious and sub-conscious, borne from our culture, environment, education, and social status (to name but a few), which shape our perspective and attitudes. James exhorts us to note that such thinking is far from the heart of Jesus and that our faith in Him demands that His love works on our hearts even as it flows to all men, regardless of their station (or our own position) in life.

We are to *"love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is this; we shall love our neighbor as ourselves. There is no other commandment greater than these (Mark 12:30-31)."* Jesus, in re-affirming these commandments in the New Testament, has emphatically called us to a higher standard of personal conduct. Remember, *"if you love Me (Jesus), keep My commandments (John 14:15)."*

Scripture repeatedly refers to the hatred and oppression of the poor as a grievous offense to God – *"the wicked in his pride does persecute the poor...in the secret places does he murder the innocent: his eyes are privately set against the poor (Psalm 10:2,8);" however, the LORD "shall stand at the right hand of the poor to save him from those that condemn his soul (Psalm 109:31)."* Since Jesus Himself reminds us that the poor will always be with us (Matthew 26:11), we must consider that *"he who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the poor (Proverbs 14:31)" and "blessed is he that considers the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble (Psalm 41:1)."*

If, as part of our spiritual maturation process, we are to be transformed into His likeness, should not we be moved with the same compassion toward those in need as our Lord showed to the multitudes who fainted and were scattered as sheep having no shepherd (Matthew 9:36)? *"His compassions fail not. They are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23)."* May our compassion make a difference (Jude 22) in the lives of all about us as we *"in lowliness of mind esteem each other better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3)"* and in so doing may our faith control our behavior in the way we treat people, showing the reality of our beliefs and faith in our gracious and compassionate Father.