



Lesson 2

Favouritism (Verses 1-7)

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,

and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet,"

have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

It is a natural human reaction for us to treat important people differently from unimportant people. So in the first century the Jews would give a rich man special attention. But James says that this is completely wrong. Partiality is favouritism – treating people differently for no good reason. God does discriminate between people, because He will reward faithful disciples with eternal life but unfaithful ones will perish and will not be in His kingdom. But this distinction is not about their sex, colour of skin and certainly not how rich they are!

God is the judge, so if we favour one person over another person then we are being judges and this is evil. Our motives are not good.

The Importance of Faith (Verses 5-7)

“Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

But you have dishonoured the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?

Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honourable name by which you were called?”

Worse than that, when we show favouritism we are acting as though we know better than God, for James says that God has chosen the poor *who are rich in faith* to be in His kingdom, because they love Him. In James' day it was the rich people who caused trouble for the believers, so it was totally wrong to favour rich people. Faith, not worldly possessions, is what is important to God, and we should have the same attitude. However, God knows those who are rich in faith, whereas we cannot know this. So we cannot judge fairly.

The Royal Law (Verses 8 - 13)

“If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing well.

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

It was against the principles of the Law of Moses to be unkind to the poor. The Jewish law had special rules to protect poor people.

“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your



vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:9-10).

Later in this section of the Law, it states:

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18).

James may well have been thinking about these verses because he goes on to talk about the ‘royal law’ – to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’.

Showing partiality was therefore breaking the Law of Moses, and a sin. However, we do not want to be judged by the Law of Moses, but by Christ and a ‘law of liberty’. Jesus has set us free from the law which we could not possibly keep. We only need to break one part of the law once and then we are worthy of death. Adam broke one law once and his punishment was death. Consequently, every one of us will die. We all need mercy from God, so we should be merciful to other people, especially those who are already disadvantaged. Mercy is better than judgment, says James.

Jesus said that loving God and loving our neighbour is the basis of a faithful life. This is precisely what Jesus did. He was poor by human standards, having no house to live in, and few possessions.

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’” (Matthew 8:20).

But no-one has ever had greater faith than Jesus and He always pleased God, never doing any wrong at all.

Faith Without Works is Dead (Verses 14-25)

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,

and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-- and shudder!

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;

and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"-- and he was called a friend of God.

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

James goes on to explain that people who do not try to obey God cannot claim to have faith. Faith is not something that you just *think*: it is something that affects the way we live. Faith without works is not faith at all – it is utterly dead. If we see someone in need and say kind words to them but do not provide what they need then our words are useless. So faith that is words without actions is useless. All sorts of people claim to believe in God, but unless they show their faith in Him by trying to do what He says they are fooling themselves and everyone else. Even some totally wicked people claim to believe in God!

Abraham, the father of the Jews, showed his faith by being prepared to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14). Rahab, who was not a Jew, showed her faith by hiding the spies and so risking her own life at Jericho



(Joshua 2:1-21). So it is exactly the same principle for Jews and non-Jews – for everyone. Faith produces actions of faith. When we stop breathing we are completely dead. So faith without works is utterly dead and useless.

Notice that James believes that when someone dies they are really dead and cannot do anything at all.

Please read Leviticus 19:15-18 and Matthew 22:37-40.



Lesson 2 Questions

Name _____
Address _____
_____ Reference Number _____
Tutor's Name _____

Answers to most questions can be found in the lessons or Bible passages given. Please write your answers on this question paper and send them to your tutor

1. What is partiality?
2. Give an example of partiality that you have seen or heard about.
3. Why is partiality wrong in the ecclesia (or church)?
4. What is the 'royal law'?
5. Which is more important: loving God or being kind to people?
6. Can we keep all of God's laws?
7. Why do we all need mercy from God?
8. Why is faith without works dead?
9. Name some people, apart from Abraham and Rahab, who showed their faith by what they did. (Clue: look at Hebrews 11.)
10. What is the most important thing you have learnt from this chapter?