

We're continuing through the book of James, and though it often sounds like there are abrupt changes in subjects – like in the book of Proverbs – James is more epistle-like and so there are overarching themes and narrative threads that we can continue.

Remember, James introduces his epistle with an exhortation to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, "Count it all Joy, even in the midst of trials and temptations." That theme of joy – and its opposite, grief – returns throughout the book of James, as does themes about faith and works and wisdom and words. But surrounding James's commands for good works and faith, we can infer this: that James wants his brothers and sisters to have joy in their lives.

We'll continue to see ways in which grief can enter our lives, which James warns against, and we'll continue to see ways in which our joy is manifest.

Make no mistake, though, James knows that this joy is impossible outside of Christ. James knows it is the word of truth, the word implanted in you that is both our source and cause of pure joy. So while James wants joy for his family, he knows that Christ is central.

So we see in his second chapter, the foundation for this entire chapter, for whatever comes next is "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory."

The faith that James is talking about here is not a man-made faith. What do I mean? There is a secular faith that we don't talk about that often, and ironically it has become more popular the more it becomes fashionable to separate scientific knowledge from religious faith. It's a man-made "faith" that cannot be trusted. I'll give two examples: (1) Only those statements that can be verified empirically – i.e., by scientific testing – are meaningful as truth statements. On the other end of the spectrum (2) "There are no absolute truths." These statements may sound modernly scientific or culturally tolerant. Some may even consider these statements self-evident knowledge. But they are statements of faith – of really bad faith.

- (1) The creed, "only statements that can be verified empirically are meaningful as truth statements" is bad faith because that statement itself cannot be verified scientifically.
- (2) The creed "there are no absolute truths" is itself making an absolute truth claim, "it is absolutely the truth there are no absolute truths."

In the end, to maintain these worldviews of scientism or subjectivism, you have to hold fast to the faith of man. This is that faith of man that uses his own reason to determine that his own reason is sufficient to determine that reason is sufficient. If that's confusing when you hear it like that, you understand the point. This is that same anthropologist we've been talking about who refuses to be judged by the objective moral law given by God, and instead looks in the mirror to determine a worldview.

No, the faith we are talking about is a faith “extra nos”. It is a gift from God. “By grace are you saved, through faith, and that faith is not of yourselves, it is a gift from God.”<sup>1</sup> This is a faith that is alive and working.

The context surrounding James’s use of “faith” here is not us telling ourselves over and over again until we believe it. It is the “state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted,”<sup>2</sup> and it is not a faith we can buy at a grocery store or deduce with enough thought. It is a faith that is given to you by the creator of the universe – the holy and perfect God of time and space. This faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, is so much better than anything we can come up with by ourselves. Just as the perfect law given by God judges us, this perfect faith given by God saves us. This is a faith that is alive and working.

It’s because of this faith is not of ourselves, but is the gift of God, we have no business showing partiality as James puts it. None of us have a right to boast of our own works or condition, and we shouldn’t elevate the works or condition of others above other brothers and sisters as “more deserving.”

This word “partiality” is interesting. It’s translated “partiality,” but it’s actually a reference back to Leviticus 19:15,<sup>3</sup> where the common idiom “yissah panim,”<sup>4</sup> or lift up one’s face, is used. It’s the same idiom used in the Aaronic blessing, “the Lord lift up his countenance upon you.”<sup>5</sup>

So whereas we wish for the Lord to lift up his countenance upon us, or show favor toward us, we are commanded in Leviticus 19 and James 2, NOT to lift up our countenance, or show undeserved favor, or show partiality to others. You might say it has to do with “unfairness” and “justice” and while we plead that God would withhold justice from us – we are not to be unjust to our neighbor.

The example James uses of partiality, or unfairness, is the contrast between the poor and the rich, and the man in fine clothes and the man in shabby clothes. This is a common

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:8. See also John Eadie, “Commentary on Ephesians 2:8-10,” in *Monergism*, <https://www.monergism.com/commentary-ephesians-28-10> (accessed October 15, 2021). While not held universally that τοῦτο refers back specifically to πίστewς, and while not grammatically explicit, it makes the most sense that this be the noun referred to by the demonstrative pronoun. Grace is by definition “extra nos,” and would not need qualified as such. If it were somehow referring to the participle σωσωμένοι (having been saved), it not only breaks the gender reference, but the number reference as well, as τοῦτο is neuter singular, while σωσωμένοι is masculine plural. Eadie points out that this view was held by the early church fathers and the reformers.

<sup>2</sup> BDAG at πίστewς

<sup>3</sup> Προσωπολημψίας (partiality) is a compound word made up of the noun πρόσωπον (face, countenance) and λαμβάνω (take, receive, accept, make one’s own), which is used in the Septuagint to translate יָצַח אָפַי.

<sup>4</sup> יָצַח אָפַי; See Genesis 32:20; Leviticus 19:15; Numbers 6:26; Deuteronomy 10:17; Deuteronomy 28:50; 1 Samuel 25:35; 2 Samuel 2:22; 2 Kings 9:22; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Job 13:10; Job 32:21; Psalm 82:2; Proverbs 18:5; Malachi 2:9

<sup>5</sup> Numbers 6:26

occurrence. And it is a temptation. But notice what the command is not – both in Leviticus and James. It is not – treat the poor man better than the rich; elevate the oppressed above than the privileged. No, it is a command to be impartial, because we stand as equals – there is no Jew, nor Greek, slave, nor free, male, nor female.<sup>6</sup> No, we are all one in our Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory!<sup>7</sup>

It is usual to see the wealthy, powerful, or influential treated by a different standard, by a different system of justice. That is morally wrong. But we also see within modern critical philosophies the emphasis on defining oppression or privilege on a collective basis – not an individual basis. In these theories, the oppressed collective is exalted as necessarily more righteous; and the “privileged” collective are humiliated as necessarily more wicked. Whatever you think of this philosophy, the fact is it promotes individuals’ being treated unjustly within their assigned collective. The “gold ring” of intersectionality is no reason to be treated better. The shabby clothes of ancestral sins is no reason to be treated worse. This is just as morally wrong as treating the wealthy and powerful with a more lenient standard of justice than the poor and weak.

The secular “scientific” anthropologists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century insisted on stratifying categories of humanity.<sup>8</sup> But the solution to this error is not a new secular anthropology that continues to stratify categories of humanity. No, the solution to this partiality is the gospel. The solution to the error of stratifying humanity into layers of value is not a new secular anthropology that does the same thing; the solution is the gospel!

Brothers and sisters, we are to treat one another as ourselves, because together each of our individual identities are united in Christ. And Christ is just as capable of using the poor woman to expand his kingdom as he is a powerful king. When we treat one category of people as more worthy of justice than another, we have become judges with evil thoughts.

Now, lest you think James is condemning one class, “the rich,” by their collective assignment, and necessarily deserving of less justice, he is not. James is pointing out the natural inclination of man to devalue (or dishonor) those who bring no material or reputational value to us; and to over-value those who MAY bring material or reputational value to us, even if they are enemies of the faith. We are prone to indulge

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<sup>6</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>7</sup> Romans 6:5-11

<sup>8</sup> Here I am thinking, in short, of David Hume, “Of National Characters” in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, (Edinburgh: James Clarke, 1809); Immanuel Kant, “Lectures on Anthropology: Anthropology Pillau” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Berlin: Druck und Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1904), 25:844 for 18<sup>th</sup> century influential examples. The 18<sup>th</sup> century naturalist, Comte du Buffon, Georges-Louis Leclerc, became very influential after his death, as well. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century is replete with scientism rejecting the gospel and insisting on evolutionary ideas that promoted stratification, including Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Georges Cuvier, Ernst Haeckel, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and – of course – Charles Darwin.

popular culture movements and activism, or afraid to oppose them, even though they blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called.

But this is a show of partiality. You are committing sin and are convicted by the law.

By implication, what does a live faith work out then? A faith alive in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, imparts fair justice to our neighbors. We respect the rich and the poor as joint-heirs with Christ. Remember back to James 1: the poor may boast in Christ of their spiritual exaltation; the rich may boast in Christ in their earthly humiliation.

The implication, also, is to expose partiality when it occurs, even if it means you are the one that receives undue favor. If you are treated better than your brother because of your new car, discourage partiality. If you are treated poorly because of your shabby clothes, I urge you, discourage partiality. If you are accepted into "the club" because you know "the right people," discourage partiality; if you are turned away from "the club" because you don't, discourage partiality.

Now you could also go the opposite extreme, which for me as a serious introvert is a temptation I am much more vulnerable to, and that is to be impartial by not dealing with people at all. This is not ok either, our faith is to be alive and to be doers of the word, not just hearers, involving yourself with your family, sharing in their struggles, sharing in their temptations, and encouraging them unto joy.

We are next reminded that if we have violated the law in this way – of showing partiality to others – we are just as deserving of condemnation as the murderer, the adulterer. The law – which James referred to in chapter 1 as the perfect law – condemns us. If we are guilty of one seemingly minor violation of the law, we have violated the lawgiver and rebelled against him just as much as the adulterer and murderer. So again, James reminds us, we have no basis to assume ourselves better than another under the law. We are all condemned. But just as we are all equally condemned under the law, we have all been equally set free through Jesus Christ our Lord, the Lord of Glory. Romans 8:2 tells us, "the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."

The law without Christ condemns us unto death;<sup>9</sup> the law with Christ makes us free and our faith alive!<sup>10</sup> And so do unto to others within the context that you have been set free from the law of sin and death, set free from your just condemnation. The LORD has lifted his countenance upon you and caused his face to shine upon you! And we are now free to obey the law for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory.

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<sup>9</sup> Romans 5:16-18

<sup>10</sup> Romans 8:6; Romans 1:17; Galatians 2:20; Galatians 3:10-11

And just as Christ is "the life,"<sup>11</sup> our faith in "The Life" which is alive, reminds us that we are alive – not because of the judgment of God on us – but because the mercy of God given to us. Be merciful to one another; be slow to judgment; even though justice shall be fair; the judge shall also be merciful. Be understanding of another's situation; be slow to speak, quick to hear, and do not hasten unto the anger of man. Visit the downcast, the brokenhearted, the homesick, the suffering child; do not humiliate those who might damage your personal reputation, and exalt those who might improve your personal reputation. Share in your brothers' and sisters trials' and tribulations, because Christ has done this for us. The mercy of Christ has triumphed over the judgment of death, and instead given us a faith that is alive, free to do good to others for the Glory of God our Father. Amen.

Benediction: The Lord Bless you and keep you, the LORD cause his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace!

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<sup>11</sup> John 14:6