

James repeatedly refers to the Lord, not to the LORD (Jehovah) or God (Elohim), but the Lord, (Jesus Christ) in his epistle. He leaves no doubt that he is writing in New Testament territory and the teaching and exhortations and commands are part of the New Testament not merely a continuation of the Old Covenant. Some have thought of James' epistle as being a transition between Old and New and it is, in a way. But even in this early New Testament document the line of demarcation is clearly set out. Repetition of some Old Testament statements and commands does not signal business as usual in the Law of Moses, or a return to the Old. He but points to basic godly principles that do not change with time or dispensation. "Love your neighbor as yourself," v. 8, is from Leviticus 19:18.

Having pointed out three basic characteristics of true religion, James turns to an example. Probably a rather unexpected one to his contemporaries. Visiting the widows and orphans is one thing but having a poor person actually enter the religious gathering place you are attending is another. What if a shabbily dressed unwashed person walks into the synagogue? Where does he sit? What if a dirty unkempt man walks into meeting or Sunday school? Does his condition indicate God's disfavor with him? In the Old Testament God's favor was clearly seen in earthly blessings enjoyed by those who walked with Him and honored Him. The ancient book of Job is an example, where God's sudden removal of the prosperity Job enjoyed was viewed as unjust by Job. On the other hand His three "friends" saw it as punishment for some hidden sin in Job's life. Both assumptions rested upon the same premise. In the story's conclusion neither of them were correct in their assumptions. Yet that attitude, that wealth and prominence are rightful rewards for good behavior, persists today. And in some respects God does providentially reward faithfulness with earthly blessings. This seems to be particularly evident regarding nations that respect God, the Jews, Christianity, other nations, maintain law and order within and accept refugees. But clearly what we observe is His providential goodness. And when one considers life, good works and merciful attitudes have a way of bringing an earthly reward with them. But this is not the basis of our relationship with God the Father whether as individuals or as an assembly.

James' example therefore reenforces the change in thinking the Lord Jesus introduced in His preaching the kingdom. We clearly learn from James that a person's wealth or apparel is to make no difference as to our treatment of them in a Christian assembly and certainly not in a Gospel Service. Nor is one's personal status in society, race, color, language, nationality, previous religious affiliation, education, intelligence, gender, family

to be given undue recognition or privileges. Jesus insists on this as do His apostles. Access to the gospel is for all. All are invited to enter the kingdom of heaven and the marriage feast and the host provides a garment for each and every one to wear. If one should insist upon bringing and wearing his own garment he is rejected and ejected, Matthew 22:11. The gospel is all grace through faith.

*Ephesian 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

Our entrance into the kingdom is by grace – undeserved favor. Certainly then our enjoyment of its privileges together is to be characterized by grace to one another, not partiality. Both the Old and the New Testaments warn against partiality yet it is a persistent problem in every generation. Believers are not invulnerable to this snare and fall into it favoring family members over others both when granting privileges and disciplining sins. Paul exhorts that nothing be done by partiality.

*1Timothy 5:21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. {preferring...: or, prejudice}*

The key point of this passage is that we engage in conduct that fulfils the royal law according to the scripture. Favoritism plagues almost every human endeavor whether government, business, school, even families. James treats it as a serious sin, against Christ's royal law (and incidently Moses' Law as well). It is not love. In fact it is the opposite. Beware.

A second principle flows from one's attitude that is molded by the royal Law. "Mercy rejoices against judgement." Mercy triumphs or glories over judgement. Judgement punishes, mercy saves. This reflects the Lord's warning: "Judge not that ye be not judged." Matthew 7:1. That is, condemnation and punishment of a believer guilty of a sinful or disobedient act is not normally the responsibility of another believer, or even of the church (the assembly). On the other hand some try to apply this principle to government authorities and other authorities God has established here upon earth, denying their right to judge and punish. These include parents of young children and adults in a position of authority in a government, a school or a business establishment, etc. But believers, even if having been harmed, are to mercifully forgive a sin of another, forgive enough first to seek a soul's repentance, Matthew 18:15. Then forgiving mercy acts to receive a repentant soul and begin to restore a normal relationship. Mercy triumphs or glories over judgement.

Yet many, in pride, refuse mercy by not humbling and repenting, and persisting in their sins. If this occurs in a Christian congregation expulsion becomes necessary to maintain holiness in the assembly. Even this expulsion is

not punishment in the sense of a legal penalty for a crime. It rather is intended as a “wake up” leading to repentance and restoration. Punishment for sinful acts, for crimes on this earth, is reserved to civil authorities, Romans 13:1 - 6. Christ on the cross has born God’s judgement for the believer’s sins. He did not come to condemn the world but that the world though Him might be saved, John 3:16-18. Punishment of the sins of an unbeliever is in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, John 5:22-30, in the hereafter. He does not condemn and punish now. The story of the woman taken in adultery illustrates the point, John 8:1- 11. Christians of this age have no business attempting to punish sinners. The Royal Law does not call for that. See Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39; Romans 13:8-9; Galatians 5:14; 6:2. We seek the salvation of lost sinners not the death penalty, although that clearly is the God given prerogative and duty of government.

Clothing was originally given in grace and mercy to cover Adam and Eve after they sinned and lost their innocence. That act required an animal sacrifice to provide

the coats of skin. Very costly clothing indeed. A picture of the sacrifice God would provide to cover our sins. Since then men have developed other technologies to clothe themselves that avoid slaughtering innocent animals. But beyond that they have turned the use of clothing to many symbolic roles generally fueling human pride and rivalries. The apostles caution against improper emphasis upon clothing both as a matter of elegance or identification. 1Corinthians 9:19-22; 1Timothy 2:9-10; 1Peter 3:3-5, speak to the issue of clothing, abuses and misuses. The first is regarding forcing cultural changes as part of the gospel. The others are regarding becoming enamored with fine clothing. We walk the line. Oh yes, regarding the poor shabbily dressed unwashed person coming to meeting. That only has to happen once. Our privilege, and duty of love, under the royal law, the law of liberty, is to respectfully feed, clothe and shelter such. James addresses that next.

By Ron Canner, July 30, 2008

Comment: What is the balance in dressing respectfully when attending an assembly gathered unto the Lord’s name where He is present in the midst (Matthew 18:20)? Does He care what we wear? Is it important to Him? Do we dress well out of respect for Him? In doing so do we risk making others feel inferior because they do not have the means to dress as well? Is the assembly meeting a place to parade our “Sunday, go to meeting,” best? The Easter Parade? Should we “dress down” for the sake of the feelings of others? Is that what the Lord would do? Do we respect the Lord enough to wear our very best on occasions when He is there? Will He be there if each of us does not dress as well as he or she can properly afford? Does He care? Will others care? Should we care? James says we treat everyone without partiality. If we are truly gracious and loving no one will really notice our apparel, at least not with an appraising attitude. We rejoice when another is blessed. Envy and jealous feelings have no place in the believer’s heart or in assembly. RMC.

