

point is guilty of breaking all of it.

"If you show" – more accurately, "since you show", the form of the verb indicating it was ongoing practice. Exclusive behaviour violates God's royal, or supreme, law of love which governs all human relationships. Favouritism was prohibited in Leviticus 19:15, three verses removed from the command James quotes.

11 For He who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

"Lawbreaker" – Jewish religious teaching had reduced the law to a long series of injunctions which were held to be of varying importance, rather than a unified way of life of loving God and therefore others. James' point to his readers is that they could not cherry-pick and claim to live for God.

12-13 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

A judgmental person whose life does not show mercy, has clearly not received God's mercy. The unredeemed will be judged for eternal hell, while those showing the evidence of God's nature in new life – James assumes his readers are genuine believers – will be those with the assurance of a

IN PRACTICE In a harsh and judgmental world, those who walk with Jesus and His Spirit are called to be different – and also empowered to live differently. Our call is simply to love others with God's love. That's more than a nice-sounding phrase. It means choosing not to apply man's judgmental discriminations. It means accepting people as made in God's Image. Most will be different. Many will be difficult for us. Their rejection of God may be overt. But God sent Jesus so that they could come back to Him and know Him personally. We are the impartial, non-judgmental guides He has put in place for them, serving under the royal law of love.

QUESTION *How can we demonstrate God's impartiality to others?*

PRAYER Lord, in our humanness we judge others who are not like us and fall far short of having Your heart for them. Fill us with Your Spirit afresh to love with Your love and leave the judging to You because You are completely fair and impartial. Empower us to be reliable guides to others, showing the Way of Jesus and not our way. Amen.

different judgment, that of merciful freedom.

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

"Claims to have faith" – but if not genuine saving faith is demonic, useless and dead, James 2:19,20,26. Can such 'faith', form without substance, save them? The implication is that it cannot. Intellectually accepting certain truths, without the step of trusting Jesus Christ as Saviour, is not the faith that justifies and saves.

15-17 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Genuine faith and having God's Spirit active within us cannot help but produce actions that please God. James is not saying that a person is saved by their good works. He has clearly stated that salvation is a gracious gift from God that cannot be earned, James 1:17-18. He sets out plainly the danger of a religiosity which is not sincere faith and which cannot save, vv. 14 and 17, James 2:20, 24, 26 and see also Eph. 2:8-9 and Jesus' teaching e.g. Matt. 3:7-8, John 8:30-31.

"What good is it?" – this picture of false faith is like the illustration of false love in 1 John 3:17.

The Living Word

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The Bible readings for Sunday, Sept 9, 2018, with commentary notes

Church calendar readings for Sunday, September 9, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **God's love has no favouritism**

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23 » The principle of God's impartial kindness

Mark 7:24-37 » Jesus in a Gentile district is impartial in His ministry

James 2:1-17 » Genuine faith treats others impartially

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23 » The principle of impartial kindness

The Lord's way is to treat people of His creation evenly

1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

2 Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.

"A good name" – character is to be valued above riches, as Proverbs 3:14 and 16:16. The precepts of the Lord similarly, Ps. 19:10 and 119:72, 127.

To oppress the poor, who are made in God's image, is to insult God himself. See Prov. 14:31.

8-9 Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity, and the rod they wield in fury will be broken. The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share

their food with the poor.

"Reaps calamity... will be blessed" – Scripture says much about the grace of God but also that all actions have consequences such that we reap what we sow; meanness and generosity of spirit both come back to us, but in opposite ways.

For further study, see Proverbs 11:25-26; 14:21; 19:17, Hosea 8:7; 2 Cor. 9:6-10, Galatians 6:7.

22-23 Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life.

"Do not exploit the poor" – which was common in a culture that believed riches demonstrated God's blessing. See Prov 22:16, 14:31. Justice defends the needy, Isaiah 1:17.

IN PRACTICE These verses set out God's way which is to regard everyone without partiality – "God is no respecter of persons, meaning He does not show favouritism", Acts 10:34, Galatians 2:6. God regards all who are His creation, even-handedly – and often chooses 'outsiders'. Upholding this viewpoint, rather than the narrow, human perspective of our rights and entitlements to control and judge others, speaks plainly to us about how we judge others – or choose not to judge others. God's ways are higher than our ways.

QUESTION *We all fall into the trap of favouritism and judging others! What is an area of this attitude that the Holy Spirit is revealing to you?*

Mark 7:24-37 » Jesus in a Gentile district is impartial in His ministry

Jesus delivers a Greek woman's daughter and heals a deaf and dumb man

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep His presence secret.

"Tyre" – there was a Jewish community in the mainly Greek-speaking Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon, who knew Jesus, Mark 3:8.

25-26 In fact, as soon as she heard about Him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

"She begged" – a Gentile, compelled by her need, asking repeatedly for help from the Jewish rabbi.

27 "First let the children eat all they want," He told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

"Children's bread" – Jesus tests the woman's faith in an exchange not as harsh-sounding as it is to us.

"The children" are the Jewish people, "bread" is His message and "dogs" Gentiles. However "first" looks to Gentiles also receiving God's grace.

28 "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

The Passion Translation renders these verses,

"Finally He said to her, "First let my children be fed and satisfied, for it isn't fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." She answered,

"How true that is, Lord. But even puppies under the family table are allowed to eat the little children's crumbs." Then Jesus said to her, "That's a good reply!"

"How true that is, Lord. But even puppies under the family table are allowed to eat the little children's crumbs." Then Jesus said to her, "That's a good reply!"

29 Then He told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."

"Even puppies...are allowed..." – her reply to being compared to an unclean dog is humble but also persistent; the Good News may be for Jews first, Exodus 4:22, but others are included. She comes through the test demonstrating genuine faith.

30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

"She went home" – this deliverance where there was no contact or even proximity with the suffering person.

For further study, compare with the healing miracles in Capernaum of the centurion's servant, Matt. 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10 and the official's son, John 4:46-54 with Jesus distant from the sick person.

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to Him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place His hand on him.

The Decapolis, east of Galilee, was another Hellenistic/Gentile region, like Tyre and Sidon, where Jews had resettled following the deportations.

33-35 After He took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then He spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.

"Put his fingers" – Jesus uses sign language to tell the deaf man what He was doing. "Took him aside" – to avoid making the man a spectacle.

36-37 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more He did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement.

"He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

"Overwhelmed with amazement" – the crowd saw signs and wonders and possible political liberation. However Jesus needed them to understand He was Messiah without political might, who healed physical disabilities while ministering to their spiritual blindness and deafness.

IN PRACTICE Jesus' ministry in Tyre was a ministry to Jewish settlers there – He didn't seek out a Syrian Gentile woman with a pressing family situation and a demon or two to send packing. But neither did He dismiss her because she was not one of the 'children' He was sent to. What a lesson for us! We have 'our' sort of people – people we relate to, in our church or belonging to our denomination or whatever. And then God shows us someone else who needs prayer and help. Not from church... or even Romany, or a DSS family with history, or folk from a different culture. What stops us? Discrimination and judgment thoughts come, but Jesus, who knew His call and priorities, didn't hold back His love. Neither should we, but go with what He gives us, without partiality.

QUESTION *God is always testing us and taking us a bit outside our comfort zone. You probably have such a story, if you think about it. What did you learn from it?*

James 2:1-17 » Genuine faith treats others impartially

Genuine faith is demonstrated in how impartially we treat others

1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.

"Favouritism" – Christ lived for 30 years in an undistinguished village and ministered in Galilee and Samaria, regions despised by Israel's leaders, a strong statement about God's impartiality.

2-4 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

"Meeting" – literally, 'gathering'. At this transitional time James uses both this general word, also used for synagogue, and 'church', James 5:14.

"Gold ring and fine clothes" – rings showed economic status, Luke 15:22. The early church was mixed socially with many who were not well off, Acts 4:35-37, Acts 6:1-6, 1 Cor 1:26.

"A good seat... sit on the floor" – most in a synagogue would stand or sit cross-legged on the floor. There would be a few benches around the wall and in front, which the Pharisees considered theirs by entitlement, Mark 12:38-39.

5-7 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him? But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of Him to whom you belong?

"Chosen... to inherit the kingdom" – God's choosing is a combination of His calling and our response, into the sphere of salvation and the realm of Christ's rule, the present sense of kingdom. God's kingdom order confronts the world's sense of priorities, Luke 6:20-23.

"The noble name" – literally, "who slander the noble name spoken over you," meaning the ownership of Jesus Christ we declare at conversion and baptism.

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right.

"Royal law" – or sovereign law i.e. one that is binding, quoted from Lev. 19:18. Taken with the command to love God, Deut. 6:4-5, it encapsulates all the Law and Prophets as Jesus taught and Paul emphasised, Matt. 22:36-40, Romans 13:8-10.

9-10 But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one