

Prayer

O Lord, Your love has inspired so many people throughout history. Inspire us now by the stories of those who have followed Your teaching and given us an example of holy living, and let us be true to them by honouring You, the One who inspired them, rather than glorifying their role in the mission of the church. Give us eyes to see these things with spiritual clarity, we pray: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Be quiet and let the Holy Spirit speak to you. Listen for what He has to say

On-going prayers

- **Pray this week** for people whose life is lived dealing with paperwork, such as secretaries and administrators
- Pray for an item of news that is important in your own country
- Give thanks to God for your friends and the help they give you

Meditation

Lord of all;

Lord of every living thing;

Lord of every wonderful and fascinating human being;

Lord of space, of the solar system and distant galaxies;

Lord of countries and continents; sky, land and oceans;

Lord of time, creator of the past and present and future;

Lord of banking, politics, pressure groups and charities;

Lord of commerce, industry, factories and building sites;

Lord of history, geography, sciences, maths and the arts;

Lord of all that could be;

Lord of all;

Save us, redeem us, and re-make us anew!

Bible Study - James 2:8-13

⁸ If, then, you keep the royal law according to what is written; 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself,' then you do well; ⁹ But if you show favouritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as sinners. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole Law but stumbles in one thing has become guilty in respect of it all. ¹¹ For He who said, 'You shall not commit adultery,' also said, 'You shall not murder.' So if you do not commit adultery but have committed murder, you have become a sinner according to the Law.

¹² Therefore speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom. ¹³ Mercy triumphs over judgement: whereas judgment will be merciless to those who show no mercy at all.

Review

Yesterday, James spoke out strongly against prejudicial attitudes within the church, and this passage follow on directly from this. The problem was this; people believed that being pleasant and friendly to those they knew was a sufficient expression of love to one's 'neighbour'. James was intent on explaining that this was not good enough, and that if the rich ignored the poor (see the previous study, 2:1-7), they sinned by showing favouritism (2:9). To show the importance of this, James quoted the well known argument that if someone broke a small part of God's law, then they had in effect, broken all God's law (2:10,11). He cautions his largely Jewish Christian readers (1:1) to accept that they live under the judgement of God (2:12), notwithstanding the fact that mercy 'triumphs over judgment' (2:13).

Yet again in James' letter, there is no doubt that the teaching of Jesus lies behind what he says. In particular, he uses Jesus' teaching about the attitudes and thoughts that lead to adultery (Matt 5:27f.) and murder (Matt 5:21f.), and the importance of dealing with the root of such sins. Clearly, James regarded 'favouritism' as a sinful attitude that worked against complying with the famous moral code of Leviticus 19:18b, which he calls the 'royal law'; 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' Jesus Himself quoted this law as a summary of God's moral rule for all people (see Matt 22:39 etc). His point is clear; act with favouritism and you break this law, and in doing this you break the whole law of God (2:10)! We tend to shy away from saying such things today because we do not want to sound legalistic. However, James said this for one very good reason; he wanted people in the church to accept that favouritism was wrong, repent, and seek forgiveness for it.

James pursued this matter because it was a deep rooted problem. There is considerable scriptural evidence that many people in the early church believed that what you did in life did not matter very much, because Christ was going to come again and put all things right. In the mean time, some thought it wise to keep to themselves (and their own friends) and do their best, but there was not much point in trying to right the world's wrongs, and in addition, the Lord had said that He would forgive all sin, so, why worry! Such simplistic attitudes appear to absolve people from the consequences of their behaviour, and James knew that it was not good enough for God's people. Sitting light to personal responsibility and moral issues was not compatible with the faith of Christ. James was determined to point this out, and expose those who showed favouritism within the church as guilty of this sin.

The letter continues by speaking strongly about the judgement of God (2:12-13). The delicate balance of 'mercy' and 'judgement' which lies in the hands of God is extended in our favour through the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, but this does not lessen moral justice or the judgement of God. James therefore recommended his readers to live as people who knew that they faced judgement, but one tinged with the freedom of the Gospel (2:12) and the mercy of the Lord Jesus. The sin of favouritism which kept the poor in oppression needed to be recognised as such, and in a stinging riposte to those who behaved in this way, James said there would be no mercy for those who showed no mercy themselves (2:13). It is a point very similar to that made by Jesus in the parable of the wicked servant (Matt 18:23f.)!

This whole passage is very 'close to home' for Christians today. Too many of the things we do in the life of the church smack of the ignorant favouritism of people in a social club, as if those who attend do so for their own benefit. We need to hear what James says. We would like faith to be simple and make no demands on us, but Jesus has died for us on a Cross, and unless we respond vigorously to the moral challenge to live like Him, we will only expose our own prejudices and favouritism. We should seek God's mercy because we know that our natural selves merit His judgement.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. If you had to sum up what you believed to be the teaching of this passage, how would you do it, and why?
2. Discuss in your group the answers you have given to question 1.
3. What part of James' teaching here do you find difficult to understand? Why is this? Try looking up the references in this study to find out more.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I find it greatly liberating to know that God will act in mercy towards me, but I also find it helpful to know that God grants me this mercy not by turning a blind eye to my sin, whatever it is, but by exposing it for what it is. When I know how I have sinned (for example if I have shown favouritism) then I need to know this is wrong and cease to act in that way; this is how my salvation works.

Discipleship issue in this text

- *Favouritism and sin*
- *The mercy and judgement of God*

Ideas for exploring your discipleship

- *How much do you know of God's commands? Look them up in the Old and New Testaments. Do you feel that you are someone who is able to learn from God's Word and grow in your faith? If not, what holds you back?*

- *Look up the words 'Mercy' and 'Judgement' of 'Justice' in a Biblical Dictionary and check out your knowledge of these two important concepts.*

Final Prayer

Lord God; You have guided each of us along a path of life which has been full of many unexpected things. Save us, we pray, from falling into the temptations and oppressions of the world around us; and through Jesus Christ, keep us pure, in faith, in hope, and in love. AMEN
