

# The Sin of Partiality – Part 1

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – James addresses the religiously sinful practice of partiality in the body of Christ
2. aim – to cause us to remember that all are saved by grace through faith regardless of class
3. passage – James 2:1-13

### b. outline

1. The Definition of Partiality (James 2:1-4)
2. The Sin of Partiality (James 2:5-7)
3. The Cure for Partiality (James 2:8-13)

### c. opening

1. the **continuation** of the letter
  - a. I will continue to preach from James during this time of “social distancing”:
    1. because a topical series just focuses our attention on fear rather than faith (**dumbing down**)
    2. because *each and every part* of the Word of God is sufficient for any time or situation
    3. because this passage is relevant to the current situation, albeit (somewhat) indirectly
    4. because it conveys the idea that we firmly believe that the church of Christ is *still advancing and that believers are to be growing up in the faith even while the world is trapped in fear*
  - b. I intend **this week** to spend more time on *introducing* the subject then finishing it ...
2. the **outline** of the letter
  - a. James’ statement in **1:22** is the **thesis** of the entire work: “*be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*” – living in the deception of thinking one way and acting another
  - b. the **tendency** within us: to “disconnect” what we *believe* from what we *do*; the “natural” condition of the flesh whereby we tend to think one way but act another (**a self-deception**)
    1. **LOW**: to *assume* (in our minds) that we are followers of Jesus, but to act **inconsistently** in those beliefs – to *say* that we are believers, but to *deceive ourselves* by our **e.g. reactions**
    2. **LOW**: **what is genuine saving faith (vs. a faith that is just “professed”)?**
      - a. what does it mean to have “faith?” – **answer**: to be a doer of the word, not just a hearer ...
  - c. **IMO**: the letter of James can be outlined along this line of thought: that saving faith is always **consistent** between what we believe and what we do
    1. **The Testing of Saving Faith (1:1-18)** – the recognition that the Christian life is *hard*, trials are an **essential** part of faith, but we must seek wisdom, humility, and steadfastness from the Lord
      - a. faith, *by definition*, must endure through trials *or it is not actually faith*
      - b. and, these trials of faith are actually good and perfect gifts of God *setting us apart unto him*
      - c. **e.g. COVID-19** is a true test of faith – testing our ability to trust in God during a pandemic
    2. **(now) The Consistency of Saving Faith (1:19-2:13)** – the statement of the thesis, the importance of aligning true belief with true action as the measure of true religion
      - a. **vv. 19-20**: an **introduction** to faith as *consistent* – **i.e.** such testings are to see if we are truly willing to trust the Lord *in utter obedience*, or “back away” because it is “too hard”
      - b. **vv. 21-25**: the **thesis** of the consistency of faith to practice – **i.e.** the consistency of saving faith is to act according to our nature *as it is declared by God’s word*; to know who we really are in Christ and then to *act in accordance with that nature*
      - c. **vv. 26-27**: the **elements** of a consistency of faith to practice – **i.e.** the proper application of belief to practice (religion): (1) to speak consistently about our connection to Christ, (2) act selflessly towards others in imitation of Christ, and (3) remained unstained by the worldly (secular) worldview around us as we think like Christ
3. the **current place** in the section
  - a. **2:1-13**: a **continuation** of the thought of **vv. 26-27** – *another* example of inconsistent religion: to show **partiality** towards others on the basis of class
  - b. James will first *define* the concept in **vv. 1-4**, show why it is *sinful* in **vv. 5-7**, then speak of the *cure* for this sinfulness in **vv. 8-13**

## I. The Definition of Partiality (James 2:1-4)

### Content

#### a. the method of partiality

1. James uses an *illustration* (or *example*) to make his point, similar to what his half-brother does
  - a. Jesus often spoke in illustrations (we call them *parables*) and he often spoke about the contrasts of rich vs. poor (**esp. in Luke; 1:53; 6:24; 12:16ff; 14:12; 16:1; 16:19ff; 18:23; 19:2; 21:1**)
  - b. is it *possible* that growing up together they came to understand this distinction (as the poor) and both were inclined to use it as a means of instruction?

#### b. the details of partiality

1. “*brothers*” (v. 1) = (**again**) James is writing to *believers*; those who have trusted in Christ by faith and are included in the family of God as adopted sons and daughters (*genderless* by implication)
  - a. **reminder**: the people to whom he is writing are *scattered, converted, Jews* (i.e. the primitive church) – under the great strain of persecution (e.g. scattered somewhat like us !!)
  - b. the same kind of people as *himself* and those *in his church in Jerusalem*
2. “*partiality*” (*pro-sopo-lemp-sia*; v. 1) = favoritism; a respect of persons; deference towards another
  - a. used **4x** in the N.T. (**Rom. 2:11**, God shows no “*respect of persons*”; **Eph. 6:9**, masters, there is no “*partiality*” with God; **Col. 3:25**, for the wrongdoer, God shows no “*partiality*”)
  - b. **here**: giving deference to someone based on their *social* or *economic class*; to treat people with greater *respect* or *honor* simply because they are of a higher *societal position* (**see below**)
    1. see the synonym in v. 3 “*pay attention to*” (or “*have respect to him*” KJV)
3. “*assembly*” (*synagōgē*; v. 2) = a place or kind of assembly; lit. the synagogue
  - a. **note**: this is the *only* place of the **56x** in the N.T. that the ESV translates this as “*assembly*” (as do most other English translations, including the KJV)
  - b. **question**: why does James choose *this word* over the word “*ecclesia*” (i.e. church)?
    1. since the majority of his readers would have been *ostracized* from the synagogues, he is not writing to *Jews in general*, and he is *familiar* with the word *ecclesia* (**see 5:14**)?
  - c. **answers**:
    1. because of the *primitive* nature of the church and the believers he is writing to, the concept of the “church” may not yet be fully fleshed out and as *familiar* to his audience as “*synagogue*”
    2. because he may have wanted to convey an idea: your “*assemblies*” (as Christians) are like synagogue gatherings **and have the same sinful habits present amongst the Jews**
    3. **note**: the length of this diatribe *strongly suggests* that James sees this as one of the most critical problems of the Christian “*religion*” in his day – maybe he sees it as “*carry-over*” from the Jewish assemblies into the church, so he calls their gatherings “*synagogues*” to *prod* them

#### c. the definition of partiality

1. “*distinctions*” (v. 4) = preferences; judgments; disputes (over outward matters); lit. evaluations
  - a. lit. showing deference to certain people based on their *outward manifestations of wealth*
    1. “*wearing a gold ring and fine clothing*” vs. “*shabby clothing*”
    2. inviting the wealthy individual to “*sit here in a good place*” (a place of honor, in the front) vs. the poor one to “*stand over there*” (in the back) or “*sit down at my feet*” (the place of servants)
  - b. **reality**: this is true in virtually *every* social situation of human beings, *even in the church* (e.g. pastors who elevate certain individuals [in attention or position] because they are the best “givers”)
2. **partiality = granting deference to individuals based on their status outside of the church – to create strata of position within the church based on something other than faith in Christ**

## II. The Sin of Partiality (James 2:5-7)

### Content

#### a. the sin of partiality

1. **note**: although *common* in society (and embraced), James *clearly sees* this as evil *in the church*
  - a. “*judges with evil thoughts*” (v. 4) = those who make distinctions, but (**here**) with “*evil*” intentions
2. **question**: why is partiality *sinful* in the life of the church? why is it inherently *wrong* to defer to some people over others *in the church* when it is considered perfectly *normal* in the world?
3. **answer #1**: because it is *inconsistent* with God’s design for true spirituality (v. 5)
  - a. (**see above**) it is *highly likely* that James sees this as something “*carrying over*” from synagogue life, where there was always a strong sense of “*caste*” amongst the people

1. namely, the belief that the *wealthy* were “more blessed” by God, and were considered more “valuable” in the sight of God because he had blessed them with wealth
- b. **(see above)** it is *highly likely* that James is addressing this issue as *Jesus* (his elder brother) often did in the course of his teachings (condemning or pitying the rich)
  1. specifically, the difference between the rich/poor *economically* vs. the rich/poor *spiritually*
  2. **e.g. Matthew 5:3** – “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*”
    - a. Jesus *clearly teaches* that material wealth can be a great *hindrance* to a saving relationship with himself (**Matthew 19:23f; Luke 6:24; 18:23-25, etc.**)
    - b. Jesus *intimates here* that material wealth is *irrelevant* to one’s spiritual state – that it is one’s *spiritual wealth* that determines his fate (**i.e.** the Beatitudes: to recognize one’s *spiritual poverty*, *mourn* over it, *meekly* seek God, *hunger* for true righteousness, recognize a need for *mercy*, come for *purity of heart*, and find true *peace* with God and others)
- c. **principle: material wealth is an *illusion* – it evaporates like a mist during pandemics, you can’t hold on to it beyond this life, and it has a *strong detrimental effect* upon your ability to trust in God by faith**
  1. **thus, for the church to give deference to the rich is to be *religiously inconsistent***
  2. **i.e.** to claim that one is saved *only* by faith in Christ, yet send the message that “certain” individuals are “more important” because of some *outward physical* reality
  3. if salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then there should never be any distinctions in the church that “contradicts” that message
- d. **principle: *earthly prosperity* is also an *illusion* – it is in times of pandemic (or persecution) that the church is reminded that these outward distinctions mean nothing**
  1. **the only thing that truly matters is *Christ* – his person, power, and promises**