



The Letter of James  
Bible Study Session 7  
James 2:1-13  
“Faith’s Involvement”

Study By  
*Lorin L Cranford*

**Greek NT**

2.1 Ἀδελφοί μου, μὴ ἐν προσωπολημψίαις ἔχετε τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης; 2 ἂν γὰρ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς συναγωγὴν ὑμῶν ἀνὴρ χρυσοδακτύλιος ἐν ἔσθῃτι λαμπρᾷ, εἰσέλθῃ δὲ καὶ πτωχὸς ἐν ῥυπαρᾷ ἔσθῃτι, 3 ἐπιβλέψητε δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν φοροῦντα τὴν ἔσθῃτα τὴν λαμπρὰν καὶ εἶπητε· Σὺ κάθου ὡς καλῶς, καὶ τῷ πτωχῷ εἶπητε· Σὺ στῆθι ἢ κάθου ἐκεῖ ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου, 4 οὐ διεκρίθητε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἐγένεσθε κριταὶ διαλογισμῶν πονηρῶν;

5 ἀκούσατε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί. οὐχ ὁ θεὸς ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ πλουσίους ἐν πίστει καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας ἧς ἐπηγγεῖλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν; 6 ὑμεῖς δὲ ἠτιμάσατε τὸν πτωχόν. οὐχ οἱ πλούσιοι καταδυναστεύουσιν ὑμῶν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλκουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς κριτήρια; 7 οὐκ αὐτοὶ βλασφημοῦσιν τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς; 8 εἰ μέντοι νόμον τελεῖτε βασιλικόν κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε· 9 εἰ δὲ προσωπολημπτεῖτε, ἀμαρτίαν ἐργάζεσθε, ἐλεγχόμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου ὡς παραβάται.

**La Biblia  
de las Américas**

2.1 Hermanos míos, no tengáis vuestra fe en nuestro glorioso Señor Jesucristo con una actitud de favoritismo. 2 Porque si en vuestra congregación entra un hombre con anillo de oro y vestido de ropa lujosa, y también entra un pobre con ropa sucia, 3 y dais atención especial al que lleva la ropa lujosa, y decís: Tú siéntate aquí, en un buen lugar; y al pobre decís: Tú estate allí de pie, o siéntate junto a mi estrado; 4 ¿no habéis hecho distinciones entre vosotros mismos, y habéis venido a ser jueces con malos pensamientos?

5 Hermanos míos amados, escuchad: ¿No escogió Dios a los pobres de este mundo para ser ricos en fe y herederos del reino que El prometió a los que le aman? 6 Pero vosotros habéis menospreciado al pobre. ¿No son los ricos los que os oprimen y personalmente os arrastran a los tribunales? 7 ¿No blasfeman ellos el buen nombre por el cual habéis sido llamados? 8 Si en verdad cumplís la ley real conforme a la Escritura: AMARAS A TU PROJIMO COMO A TI MISMO, bien hacéis. 9 Pero si mostráis favoritismo,

**NRSV**

2.1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? 8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted

**NLT**

1 My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people more than others? 2 For instance, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in shabby clothes. 3 If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor” -- well, 4 doesn’t this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives?

5 Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn’t God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren’t they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? 6 And yet, you insult the poor man! Isn’t it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? 7 Aren’t they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear? 8 Yes indeed, it is good when you truly obey our Lord’s royal command found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 9 But if you pay special

10 ὅστις γὰρ ὄλον τὸν νόμον τηρήσῃ, πταισῆ δὲ ἐν ἐνί, γέγονεν πάντων ἔνοχος. 11 ὁ γὰρ εἰπὼν· Μὴ μοιχεύσῃς εἶπεν καὶ· Μὴ φονεύσῃς· εἰ δὲ οὐ μοιχεύεις φονεύεις δέ, γέγονας παραβάτης νόμου. 12 οὕτως λαλεῖτε καὶ οὕτως ποιεῖτε ὡς διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας μέλλοντες κρίνεσθαι. 13 ἡ γὰρ κρίσις ἀνέλκος τῷ μὴ ποιήσαντι ἔλεος· κατακαυχᾶται ἔλεος κρίσεως.



cometéis pecado y sois hallados culpables por la ley como transgresores. 10 Porque cualquiera que guarda toda la ley, pero tropieza en un punto, se ha hecho culpable de todos. 11 Pues el que dijo: NO COMETAS ADULTERIO, también dijo: NO MATES. Ahora bien, si tú no cometes adulterio, pero matas, te has convertido en transgresor de la ley. 12 Así hablad y así proceded, como los que han de ser juzgados por la ley de la libertad. 13 Porque el juicio será sin misericordia para el que no ha mostrado misericordia; la misericordia triunfa sobre el juicio.

by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

FAITH

attention to the rich, you are committing a sin, for you are guilty of breaking that law. 10 And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God’s laws. 11 For the same God who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” So if you murder someone, you have broken the entire law, even if you do not commit adultery. 12 So whenever you speak, or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law of love, the law that set you free. 13 For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God’s mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you.

### The Study of the Text:<sup>1</sup>

Again with little advanced warning, James skips to another topic that has only minimal connection to the emphasis in 1:19-27. His focus now is on the nature of saving faith, τὴν πίστιν. This emphasis will include two separate pericopes, 2:1-13, and 2:14-26. But each of these units is distinct and contains different emphases. Structurally a reduplicated pattern is the basis for idea expression in both units: admonition (vv. 1 // 14), example (vv. 2-4 // 15-17), and explanation (vv. 5-13 // 18-26). Yet the details of each of these sections is developed distinctly. With each progressive pericope in these studies we are discovering the creative genius of both James and his editors who brought his ideas over from the original Aramaic into this eloquent expression of literary Koine Greek.

What is faith? The *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary gives three basic definitions with subsections under two of these:

1. a : allegiance to duty or a person : loyalty b (1) : fidelity to one’s promises (2) : sincerity of intentions
2. a (1) : belief and trust in and loyalty to God (2) : belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion  
b (1) : firm belief in something for which there is no proof (2) : complete trust
3. : something that is believed especially with strong conviction; especially : a system of religious beliefs <the Protestant faith>

The second of these seeks to be the religious definition. In reality, none of these definitions has much at all to do with the biblical word for faith in the New Testament, πίστις. Built off the verb πιστεῦω (I believe), this ancient Greek word stresses a commitment of trust and surrender to the person of Jesus Christ in the Greek

<sup>1</sup>With each study we will ask two basic questions. First, what was the most likely meaning that the first readers of this text understood? This is called the ‘historical meaning’ of the text. That must be determined, because it becomes the foundation for the second question, “What does the text mean to us today?” For any applicational meaning of the text for modern life to be valid it must grow out of the historical meaning of the text. Otherwise, the perceived meaning becomes false and easily leads to wrong belief.

New Testament. One important implication from this is that in the New Testament faith and believing are the same idea, unlike the implication of the two separate English words.

The question arises naturally as to how the idea of πίστις in the New Testament evolved into the idea of faith in contemporary English? The answer is relatively simple: the impact of the Roman Catholic Church on Christian thinking in the western world. In the second century with the beginning development of sacramentalism the shift started occurring. Faith ceased to be a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and moved to becoming a passive acceptance of what the Church taught about Jesus Christ. The shift included a movement away from volitional to the intellect. Faith shifted from personal commitment to a person to formal acceptance of ideas about this person. In the process of making this radical re-defining of faith, the vitality of dynamic spiritual relationship with the risen Christ was seriously undermined. Faith became something one did at a specific moment in time, usually in formal confirmation at the conclusion of a period of classes taken, rather than ongoing commitment in a spiritual relationship. This twisted and rather anti-biblical understanding of faith pervades not just Roman Catholic belief but most every Protestant group also suffers from such shallow understanding as well. Not the Reformers of Luther and Calvin, but the Radical Reformers like Meno Simons in the 1500s sought to re-discover biblical faith, and did succeed to a fair extent. But even their spiritual descendants like the Brethern Church, Baptists, and others still struggle to be true to the biblical meaning of faith.

Formal faith is much easier and much less demanding than biblical faith. The radical nature of biblical faith is hugely threatening to many people with religious interests. Formal faith simply requires one to go through some kind of religious ritual that is not too demanding or threatening, such as baptism or confirmation classes. Once its completed then one continues on with life pretty much the same as it was before. This item has been checked off of the religious To Do list. Biblical faith, on the other hand, demands a complete re-ordering of one's life and the priorities that guide one in life. Full surrender to the claims of Christ as Lord are built into this faith.

What James will make abundantly clear is that only this biblical faith is saving faith. Any other version of faith is false and will not bring the individual into right standing before God. Thus we greatly need to understand this biblical faith, since our eternal destiny hangs in the balance.

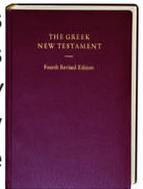
## 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

### Background:

Some background issues will play a role in the understanding of this passage, and thus need to be explored.

### Historical Setting.

**External History.** During the first ten centuries of hand copying the Greek text of this passage, variations in wording etc. surface, when the several thousand currently existing copies of these manuscripts prior to the middle ages are compared. But the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev ed) concluded that only in one place were the variations sufficiently significant to impact the Bible translation of this text. In verse three the instructions given to the beggar Σὺ στῆθι ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου, “you stand there or sit...”, are modified in some manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> The intent seems to have been mostly to clarify and make even more emphatic the negative tones of the insulting instructions given to this visitor at church.<sup>3</sup> The external weight of evidence is somewhat spread out among



<sup>2</sup>“{B} ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου A (C\* καί for ἢ) Ψ 33 81 1292 1505 1611 2138 1 591 it<sup>ar, s, t</sup> vg syr<sup>h</sup> (arm) geo Cyril Hesychius<sup>lat</sup>; Augustine // ἢ κάθου ἐκεῖ B 945 1175 1241 1243 1739 1852 2298 it<sup>ff</sup> (cop<sup>sa</sup> ὅδε for ἐκεῖ) // ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου ὅδε P<sup>74</sup> vid x (C<sup>2</sup> καί for ἢ) 322 323 436 1067 1409 1735 2344 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect syr<sup>p</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> eth slav” [Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (With Apparatus); The Greek New Testament, 4th Revised Edition (With Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>3</sup>“The reading in the text best explains the origin of the other readings. The reading στῆθι ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου ὅδε (*stand there or sit here*) is obviously an attempt to make explicit what is implied in the text. Several manuscripts read στῆθι ἢ κάθου ἐκεῖ (*stand or sit there*), but this reading arose because a copyist failed to realize that the place of the footstool was nearer to the speaker than the place where the person was told to stand.

“The longer reading στῆθι ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου ὅδε, though not original, ‘represents the probable alternatives offered plausibly enough: the poor man should most properly stand over there, well away, but if he must sit it should be in an equally appropriate,

the different significant manuscripts, but the internal evaluation guidelines favor the adopted reading of the text.<sup>4</sup>

Evidently in the copying process centuries after the writing of the text the non-Jewish copyists did not understand the very Jewish cultural pattern expressed by these instructions. Essentially the second option given to the beggar was to sit on the floor near the foot prop for a master, a position reserved for slaves. Failure to realize this prompted some copyists to vary the wording in order to try to preserve the obvious negative tones to the options given to the beggar, but without clear understanding of the much earlier Jewish custom of Jewish slave owners taking their slaves with them to the synagogue meetings on Friday evenings. They sat near their owners during the sabbath meeting not to be a participant but to be available to their owner to do whatever things he wanted them to do for him during the meeting.

In the text apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (N-A 27th rev ed) several places where variations occur are listed.<sup>5</sup> Careful examination of each of these reveals efforts either to make



inferior position, here, under my footstool, i. e. on the floor' (Laws, *The Epistle of James*, p. 99). The force of the speaker's words may be lost if the reader does not realize that the poor person is told to sit near the speaker. 'In contrast to the proximity of the rich person ('sit here in a fine place'), the closeness here is even more humbling than being made to stand at a distance; it is a form of mockery' (Johnson, *The Letter of James*, p. 223). In translating the text, therefore, one may choose to make clear that the poor person is told to sit near the speaker. NIV says, "say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,'" and TEV reads, "say to the poor man, 'Stand over there, or sit here on the floor by my feet.'" [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 471.]

<sup>4</sup>"The reading which, in the opinion of a majority of the Committee, best explains the origin of the others is that supported by A C\* Ψ 33 81 614 630 2495 vg syr<sup>al</sup>: Σὸ στῆθι ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου (" 'Stand there' or 'Sit [by my footstool]' "). Obviously secondary (though it supports the position of ἐκεῖ after στῆθι) is ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου ὧδε (P<sup>74vid</sup> & C<sup>2</sup> K P 049 056 0142 most minuscules syr<sup>p</sup> al), where ὧδε creates a better parallelism and expresses explicitly what is otherwise implied—namely, that the place ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου is thought of as nearer the speaker than the place indicated by the command στῆθι ἐκεῖ. Not recognizing this, B and several other witnesses (including 1739) transposed ἐκεῖ so as to produce a parallelism of two (rather than three) references to places." [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 609-10.]

#### <sup>5</sup>Jakobus 2,1

\* 6 7 1-5 614. 630. 1505 al sy sa<sup>mss</sup> bo (different sequences in the listing of the phrase τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης are found.

| 1-5 33 pc vg<sup>mss</sup>

#### Jakobus 2,2

\* την &<sup>2</sup> A P 33. 1739 M

| txt &\* B C Ψ 630. 1505 pc

#### Jakobus 2,3

\* και επιβλ. & A 33 M bo<sup>pt</sup> (και επιβλέψητε replaces επιβλέψητε δὲ)

| txt B C P Ψ 614. 630. 945. 1241. 1505. 1739 pc ff sy<sup>h</sup>

\* αυτω P 1739 m t vg<sup>cl</sup> sy<sup>p</sup> co (αὐτῷ is added after εἶπητε)

| txt P<sup>74vid</sup> & A B C Ψ 33. 81. 614. 630. 1505 pc ff vg<sup>st,ww</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> bo<sup>mss</sup>

\* 2 3 1 B 945. 1241. 1243. 1739 pc ff sa (variations in ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου are found)

| ωδε η καθου εκει 365

| εκει η καθου ωδε P<sup>74vid</sup> & (C<sup>2</sup>) P M sy<sup>p</sup> bo

| txt A (C\*) Ψ 33. 81. 614. 630. 1505 pc vg sy<sup>h</sup>; Cyr

\* επι B<sup>2</sup> P Ψ 33. 323. 614. 630. 945. 1505. 1739 al vg<sup>mss</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> sa (ὑπὸ is replaced with ἐπι)

| txt & A B\* C 049 M lat

\* των ποδων μου (A : σου) 33 (t) vg (μου is replaced with τῶν ποδῶν μου)

| - Ψ

#### Jakobus 2,4

\* και ου P M (the negative οὐ before διεκρίθητε is replaced or modified by alternative readings)

| και 322. 323 pc

| ουχι Ψ

| - B\* 1852 pc ff

| txt & A B<sup>2</sup> C 33. 81. 614. 630. 945. 1241. 1505. 1739 al

#### Jakobus 2,5

the expression clearer to the later readers, or efforts to reflect an interpretive understanding of an expression not well understood by the copyist. No essential shift of meaning is reflected in any of these variations.

Consequently the adopted text reading can be confidently exegeted as the most likely wording of the original text of the document.

**Internal History.** In the time and place markers of the text the issue of wealth and poverty again surfaces as it did in 1:9-11. That study, number four on 1:9-12, contains an extensive background treatment of this issue, particularly as it was connected to early Christianity. Thus it will not be repeated here.

The other markers allude to issues in the first century world but are issues of exegesis more than of background studies. They will be treated in the exegetical section below.

### **Literary:**

Consideration of the literary aspects are important as well.

**Genre:** The entire passage does not contain distinctive literary forms beyond the standard paraenesis that is typical of virtually all of the document. Some of the patterns of arguing a point are distinctively Jewish but do not take on a traceable genre form that sets them apart in connection with similar forms in

\* εν τω κ. 322. 323 pc (vg) (τῷ κόσμῳ is replaced or modified)

| του κοσμου (+ τουτου 61 al) A<sup>2</sup> C<sup>2</sup> P Ψ M ff co?; Prisc

| txt κ A\* B C\* 33. 945. (1241). 1739 pc

\* (Hbr 6,17) επαγγελιας κ\* A (βασιλείας is replaced with ἐπαγγελίας)

### **Jakobus 2,6**

\* ουχι A C<sup>vid</sup> 614. 630. 1505 al sy (οὐχ is replaced with alternatives)

| ουχι και P<sup>74vid</sup> Ψ

| txt κ B C<sup>2</sup> 049. 33. 1739 M latt

\* υμας P<sup>74</sup> κ\* A pc (ὕμῶν is replaced with ὑμᾶς)

| – 623\*

### **Jakobus 2,7**

\* και P<sup>74</sup> A Ψ 33. 81. 614. 630. 1505 al sy<sup>h</sup> (οὐκ is replaced with καὶ)

### **Jakobus 2,8**

\* 1 3 2 C pc (either the sequencing of νόμον τελεῖτε βασιλικὸν is altered or is replaced)

| λογον βασιλικον λαλειτε 1241

\* κατα τας γραφας 322. 323 vg sa<sup>mss</sup> bo (κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν is either replaced or omitted)

| – 623\* pc

### **Jakobus 2,10**

\* –σει P M (τηρήση is replaced by one of these alternatives)

| τελεσει Ψ 81. 945. 1241. (1739). 2298 al

| πληρωσει A 614. 630. 1505. 2464 al

| πληρωσας τηρησει 33

| txt κ B C pc latt

\* –σει P Ψ 1739 M vg<sup>mss</sup> (πταιση is replaced)

| πεση (614). 2495 pc

| txt κ A B C pc lat

\* π. εν. εσται Ψ (γέγονεν πάντων ἔνοχος is replaced)

### **Jakobus 2,11**

\* φονευσ(ης) ... μοιχευσ(ης) C 614. 630. 945. 1241. 1505. 1739. 1852. 2464 al sed \*ου Ψ 614. 630. 1505. 2464 al (μοιχεύσης, εἶπεν καὶ· μὴ φονεύσης is replaced)

\* εγενου P<sup>74</sup> A 33 (μὴ φονεύσης is replaced)

\*<sup>1</sup> αποστατης P<sup>74</sup> A (παραβάτης is replaced)

### **Jakobus 2,12**

\* λογου P<sup>74</sup> (νόμου is replaced)

### **Jakobus 2,13**

\* –χασθω (+ δε A 33. 81) A 33. 81. 323. 945. 1241. 1739<sup>c</sup> al sa (κατακαυχᾶται is replaced by alternative spellings)

| –χασθε C<sup>2</sup> 1739\* sy<sup>p</sup>

| –χεται δε κ<sup>1</sup> al lat sy<sup>h</sup>

| txt κ\*<sup>2</sup> B C<sup>vid</sup> Ψ M vg<sup>mss</sup> bo; Cyr Hes (P illeg.)

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 590-91.]

ancient Jewish literature.

**Context:** The contextual setting for 2:1-13 is illustrated in the outline below. The first of two discussions on the nature of faith, 2:1-13 is closely connected to 2:14-26 that continues the emphasis although with a slightly different thrust. The passage has little direct connection to the preceding passage of 1:19-27, despite a few commentators' efforts to artificially create one.

<b>STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF TEXT</b>		
Of James <sup>6</sup>		
<b>PRAESCRIPTIO</b>		1.1
<b>BODY</b> 1-194	1.2-5.20	
Facing Trials	1-15	1.2-12
God and Temptation	16-24	1.13-18
The Word and Piety	25-37	1.19-27
<b>Faith and Partiality</b>	<b>38-55</b>	<b>2.1-13</b>
Faith and Works	56-72	2.14-26
Controlling the Tongue	73-93	3.1-12
True and False Wisdom	94-102	3.13-18
Solving Divisions	103-133	4.1-10
Criticism	134-140	4.11-12
Leaving God Out	141-146	4.13-17
Danger in Wealth	147-161	5.1-6
Persevering under Trial	162-171	5.7-11
Swearing	172-174	5.12
Reaching Out to God	175-193	5.13-18
Reclaiming the Wayward	194	5.19-20

**Structure:**

The block diagram of the scripture text below in English represents a very literalistic English expression of the original language Greek text in order to preserve as far a possible the grammar structure of the Greek expression, rather than the grammar of the English translation which will always differ from the Greek at certain points.

<sup>2.1</sup> My brothers,

**38 stop trying to possess both prejudice and faith**

in our Lord Jesus Christ  
the Glory

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<sup>6</sup>Taken from Lorin L. Cranford, A Study Manual of James: Greek Text (Fort Worth: Scripta Publications, Inc., 1988), 285. **Statements** indicate core thought expressions in the text as a basis for schematizing the rhetorical structure of the text. These are found in the Study Manual and also at the James Study internet site.

2.2 For  
into your church service  
if there comes a man  
wearing gold rings  
and  
dressed splendidly  
and  
-- there also comes a poverty-stricken man  
dressed shabbily

2.3 and  
you give special notice  
to the man wearing the splendid clothes  
and  
--- say,  
"Sit here in this appropriately good place,"  
and  
to the one in poverty  
--- say,  
"You stand over there,  
or  
--- sit on the floor by my feet,"

39 2.4 **are you not discriminating among yourselves**  
and  
40 **have become critics**  
with evil reasoning?

41 2.5 **Listen,**  
my dear brothers!

42 **Has not God chosen the poverty-stricken of this world**  
to be rich  
by means of faith  
and  
-- -- inheritors  
of the Kingdom  
which He promised to those loving Him?

2.6 But  
43 **you have insulted these in poverty.**

44 **Do not the rich exploit you**  
and  
45 **-- --- --- ---- themselves drag you**  
into court?

46 2.7 **Do not they slander that good name**  
by which you are called?

2.8 However,  
if you keep the royal law from scripture,  
"You will love your neighbor as yourself,"  
47 **you do well;**

2.9 but  
if you show prejudice,  
48 **you commit sin,**  
being convicted by the Law as transgressors.

2.10 For  
 whoever would keep the whole law  
 but  
 stumble in one point  
**49 stands guilty of all.**

2.11 Now  
 He who said,  
 "Do not commit adultery,"  
**50 also said,**  
 "Do not commit murder."

But  
 if you do not commit adultery,  
 but  
 --- -- commit murder,  
**51 you stand as a transgressor of Law.**

**52** 2.12 **So speak**  
 and  
**53 so act**  
 as those going to be judged by the Law of liberty.

2.13 For  
**54 judgment without mercy will be given**  
 to him  
 who did not show mercy;

**55 mercy triumphs over judgment.**

The rhetorical structure of this passage is rather easy to determine -- and becomes the basis not only for 2:1-13 but also for 2:14-26 as well. The author begins with a warning against seeking to combine faith and prejudice (core statement 38 in verse 1). Remember the foundational ancient Jewish axiom of true religion: the vertical (toward God) and the horizontal (toward others) relationships must work in harmony with one another; contradiction between these two negates both. This axiom is then illustrated negatively with the example of economic discrimination in Christian meeting practices (core statements 39 and 40 in verses 2 through 4).

In typical ancient scribal fashion, the author amplifies and defends both his warning and illustration in core statements 41 through 55 (vv. 5-13). This comes in two parts: vv. 5-11 and v. 12-13.

The development of the defense begins with a chiasmic pattern followed sequentially at the informal level: rich man (A, vv. 2a, 3a); poverty-stricken man (B, vv. 2b, 3b); the charge (C, v. 4); the poverty-stricken (B', vv. 5-6a); the wealthy (A', vv. 6b-7). In each segment of the second set (B' and A'), the contrast is between God's treatment of these individuals, and the Christian readers' treatment of these individuals. This provides the validation for the accusation of discrimination leveled in segment C, and comes as the first leg of the defense. This can be charted out as follows:

<b>A</b> vv. 2a, 3a, - rich man	<b>A - B</b> Actions of discrimination described
<b>B</b> vv. 2b, 3b - poverty-stricken man	
<b>C</b> v. 4 - accusation of discrimination	<b>C</b> Charge of discrimination made
<b>B'</b> vv. 5-6a - the poverty-stricken	
<b>A'</b> vv. 6b-7 - the wealthy	<b>B' - A'</b> Validation of the charge

The charge of discrimination rests on the hypocritical nature of the opposite ways of treating these two visitors at church who came from the opposite ends of the economic spectrum. The way they treated the rich visitor wasn't wrong, but in treating the beggar the opposite way, they erred profoundly from scripture principle. The second set of declarations (B' - A') carry the idea forward in a manner typical of the ancient step

parallelism in the Jewish wisdom tradition.

Verses 8-11, the second leg of the defense, attempt to answer an anticipated objection to the first segment of his elaboration in verses 6b-7 regarding treatment of the wealthy. The author senses that an objection may be raised against his views, with a self-justifying assertion that their treatment of the wealthy was according to scripture principle. The author first agrees with the treatment of the wealthy, but reminds his readers of another important scripture principle regarding the poor, which they ignored. The response argues that selective obedience to scripture principles won't work. It's comparable to trying justify murder by saying that no adultery has been committed. That is, one chooses to "love his neighbor" and disregards the divine mandate not to treat the poor with contempt. Both principles stand side by side in God's Torah, and must be equally applied.

Finally, in verse 12, an application of his arguments is made in the form of a dual admonition to speak and act appropriately to what has been set forth. This admonition is reinforced with a warning about eschatological judgment in verse 13.

Although somewhat complex, the way James makes his case reflects very Jewish ways of thinking in the ancient world. It also demonstrates a high skill level with making an argument in ways that only very skilled Jewish scribes would have used. Whether James developed such skills, or whether one of the Hellenistic Jewish Christian editors in Jerusalem possessed such skills, is not clear. The latter option is more likely.

### ***Exegesis of the Text.***

The internal structure of the thought flow, as charted out above, presents several legitimate options for outlining the passage as the basis for exegeting the text. The simplest way is to follow the core elements in the passage as the organizing structure for the interpretation of the text: admonition (v. 1); illustration (vv. 2-4); explanation (vv. 5-13).

#### **1) Admonition, v. 1:**

2.1 Ἀδελφοί μου, μὴ ἐν προσωπολημψίαις ἔχετε τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης;

2 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

In a manner consistent with the entire document, the vocative direct address, Ἀδελφοί μου, *my brothers*, introduces the new topic beginning in verse one.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the pastoral tones affirm friendly relations toward the readers.

The negative command, a prohibition, centers on the present imperative prohibitive command, which by definition demands the cessation of an action already in process.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes, however, in more axiomatic sayings the prohibitive imperative forbids an action to occur as an ongoing process. The literary tone of the admonition in verse one favors the latter, but does not necessarily rule out implications of the former. This becomes James' emphatic way of saying, "If you have done this already, stop it! And don't let it happen at all in the future!" Understanding the intensity of the prohibition here is important to gaining a clear sense of the urgency behind James' command to his readers.

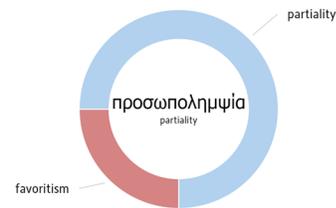
The command stresses μὴ ... ἔχετε, *don't possess*. Posses what? The direct object of the verb is τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης, *faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory*. At initial glance this seems impossible for a Christian leader to demand of his readers. Not to possess a faith commitment to Christ? There has to be something else going on here! Yes there is, this faith commitment is not to be claimed while the individual is living in the posture of ἐν προσωπολημψίαις, *in partiality*. The plural form stresses not just an attitude of discrimination but concrete expressions of discrimination against some people.

<sup>7</sup>"The author begins this new section with his common homiletic introduction 'my brethren' (cf. 1:2) as used in the early church and in Judaism in general (Wessel, 82-85). As is normal in James, the address comes with an imperative, μὴ ... ἔχετε ..." [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 105.]

<sup>8</sup>"On the other hand, present imperatives give a command to do something constantly, to continue to do it; or else a prohibition against its continuance, an interruption of an action already begun. But they are less pressing, less rude, less ruthless, than the aorist." [James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Volume 3: Syntax. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963-), 74-75.]

Now a clear picture emerges. Here is an individual claiming faith in Christ but living his life by showing discrimination against certain people he doesn't like. But the traditional Jewish response would have been, "Doesn't the Bible tell us to hate evil and love the good? Discrimination is good and necessary."

Not the discrimination that James is talking about! The first signal of James' point comes in the word προσωπολημψίας.<sup>9</sup> Translating this word clearly and accurately is almost impossible.<sup>10</sup> In the four uses of this word in the Greek New Testament, three of them refer to God not showing προσωπολημψία, especially in final judgment. The NT writers universally condemn such action by individuals through the use of a variety of terms.<sup>11</sup> By using προσωπολημψία in the plural form



partiality | 3 of 4

Ro 2:11 For God shows no partiality.

Eph 6:9 And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

Col 3:25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.

favoritism | 1 of 4

Jas 2:1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

<sup>9</sup>“This term is not found in either secular Greek or the LXX. It is apparently a creation of the early Christian parenetic tradition to translate the common Hebrew term for favor/favoritism, *nāsiā’ rānīm* (LXX *πρόσωπον λαμβάνειν* or *θαυμάζειν πρόσωπον*) used in the OT in both a positive (1 Sa. 25:35; Mal. 1:8) and a negative sense, particularly in judicial contexts (Dt. 1:17; Lv. 19:15; Ps. 82:2; Pr. 6:35; 18:5). God shows no partiality (Dt. 10:17), so neither should human judges. This theme is repeated in the NT (Gal. 2:6), and the coined expression for favoritism, *προσωπολημψία*, entered the NT tradition first as a characteristic of God’s judgment (Col. 3:25; Eph. 6:9; Rom. 2:11; Acts 10:34; cf. 1 Pet. 1:17) and then (as in the OT) as a mandate for human justice. This meaning naturally continues in church tradition (cf. E. Lohse, TDNT VI, 779–780; Mayor, 78–79).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 105-06.]

<sup>10</sup>Translations of *προσωπολημψίας*:

**English:** if you favor some people more than others (NLT); respect of persons (KJV; ASV; D-R; KJ21); do not take a man’s position into account (BBE); when you show favoritism (CEB); partiality (ESV; ESVUK; LEB; NKJV); treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance (GNT); showing favoritism (HCSB; MOUNCE); an attitude of personal favoritism (NASB); think some people are more important than others (NCV); So treat everyone the same (NIRV); don’t show favoritism (NIV); must not show favoritism (TNIV; NIV1984); show favouritism (NIVUK); your acts of favoritism (NRSV); public opinion influence (Message); in acception of persons [in acception, or taking, of persons] (Wycliffe); make distinctions between one man and another (Wey); snobbery (PHILLIPS).

**Spanish:** una actitud de favoritismo (BdA; NBLH); acepción de personas (BR-V); no puede ir unida a favoritismos ni discriminaciones (CST); no deben hacer discriminaciones entre una persona y otra (DHH); si favorecen más a algunas personas que a otras (NTV); no debe dar lugar a favoritismos (NVI; NVIC); no se consideren mejores que los demás (PDT); no se mezcle con favoritismos (BLP; BLPH); no deben hacer diferencias entre las personas (RVC); sea sin acepción de personas (RVR1960, 1995); en acepción de personas (RVA); así que no deben tratar a unas personas mejor que a otras (TLA).

**German:** Ansehen der Person (Elberfelder 1905); ohne Ansehen der Person! (Elberfelder); Ansehung der Person (LB, 1545, 1912; SCH1951, 2000); frei von allem Ansehen der Person (LB1984); frei von jedem Ansehen der Person (EÜB); vom Rang und Ansehen der Menschen beeindruckt (HOF); Rang und Ansehen eines Menschen nicht zum Kriterium dafür (NGU-DE); ... und dem allein alle Ehre zusteht. Dann dürft ihr aber auch nicht Unterschiede machen, je nachdem, ob ein Mensch in der sozialen Rangordnung hoch oder niedrig steht! (GNB); nicht so, daß Ansehen der Person damit verbunden ist (MB); gehe nicht einher mit einem Verhalten, das die Person ansieht (ZB); wenn ihr bestimmte Menschen bevorzugt (NLB).

**French:** toute acception de personnes (Segond 1910); soit exempte d’acception de personnes (Ostervald); gardez-vous de toutes formes de favoritisme (BDS); soit exempte de tout favoritisme (NEG1979); soit libre de tout favoritisme (SG21).

**Latin:** in personarum acceptione (Vulgate).

<sup>11</sup>**D. Show Favoritism, Prejudice (88.238–88.242)**

**88.238** *προσωπολημπτέω, προσωπολημψία, ας f; λαμβάνω πρόσωπον* (an idiom, literally ‘to accept a face’): to make unjust distinctions between people by treating one person better than another—‘to show favoritism, to be partial, partiality.’

*προσωπολημπτέω*: εἰ δὲ προσωπολημπεῖτε, ἁμαρτίαν ἐργάζεσθε ‘if you treat one person better than another, you are guilty of sin’ Jas 2:9.

*προσωπολημψία*: οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν προσωπολημψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ‘God shows no favoritism’ Ro 2:11.

*λαμβάνω πρόσωπον*: διδάσκεις καὶ οὐ λαμβάνεις πρόσωπον ‘you teach and do not show partiality’ Lk 20:21.

‘To show favoritism’ or ‘to be partial’ is expressed in an idiomatic manner in some languages, for example, ‘to look only upon a person’s face,’ ‘to call a sparrow a chicken,’ or ‘to give one’s clansman the best piece of meat.’

**88.239** *προσωπολήμπτῃς, ου m*: (derivative of *προσωπολημπτέω* ‘to show favoritism,’ 88.238) one who unjustly treats one person better than another—‘one who shows favoritism, a respecter of persons.’ *καταλαμβάνομαι* ὅτι οὐκ ἐστὶν προσωπολήμπτῃς

James not only condemns the attitude but also the expression of it in concrete actions. At the heart of the idea is that one person is inherently better than another and thus deserves favored treatment.

James' denial of the legitimacy of such runs counter to most all of modern society. Unquestionably, it certainly stood in condemnation of most of first century Jewish thinking that saw covenant Jews as God's favored people who were far superior in the eyes of God to all other peoples, and enjoyed a special relationship with God not possible for any non-Jew.<sup>12</sup> Although the idea of discrimination against another person on the basis of their morality, race etc. is supposedly condemned by law in most modern western countries, the practice remains alive and well. Favoritism wrecks homes, work places, sports, and social harmony in many other settings as well.

One must exercise caution at this point though, especially in the modern 'live and let live' mentality. The challenge is distinguishing between the person and his/her behavior. Unquestionably the scriptures affirm both God's wrath -- both temporal and eternal -- on immoral behavior and our duty as His people to abhor it as well. But the OT emphasis on God's concern for every person was heightened by Jesus in the image of God as Heavenly Father. Fundamental to Christianity is the conviction that God loves (ἀγαπεῖ) every person and greatly desires their salvation (e.g., John 3:16). But God also passionately hates their sin and sinning because it separates fallen humanity from fellowship with Him who is utter purity and holiness. The message of early Christianity was that the God who created everything and everyone has also made possible a way of salvation from sin through the atoning death of His Son, Jesus Christ. And that this deliverance is available to absolutely everyone who is willing to surrender himself completely in faith commitment to Jesus Christ. Thus the old cliché remains true and relevant even though hard to implement: *Love the sinner and hate his sin!*

The central point of the admonition is that it is utterly impossible to live ἐν προσωπολημψίαις and at the same time claim τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης. James sees an impossible contradiction between claiming faith and living in discrimination. One cannot be a legitimate Christian in such hypocrisy!

The heart of the tension is creatively expressed by placing the negative μὴ ἐν προσωπολημψίαις and the ultimate positive τῆς δόξης on opposite sides of the imperative verb ἔχετε in the sentence. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ means commitment to Him who stands as the absolute Shekhinah Presence of Almighty God (Hebrew: שכינה).<sup>13</sup> The God of Israel was understood in terms of overpowering Presence whose power

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ὁ θεός 'I realize that God does not show favoritism (in dealing with people)' Ac 10:34.

**88.240 ἀπροσωπολήμπτως:** pertaining to behaving in an unprejudiced manner—'impartially, in an impartial manner.' πατέρα ἐπικαλεῖσθε τὸν ἀπροσωπολήμπτως κρίνοντα κατὰ τὸ ἐκάστου ἔργον 'you address him as Father who judges people impartially according to what each one has done' 1 Pe 1:17.

**88.241 πρόσκλισις, εως f:** a decided and unjustified preference for something or someone—'prejudice, partiality.' διαμαρτύρομαι ... μηδὲν ποιῶν κατὰ πρόσκλισιν 'I call upon you ... not to show prejudice in anything you do' 1 Tm 5:21.

**88.242 ἀδιάκριτος, ον:** pertaining to not being prejudiced—'impartial, free from prejudice.' ἡ δὲ ἄνωθεν σοφία πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή ἐστιν ... ἀδιάκριτος, ἀνυπόκριτος 'but the wisdom from above is first of all pure ... free from prejudice and hypocrisy' Jas 3:17.

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 767.]

<sup>12</sup>For some helpful insight into the history of Jewish attitudes toward non-Jews see "Gentile," *New World Encyclopedia* at <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/gentile>. Jewish attitudes have softened over the centuries, but still contain assumptions of superiority and elitism.

<sup>13</sup>The alternative views of the role τῆς δόξης fail to persuade given both the syntax of the sentence and the meaning of the noun. After listing four possibilities Davids, for example, adopts the fourth option but his subsequent exposition fundamentally supports the third option. He has an agenda to find eschatology under every 'rock' in James, and this weakens his commentary:

But that still leaves the problem of τῆς δόξης and what it modifies (if one does not excise it with 33 429 sa). The following options are possible: (1) τῆς δόξης modifies τὴν πίστιν, yielding either "the glorious faith" or "faith in the glory of ..." This option is taken by 614 and the Peshitta and gains support from other examples of such word order (Acts 4:33) and the connection of the preached gospel with glory in 2 Cor. 4:4. But the reading is unnatural and the emphasis on glory in this context seems to make no sense; the stress in the following verses will be on Christ. (2) Τῆς δόξης modifies κυρίου, meaning "faith in our Lord of glory Jesus Christ." But despite the parallel to "Lord of glory" in 1 Cor. 2:8, where it is applied to Jesus, having been transferred from God (cf. Eth. Enoch 22:14 and Spitta, 4), it is unlikely that James would have expressed himself so awkwardly (but cf. the RSV and perhaps the NEB). (3) Τῆς δόξης is an appositive to Jesus Christ, i.e. "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory" (Hort, 47–48; Laws, 95–97; Mayor, 80–82). Despite the parallel form in Jn. 14:6 ("the Truth") and its later use by

was supreme and when He made Himself known to individuals they were literally overwhelmed. In the New Testament, the perspective is that this divine presence is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ (e.g., John 1:14-18). Thus to claim faith commitment to One who is the very overpowering presence of God and then to discriminate against others is impossible to do, because this awesome God shows no προσωπολημψία, as is made very clear in Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; and Col. 3:25. Were such an individual to genuinely come into the utter purity of the Divine Presence instant condemnation would occur because his προσωπολημψίαις have nullified his claim to τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Thus the claim to faith in such situations is completely phoney! Also note that James stresses faith in Jesus Christ as τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν. Claiming commitment to Jesus as Lord means surrender to His authority. Were this true we would not be discriminating, in line with His practice and nature to not discriminate.

## 2) *Illustration, vv. 2-4:*

2 εἰς εἰσέλθῃ εἰς συναγωγὴν ὑμῶν ἀνὴρ χρυσοδακτύλιος ἐν ἐσθῆτι λαμπρᾷ, εἰσέλθῃ δὲ καὶ πτωχὸς ἐν ῥυπαρᾷ ἐσθῆτι, 3 ἐπιβλέψῃτε δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν φοροῦντα τὴν ἐσθῆτα τὴν λαμπρὰν καὶ εἶπητε· Σὺ κάθου ὧδε καλῶς, καὶ τῷ πτωχῷ εἶπητε· Σὺ στήθῃ ἢ κάθου ἐκεῖ ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου, 4 οὐ διεκρίθητε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἐγένεσθε κριταὶ διαλογισμῶν πονηρῶν;

2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Of the many ways James could have illustrated προσωπολημψία, the one he chose was economically based. Very likely this was one of those areas of προσωπολημψία most relevant to his readers, particularly in Diaspora Judaism where gaining wealth was highly prized by the merchant oriented Jewish population. Added to that was the stream of Jewish tradition in both Judea and Diaspora Judaism by the first century that identified material wealth with divine blessing and poverty with divine wrath. The logic behind this was simple: God blesses the righteous and curses the unrighteous. Wealth is a blessing from God, so the wealthy are righteous and the poor are sinful.

The scene painted by James in the lengthy if-clause (vv. 2-3) has been interpreted different ways by commentators.<sup>14</sup> The narrative does locate the Christian gathering as εἰς συναγωγὴν ὑμῶν, *into your meeting*. Although some see this as a 'church court' with legal actions taking place, this appears to me to be a modern setting not found actually in most Christian denominations of our day even, much less in the ancient world. What is much more likely is that this gathering of believers was a typical meeting in private homes for prayer and study of the Word, in line with what James alludes to in 1:19-27. Given the Jewish thrust of the language such a gathering should not be labeled a 'worship service' since this phrase carries enormous baggage acquired in Christian tradition beginning several centuries later, and not a part of the early Christian pattern of meetings.

Is James describing a hypothetical scene or an actual one? The third class conditional protasis introduced by εἰς, *if*, argues for the hypothetical understanding. But in ancient polemical texts this kind of if-clause

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Justin (Dial. 128.2), there is no instance of such a title being applied to Jesus at this period of history. (4) Τῆς δόξης is a genitive of quality modifying "our Lord Jesus Christ" and yielding "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (Dibelius, 128; Cantinat, 121; Ropes, 187; Mussner, 116; NIV). While awkward, this genitive function has a precedent in 1:25, and it allows one to explain the word order as a qualifying (and amplifying) addition to a standard title, as in Eph. 6:24.

[Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 106-07.]

What he failed to consider in his critique of option three is the clear emphasis of John 1:14-18 which unquestionably exegetes the Word as the Glory in terms of the Shekiah Glory manifested in the tabernacle. And this serves as a conceptual foundation for the entire fourth gospel. In my estimation this is the clear meaning of τῆς δόξης by James.

<sup>14</sup>There are two possibilities of the *mise en scène*. James is either describing the churches gathered for worship, assuming that συναγωγή in v 2 means the meeting place on the (Christian) sabbath, or writing against the background of a church court where the congregation has come together to hear a judicial case (συναγωγή then refers to an aspect of Christian assembly, akin to 1 Cor 6:1-6; cf. Matt 18:15-20, borrowed from the function of the Jewish synagogue as a בית דין, *bēi-dîn*, lit., "house of judgment": see W. Schrage, TDNT 7:840-41; Rost, "Archäologische Bemerkungen." Ward, "Partiality," 92 n.22, has shown that συναγωγή can be taken to refer to a judicial situation.) [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 57.]

often implied a polite accusation over against the first class εἰ based protasis which was more direct and accusatory. Very likely James is assuming that this kind of situation has arisen from time to time in the congregations of his readers, but he is not directly accusing all of them of being guilty of such discrimination.

One should understand the syntax of this single sentence (vv. 2-4) in the Greek text. It is structured as a third class conditional sentence with an extra long protasis (if-clause) in vv. 2-3, and as a rhetorical question in the apodosis, the main clause, in verse 4. The if-clause sets up the scene (vv. 2-3) and the main clause evaluates the scene (v. 4). The rhetorical question structure of the sentence using the negative οὐ with both verbs διεκρίθητε and ἐγένεσθε anticipates complete agreement with James' negative assessment of the scene he painted.

**The visitors:** v. 2. The two characters described as attending this meeting lived on the opposite ends of the economic spectrum of the first century. The rich man is described here in terms of ἀνὴρ χρυσοδακτύλιος<sup>15</sup> ἐν ἐσθῆτι λαμπρᾷ, a gold fingered man in shining clothes, and τὸν φοροῦντα τὴν ἐσθῆτα τὴν λαμπρὰν, the one wearing the shining clothes.<sup>16</sup> Here James does not use either ὁ πλούσιος, the wealthy man, as in 1:11, or οἱ πλούσιοι, the wealthy, as in 5:1. But he does use οἱ πλούσιοι in 2:6 as the group designation out of which this man comes. The description is clear that he is describing an individual of wealth and considerable means.

In contrast, the poor man is called a πτωχὸς ἐν ῥυπαρᾷ ἐσθῆτι, a beggar in filthy clothes. In his explanation in vv. 5-6 the terms τοὺς πτωχοὺς,<sup>17</sup> the poor, and τὸν πτωχόν, the beggar, are used in connection with this

<sup>15</sup>“χρυσοδακτύλιος, cf. Lk. 15:22, also Gen. 38:18, 25, 41:42, Is. 3:21; and see note in Mayor3, p. 83, and “Ring,” in EB, HDB, and Dictt. Antt. for details of the custom of wearing rings.

“For similar description of a rich gentleman, cf. Epictet. i, 22:18 ἤξει τις γέρον πολὺς χρυσοῦς δακτυλίους ἔχων πολλούς, Seneca, Nat. quæst. vii, 31 exornamus anulis digitos, in omni articulo gemmam disponimus.

“χρυσοδακτύλιος is found only here, but is correctly formed, cf. χρυσοῦς in the same sense, χρυσοστέφανος, χρυσοχάλινος, etc.”

[James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 189.]

<sup>16</sup>“The term λαμπρός seems here to refer to elegant and luxurious, ‘fine,’ clothes (cf. Rev. 18:14), but it can also be used of freshness or cleanness (Rev. 15:6) without reference to costliness, and sometimes (Acts 10:30) appears to mean ‘shining.’ Its natural opposite in all these senses is ῥυπαρός, ‘dirty,’ ‘shabby,’ as below, cf. Philo, De Joseph. 20, ἀντὶ ῥυπαρώσεως λαμπρὰν ἐσθῆτα ἀντιδόντες. Mayor gives other instructive references. See also Lex. s. vv. λαμπρός and ῥυπαρός.” [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 189.]

<sup>17</sup>πτωχός, ἢ, ὄν (s. two prec. entries; Hom.+; PPetr III, 36a, 17f; 140a, 1; LXX; TestSol 10:12 C; TestJob; Test12Patr; JosAs 10:13; Philo, Hypoth. f. 1 [Eus., PE 8, 7, 6]; Joseph.; Tat. 6, 2)

**1. pert. to being economically disadvantaged, orig. ‘begging’** (s. πένης for a differentiation betw. the two words; note the juxtaposition in Ps 39:18; 69:6 al.), **dependent on others for support**, but also simply **poor** (as Mod. Gk. φτωχός) χηρά πτωχή **Mk 12:42; cp. vs. 43; Lk 21:3**. Mostly as subst. (Jos., Bell. 5, 570) opp. ὁ πλούσιος one who has more than enough (Pla., Tht. 24, 175a; Maximus Tyr. 1, 9a) **Lk 6:20** (cp. vs. 24); **Rv 13:16**; 1 Cl 38:2; Hs 2:4.—**Mt 26:11; Mk 14:7; Lk 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22; J 12:6, 8; Ro 15:26** (οἱ πτ. τῶν ἀγίων τῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ, part. gen. On the other hand πτωχοί [in the sense of 2]=ἄγιοι: KHoll, SBBerlAk 1921, 937–39 and Ltzm., exc. on Ro 15:25); **2 Cor 6:10** (in wordplay w. πλουτίζειν); **Gal 2:10; Js 2:2f, 6**; B 20:2; D 5:2. οἱ πτ. τῷ κόσμῳ those who are poor in the world's estimation **Js 2:5** (opp. πλούσιοι ἐν πίστει). διδόναι (τοῖς) πτ. **Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 19:8; cp. 18:22; J 13:29**; D 13:4. Pass. **Mt 26:9; Mk 14:5; J 12:5**.

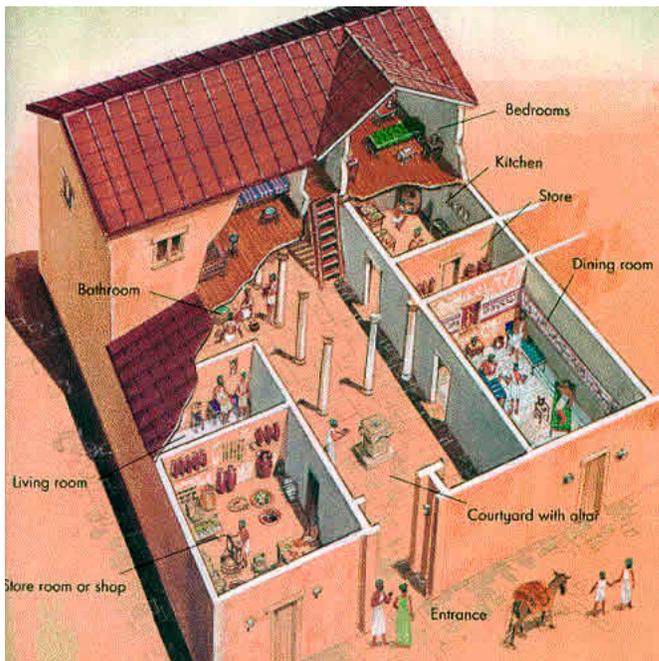
**2. pert. to being thrust on divine resources, poor.** At times the ref. is not only to the unfavorable circumstances of these people from an economic point of view; the thought is also that since they are oppressed and disillusioned they are in special need of God's help, and may be expected to receive it shortly (cp. Od. 6, 207f πρὸς γὰρ Διὸς εἰσιν ἅπαντες ξεινοὶ τε πτωχοὶ τε=all strangers and needy persons are wards of Zeus; LXX; HBrupbacher, D. Beurteilung d. Armut im AT 1924; WSattler, D. Anawim im Zeitalter Jes. Chr.: Jülicher Festschr. 1927, 1–15; A Meyer, D. Rätsel des Jk 1930, 146ff; HBirkeland, ‘Ani u. ‘anāw in den Psalmen ’33; LMarshall, Challenge of NT Ethics ’47, 76f; KSchubert, The Dead Sea Community ’59, 85–88; 137–39; AGelin, The Poor of Yahweh, ’64; FDanker, The Literary Unity of **Mk 14:1–25**: JBL 85, ’66, 467–72; s. πλοῦτος 1). The gospel is preached to them (Is 61:1) **Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18; 7:22**; 1 Cl 52:2 (Ps 68:33); Pol 2:3 (εἶπεν ὁ κύριος διδάσκων).

**3. lacking in spiritual worth, fig. ext. of 1** (Tat. 6, 2 of humans ὁ μὲν πτωχός [in contrast to God]) οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι **Mt 5:3** (cp. 1QM 14:7 𐤇𐤏𐤁𐤁𐤁; s. πνεῦμα 3b and Goodsp., Probs. 16f; EBest, NTS 7, ’60/61, 255–58; SLégasse, NTS 8, ’61/62, 336–45 (Qumran); HBraun, Qumran u. d. NT I, ’66, 13; LKeck, The Poor among the Saints in Jewish Christianity and Qumran, ZNW 57, ’66, 54–78; add. lit. Betz, SM 111). The ‘messenger’ of the church at Laodicea, who says of himself πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα, is termed πτωχός **Rv 3:17**. In 1 Cl 15:6, Ps 11:6 is quoted w. ref. to the situation in the Corinthian church.

second man. His use of πτωχός describing a beggar of extremely limited means may very well be intended to heighten the contrast between the material status of the two men.

One of the interpretive issues that has arisen over time is the spiritual status of these two individuals. Were they outsider visitors at the Christian gathering? Or, were they members of the congregation? The commentators adopting the ‘legal church court’ setting scenario are forced to adopt the latter understanding. And this is a strong argument against such a scenario, since both the nature of the scene described and James’ explanation of it in vv. 5-13 argue strongly that these two individuals were visiting the gathering as non-members.<sup>18</sup>

That visitors would show up for a Christian gathering has been shown to be quite natural. Given the enormously different understandings of personal privacy in the first century world to the modern western world, Christian gatherings in private homes with people walking through the house at will proved to be an effective outreach tool for early Christianity. Typically the meetings were conducted in the courtyard where people would be entering from the street at will, sometimes to conduct business in the store or shop usually located off the courtyard at the front of the home. When an entrance was located on the opposite end of the courtyard -- as was common -- the courtyard frequently served as a shortcut to get from one street to another since ‘blocks’ with no intersecting streets could be quite lengthy.<sup>19</sup> People walking through would discover the gatherings taking place and be curious about what was happening. They would then be invited to join the group in order to learn more about this religious movement called Christianity. Very likely it is such a scene as this that James is envisioning with his illustration.



At this point of the illustration, everything is positive. No problems have yet surfaced.

**The church’s treatment of them:** v. 3. It is not the presence of the two visitors at church that James saw as problematic. Rather it is how the congregation responds to their presence. Serious problems surface here. Here is where προσωποληψία takes place. Guilt falls on how they treated the beggar and contradiction of their treatment of him in comparison to their treatment of the rich man.

**Treatment of the rich man:** ἐπιβλέψατε δὲ ἐπὶ τὸν φοροῦντα τὴν ἐσθήτα τὴν λαμπρὰν καὶ εἶπητε· Σὺ κάθου ὡς καλῶς, if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here,

4. pert. to being extremely inferior in quality, *miserable, shabby* (Dionys. Hal., Comp. Verb. 4 νοήματα; Iren. 2, 33, 5 [Hv I, 380, 2] of God οὐ . . . π. οὐδὲ ἄπορος) of the στοιχεῖα (w. ἀσθενής) Gal 4:9. Of the grace of God πτωχή οὐκ ἐγενήθη did not turn out to be shabby 1 Cor 15:10 v.l. (this is in keeping with the Aristotelian view that exceptional generosity produces exceptional results Aristot., EN 4, 2, 19).—JRoth, The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor etc. diss. Vanderbilt 1994. B. 782; 784. TRE IV s.v. ‘Armut’, 69–121. DELG s.v. πτήσω III. M-M. EDNT. TW. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 896.]

<sup>18</sup>The similar language of Paul in 1 Cor. 14:23 further suggests these were visitors rather than members.

ἐὰν οὖν *συνέλθῃ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη* ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ πάντες λαλῶσιν γλώσσαις, *εἰσέλθωσιν* δὲ ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι, οὐκ ἐροῦσιν ὅτι μαινέσθε;

If, therefore, *the whole church comes together* and all speak in tongues, and *outsiders or unbelievers enter*, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

<sup>19</sup>For a very important and interesting detailed investigation into this, see David L. Balch, *Roman Domestic Art and Early House Churches*, vol. 228 of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008). Also helpful is his “Rich Pompeian Houses, Shops for Rent, and the Huge Apartment Building in Herculaneum as Typical Spaces for Pauline House Churches,” *Journal for the Study of the NT* 27.1 (2004).

please.” Two actions are described in picturesque fashion by James: a vision evaluation, and an oral invitation. In order to assert culpability on the entire congregation, James uses the second person plural form of the verb, rather than singling out a leader as responsible for these actions. Very likely the scenario implies one of the leaders speaking, but he does so in behalf of the entire group whom James holds accountable.

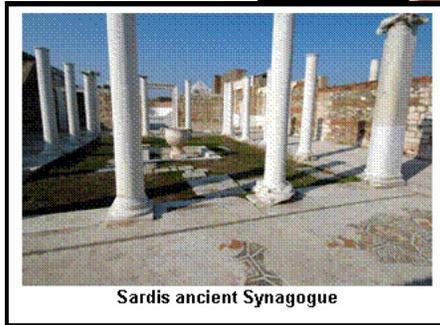


The verb specifying visual action, ἐπιβλέψατε, is intense, especially when followed by the preposition ἐπὶ specifying the object of the visual action.<sup>20</sup> The congregation carefully sized up this man based on his outward appearance, namely the gold rings on his fingers and the luxurious clothes he was wearing. Not being accustomed to having this kind of visitor in their meetings, he really caught their attention.



At this point no guilt is present. Neither the church nor its leaders had done anything wrong or inappropriate.

What their spokesman says to the rich man is also not inappropriate: Σὺ κάθου ὧδε καλῶς. With two possible meanings for the adverb καλῶς, two different translations are possible: 1) you sit here in this good place, or 2) you sit here please.<sup>21</sup> Either translation reflects high level regard for this individual. Likely the first translation is the intended meaning of James.



Sardis ancient Synagogue

The good place in ancient Jewish synagogue life would have been on the front row right in front of the raised platform which the leaders used. One would then assume that in the early Christian assemblies with Jewish influence a similar location would also be implied in James' words.

Even here the church has not incurred any guilt for their actions. To give a guest an honored seat in the meeting would have been entirely appropriate.

**Treatment of the beggar:** καὶ τῷ πτωχῷ εἶπητε· Σὺ στήθι ἢ κάθου ἐκεῖ ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου, to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet.” No close examination of the poor man is needed. His ῥυπαρᾶ ἐσθῆτι, filthy clothes, instantly identify him as a beggar. The problem surfaces in what the church through its spokesman says to this man. The context clearly implies an insult being given to the beggar with these words, but exactly how are they insulting? This bothered copyists over the centuries and resulted in several alternative wordings of the text.<sup>22</sup> The instruction contain two options. The beggar was

<sup>20</sup>“ἐπιβλέπω fut. ἐπιβλέψω,-ομαι LXX; 1 aor. ἐπέβλεψα (TestJud 17:1; Just., D. 19:3 ἐπέβλεψεν for ἐπείδεν [Gen. 4:4]) (Soph., Pla. et al.; LXX; PsSol 18:2; JosAs; ParJer 6:8; EpArist; Jos., Ant. 12, 58; Test12Patr; UPZ 78, 38 [159 B.C.]; Sb 7600, 5 [16 A.D.]).

**1. to look intently, look, gaze** of God ἐν ταῖς ἀβύσσοις look into the depths 1 Cl 59:3 (cp. Sir 16:19; Da 3:55 Theod.) ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, τὸν χεῖμαρρον GJs 18:2 (not pap).—V.I. for ἐπισκέπτομαι GJs 1:4.

**2. to pay close attention to, with implication of obsequiousness, show special respect for, gaze upon Js 2:3.**

**3. to look attentively at, with implication of personal concern for someone, look upon.** Of God's loving care, that looks upon someone or someth. (Ps.-Lucian, Astrol. 20; LXX; cp. Jos., Ant. 1, 20; PGM 13, 621) ἐπὶ τινα 1 Cl 13:4 (Is 66:2); GJs 6:2. ἐπὶ τι: ἐπὶ τὴν ταπεινώσιν upon the humble station Lk 1:48 (cp. 1 Km 1:11; 9:16). Also of Jesus look at i.e. take an interest in ἐπὶ τὸν υἰόν μου take a look at (w. implication to help) Lk 9:38.—M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 368.]

<sup>21</sup>“καλῶς. Usually explained as meaning ‘in a good seat,’ ‘comfortably.’ But the usage does not fully justify this (see Mayor's citations), and some polite idiom in the sense of ‘please,’ ‘pray,’ is to be suspected. In various Greek liturgies the minister's direction to the worshipping congregation, στῶμεν καλῶς, presents the same difficulty and suggests the same explanation. See F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies, Eastern and Western*, vol. i, Oxford, 1896, pp. 43, 49, 383, 471. The Syrian liturgies sometimes merely carry this over, ‘Stōmen kalōs,’ but also render by, ‘Stand we all fairly,’ *ibid.* pp. 72, 74, 104. On the Jewish custom of distinguished places in the synagogue, cf. Mt. 23:6, Mk. 12:39, Lk. 11:43, 20:46, and see “Synagogue,” in EB and HDB.” [James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1916), 190.]

<sup>22</sup>“you stand there: The textual variants reflect confusion on what these directions might signify. One variation has ‘you stand or sit there beneath my footrest’; another, ‘stand here or sit there’; another, ‘stand there or sit here.’ The reading adopted here best

given the choice of standing ἐκεῖ. The background seems somewhat similar to an ancient banquet where invited guests were seated at the banquet table with permission to eat, but non-invited visitors who showed up to see what was happening had to stand in the back of the room away from the tables since they were not allowed to eat any of the food.<sup>23</sup> Their standing to the back of the room visually signaled a lower status for them. They were not included among the friends of the host. But social custom of that time did allow them to show up and watch the invited guests during the banquet. By being instructed to stand ‘there’ which implies an out of the way location in the room distanced from the prime seating offered to the rich man, the congregation was clearly saying to the beggar, “You are not the kind of person we desire in our congregation.”

The second option, κάθου ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου, *sit here by my footstool*, proved to be the hardest to understand in subsequent centuries. Of the seven uses of τὸ ὑποπόδιόν in the New Testament, four of them play off the reference in Ps. 109:1, “*Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool*” (Mt. 22:44; [Mk. 12:36;] Lk. 20:43; Acts 2:35; Heb. 1:13, 10:13. Two more refer to the earth as God’s footstool: Mt. 5:35, Acts 7:49. Only James 2:3 alludes to something literal and used in the synagogue.

What later copyists and commentators seem not to have realized is that ancient Jewish men often took their slaves with them to the Friday evening sabbath service. This was not for the slaves spiritual enrichment. Instead, it was so that if the owner desired something like a drink etc. the slave would be sitting by the footstool where he could immediately respond to the owner’s instructions. Side note: if the preposition ὑπὸ is to be taken strictly literally with the meaning of ‘under,’ then the image along the lines of the earlier Assyrian drawing would be implied, where the slaves were literally underneath a board placed on top of them as a footstool. The significance of this second option given to the beggar is that the church attempts to treat him as a slave with no status in the group at all. Again, this would have been highly insulting to the beggar, who came to the meeting in all likelihood to learn about God and to seek God’s care through His people, called Christians.



Ancient Roman Couch & Footstool  
Metropolitan Museum of Art



Here is where the guilt kicks in gear regarding the congregation.<sup>24</sup> They do not treat the beggar with respect, nor do they treat him in the same way that they did the rich man. Thus two charges are brought against the congregation in the wording of the illustration. This will provide James space for amplification in vv. 5-12.

**The problem: v. 4:** οὐ διεκρίθητε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἐγένεσθε κριταὶ διαλογισμῶν πονηρῶν; *have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?* With a double barreled pair of rhetorical questions James levels serious accusations against the congregation for such actions. They have taken a wholly wrong action and this has put them in the tenuous place of spiritual sinfulness. The inner con-accounts for the variations (Metzger, 680). This first command reverses the concern shown toward the wealthy: rather than being invited to sit in honorable proximity, the poor man is distanced and made to stand.

“*sit below my footrest:* Once more the variants show scribes’ attempts at understanding a situation that eluded them. One variant replaces ‘below’ (hypo) with ‘upon’ (epi). Some scribes recognized an allusion to LXX Ps 109:1, ‘Until I place your enemies beneath the footrest of your feet’ (see Acts 2:35; Heb 1:13; 10:13) and add the words ‘of your feet’ (*tōn podōn sou*). The use of the image in Ps 109:1, as well as in other NT and LXX passages (Ps 98:5; Isa 66:1; Matt 5:35), subordinates one person to another. In contrast to the proximity of the rich person (‘sit here in a fine place’), the closeness here is even more humbling than being made to stand at a distance; it is a form of mockery.”

[Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 223.]

<sup>23</sup>See several episodes during Jesus’ ministry where this social pattern is reflected either in an event or as a point of teaching by Christ: Matt. 23:6; Mk. 12:39; Lk. 20:46; Lk. 5:29 et als.

<sup>24</sup>“It may be conjectured that those (note εἴπητε is plural) who gave the seating instructions probably held some degree of authority in the congregation, though no office such as ‘doorkeeper’ (*ostiarus*, in the later church) is envisaged. Thus, it is not unfair to say that these speakers set the tone for much, but not all (2:4), of the congregation, which took its cue from those in a role of leadership. It might even be that some of these so-called leaders acted as teachers of the congregation. If so, the unfavorable attitude shown toward those of lower social rank is even more deplorable (3:2). James appears to be talking to a congregation rife with practices of discrimination.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 62.]

nectedness of the two questions is signaled by the verb διακρίνω in the first question and the noun κριταὶ in the second, both from the same root stem.

*The first question*, οὐ διεκρίθητε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, has a rich complexity built into it that makes translation difficult. Already in 1:6, James has used διακρίνω to allude to inward mental activity in the sense of doubting, but here the context signals the action centers on an outward action. The δια -- κρίνω, the process of being split into two parts in the verb idea, either by mental action or outward action, is central. By not reasoning properly they have taken two separate actions, one toward the rich man and one toward the beggar, that reflect uncertainty about the teaching of God's Word. One side of that teaching, "Love your neighbor as yourself," (Lev. 19:18) they have applied, but the other side of that divine requirement, "You shall not render an unjust judgment; **you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great:** with justice you shall judge your neighbor" (Lev. 19:15) has been either ignored or rejected by their action. This incompatible contradiction in both actions and reasoning will be soundly condemned by James in his explanation (see below). Here he makes the accusation openly against them.

*The second question*, καὶ ἐγένεσθε κριταὶ διαλογισμῶν πονηρῶν, re-enforces the point of the first. Dibelius is correct in seeing a play on words here: "he intends to employ a paronomasia, or play on words: You have *made distinctions* (διακρίνεσθαι) and you have become *distinguishers* (κριταὶ "judges") with evil motives."<sup>25</sup> James condemns the motivation behind this discriminatory treatment of the two visitors. The desire to play up to the wealthy man is insincere, and the horrible treatment of the beggar is despicable. The church has sit in judgment on these two men but their evil reasoning reveals their unworthiness and sinful actions.

In making these serious accusations against the Christian congregation in his illustration, James reflects continuity with a stream of Jewish thinking found in both the Hebrew Bible and the intertestamental literature. Fair and compassionate treatment of the poor was a long time fundamental tenant of Judaism in the ancient world. It stood as a distinguishing mark of the Jewish people from the surrounding world. What the congregation in the illustration is doing not only betrays its Christian orientation, it seriously compromises its Jewish heritage. With James targeting Jewish Christians in this document, such an accusation had a particularly stinging impact.

The implications for modern Christianity in these accusations are substantial, since we live in an atmosphere, especially in North American Christianity, where playing up to the rich and showing disdain to the poor plays a growing role in church policies in many circles. James' strong condemnation of such does not set well with an affluent Christianity more concerned about luxurious buildings and high powered programs than with the needs of people. Perhaps this could be playing a role in the steady decline of credibility and influence in society by such churches.

### 3) *Explanation, vv. 5-13:*

5 ἀκούσατε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί. οὐχ ὁ θεὸς ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ πλουσίους ἐν πίστει καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας ἧς ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν; 6 ὑμεῖς δὲ ἠτιμάσατε τὸν πτωχόν. οὐχ οἱ πλούσιοι καταδυναστεύουσιν ὑμῶν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλκουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς κριτήρια; 7 οὐκ αὐτοὶ βλασφημοῦσιν τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς; 8 Εἰ μέντοι νόμον τελεῖτε βασιλικὸν κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν, καλῶς ποιεῖτε. 9 εἰ δὲ προσωπολημπτεῖτε, ἀμαρτίαν ἐργάζεσθε, ἐλεγχόμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου ὡς παραβάται. 10 ὅστις γὰρ ὅλον τὸν νόμον τηρήσῃ, πταισῆ δὲ ἐν ἐνί, γέγονεν πάντων ἔνοχος. 11 ὁ γὰρ εἰπὼν· Μὴ μοιχεύσης εἶπεν καὶ· Μὴ φονεύσης· εἰ δὲ οὐ μοιχεύεις φονεύεις δέ, γέγονας παραβάτης νόμου. 12 οὕτως λαλεῖτε καὶ οὕτως ποιεῖτε ὡς διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας μέλλοντες κρίνεσθαι. 13 ἢ γὰρ κρίσις ἀνέλεος τῷ μὴ ποιήσαντι ἔλεος· κατακαυχᾶται ἔλεος κρίσεως.

5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? 8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be without

<sup>25</sup>Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 137.

mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

How James amplifies both the admonition and the illustration throws considerable light on the meaning of these first two elements. In the Literary Structure proposal above, the chiasmic pattern of rich: poor // accusations // poor: rich (AB//C//b'a') helps clarify how James went about explaining his meaning with the admonition and the accompanying illustration. The accusations in v. 4 stand as the center of this part of the text and is followed by the two part amplification in vv. 5-11. The poor: rich sequence in vv. 5-7 stand as the other side of the chiasmus, the b'a' section. The second part in vv. 8-11 attempts to address a perceived objection claiming scriptural basis for its objection.

The beginning of the explanation section is signaled by ἀκούσατε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί, *Listen my beloved brothers*.<sup>26</sup> This is somewhat in the manner similar to ἴστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοί in 1:19 that signaled the beginning of a new topic. Again the combination of the imperative verb with the vocative case direct address reflects James' tendency to shift directions, as consistently done throughout the document.

**Treatment of the beggar.** vv. 5-6a, οὐχ ὁ θεὸς ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ κόσμῳ πλουσίους ἐν πίστει καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας ἧς ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν; ὑμεῖς δὲ ἠτιμάσατε τὸν πτωχόν. That the chapter and verse divisions have no connection to the divine inspiration of the contents of the Bible is clearly indicated here with the horrible verse division between these two statements that clearly are interconnected.

In this first leg of explanation James positions God and the discriminating congregation on opposite sides from one another. He frames God's positive stance toward the poor in terms of a rhetorical question that assumes complete agreement from his readers: yes, God has clearly done this! No arguments!

What has God done? James sees it from a Christian perspective, rather than from a purely Jewish one: *Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?* Two things God has already done: the poor have been chosen by God to be rich in faith, and they have become heirs of His kingdom.

The divine choosing of the poor sets off a contrast. In the eyes of the world (τῷ κόσμῳ) these people are τοὺς πτωχοὺς, *the beggars*. But through God's choosing them, they are to become πλουσίους ἐν πίστει καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας, *rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom*. God saw something in these people that the church failed to see. He therefore valued and honored them by choosing them for salvation; ἐξελέξατο is overwhelmingly a term of divine salvation in NT usage.<sup>27</sup> God takes the initiative in selecting us to become

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<sup>26</sup>“James commands the attention of his ‘brothers,’ i.e., fellow believers, but including ‘sisters’ if the evidence of 2:15 is weighed along with the relevance of Rahab in 2:25 (as Burchard, “Gemeinde,” 321, notes)—though James is somewhat removed from the equality stated in Gal 3:28. The use of ‘dear,’ ‘beloved’ (ἀγαπητοί) underlines James’ affection for his readers.” [Ralph P. Martin, vol. 48, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 64.]

<sup>27</sup>ἐκλέγομαι impf. ἐξελεγόμην; fut. ἐκλέξομαι LXX; 1 aor. ἐξελεξάμην. Pass. 2 aor. ἐξελέγην; pf. pass. ἐκλέλεγμαι, ptc. ἐκλελεγμένος **Lk 9:35** (Hdt.+; ins, pap, LXX; En 6:2; 7:1; TestJob 9:4; Test12Patr; JosAs cod. A [p. 68, 20 and 71:15 Bat.]; EpArist; Joseph., Just.; Mel., P. 83, 622 [B]); the act. does not occur in our lit.)

**1. to pick out someone or someth., choose** (for oneself) τινά (τι) someone (someth.) w. indication of that from which the selection is made τινὰ ἐκ τινος (Isocr. 9, 58; 2 Km 24:12; 2 Ch 33:7; Sir 45:4; Demetr.: 722 Fgm. 1, 16 and 18 Jac.; ἐκ τῶν γραφῶν Iren. 1, 19, 1 [Harv. I 175, 9; of the ‘eclecticism’ of dissidents]) choose someone fr. among a number πάντων 1 Cl 59:3; of two **Ac 1:24**. ὑμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου **J 15:19**. ἐξ αὐτῶν Hs 9, 9, 3. ἐκλεξαμένους ἄνδρας ἐξ αὐτῶν πέμψαι to choose men fr. among them and to send them **Ac 15:22**, cp. 25. For this τινὰ ἀπό τινος (Dt 14:2; Sir 45:16; Just. D. 27, 1 ἀπὸ τῶν προφητικῶν λόγων): ἀπ’ αὐτῶν δώδεκα twelve of them **Lk 6:13**.

**2. to make a choice in accordance with significant preference, select someone/someth. for oneself**, w. simple acc.

a. w. acc. of pers. (Jo 2:16; Bar 3:27; 1 Macc 10:32; Jos., Ant. 7, 372 God chooses Solomon; Just., D. 17, 1 ἄνδρας; Mel., P. 83 [Bodm.] σέ): **Mk 13:20; J 13:18; 15:16**; GEb 19, 85 and 34, 60. Jesus 1 Cl 64. The twelve **J 6:70**; PtK 3 p. 15, 17. The apostles **Ac 1:2**; B 5:9. Stephen **Ac 6:5**. A faithful slave Hs 5, 2, 2. Of God: the ancestors (as God's own) **Ac 13:17** (oft. LXX, cp. Dt 4:37; 10:15).

b. w. acc. of thing (X., Mem. 1, 6, 14; Pla., Leg. 2, 670d, Tim. p. 24c; Demosth. 18, 261 et al.; PMagd 29, 4 [III B.C.] = PEnteux 66, 4 τ. βέλτιστον τόπον; Is 40:20; 1 Macc 7:37; 2 Ch 35:19d; Jos., Bell. 2, 149 τόπου; Just., A I, 43, 7 τὰ καλά; Hippol., Ref. 5, 9, 20): B 21:1; good part **Lk 10:42**; places of honor **14:7**; a good place Hv 3, 1, 3; a fast B 3:1, 3 (Is 58:5f).

c. w. indication of the purpose for which the choice is made:

α. εἰς τι for someth. (Ps 32:12; Just., D. 67, 2 ἐκλεγῆναι εἰς Χριστόν) eternal life Hv 4, 3, 5. εἰς τὸ ἱερατεῦν to be priest 1 Cl 43:4.

β. w. ἵνα foll. **1 Cor 1:27f**.

His children. In this expression is some Jewish echoes regarding God's selection of Egyptian slaves to become His chosen people.<sup>28</sup> This also echoes Paul's reminder to the Corinthians including both Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:26-29):

26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

26 Βλέπετε γὰρ τὴν κλήσιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί, οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς· 27 ἀλλὰ τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τοὺς σοφοὺς, καὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνῃ τὰ ἰσχυρά, 28 καὶ τὰ ἀγενῆ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἐξουθενημένα ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ, 29 ὅπως μὴ καυχῆσθαι πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>29</sup>

The term πλουσίους ἐν πίστει, *rich in faith*, underscores His purpose in choosing the poor, an emphasis James alluded to in 1:9-11. Those without much of this world's goods find it much easier to surrender in faith commitment to Christ, than do the wealthy with a tendency to trust in their material wealth (cf. Matt. 19:24). Both the crowds who followed Jesus and the early converts to Christianity came mostly from the peasant and slave social classes in the first century world. Christianity was a 'populist' movement, not a religion of the wealthy in its beginnings. Historically, it has always been at its strongest when its focus was on the masses and at its weakest when it favored the wealthy. The great spiritual awakenings over the centuries have been mass movements, rather than intellectually centered renewals focused on the upper classes.

The second term which stands parallel to πλουσίους ἐν πίστει is καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας ἧς ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν, *and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those loving Him*.<sup>30</sup> Here James reflects a central theme of the teaching of Jesus, along with other NT writers.<sup>31</sup> This is the only reference in

γ. w. inf. foll. (1 Ch 15:2; 28:5; 1 Esdr 5:1) ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους he has chosen us that we might be holy **Eph 1:4**. Without obj. ἐν ὑμῖν ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός διὰ τοῦ στόματός μου ἀκοῦσαι in your presence God chose that (they) were to hear through my mouth **Ac 15:7**. W. ellipsis of the inf. ἐξελέξατο τοὺς πτωχοὺς (sc. εἶναι) πλουσίους (God) chose the poor that they might be rich **Js 2:5**.

δ. abs.: ἐκλελεγμένος chosen of Jesus, as God's child **Lk 9:35** (cp. ὃν ὁ πατήρ ... ἐξελέξατο διὰ λόγου εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν αὐτοῦ Iren. 1, 15, 3 [Harv. I 150, 6]; ἀγαπητός is found in the parallels **Mt 17:5**; **Mk 9:7**, and in Lk as v.l.; it = ἐκλελεγμένος also Vett. Val. 17, 2). Of Christians 1 Cl 50:7; cp. Pol 1:1. Of the church I Eph ins.

**3. gather in a crop, gather** ἐξ ἀκανθῶν ἐκλέγονται σῦκα **Lk 6:44 D**; s. συλλέγω.—HRowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, '50.—DELG s.v. λέγω. M-M s.v. ἐκλέγω. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 305-06.]

<sup>28c</sup>The words echo the biblical election (eklegein) of Israel as God's people (Num 16:5; Deut 4:37; 7:7; LXX Pss 32:12; 134:4; Isa 14:1; 43:10), which also carries over to the NT (Acts 13:17) and is applied specifically to the messianic community (Mark 13:20; John 15:16; Eph 1:4).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 224.]

<sup>29c</sup>The concept of election was deeply rooted in both Jewish and Christian thought. God chose Israel (Dt. 4:37; 7:7; 14:2) and thus the Jews thought of themselves as God's elect (at times to their own detriment; cf. L. Coenen, DNTT I, 539). Likewise God has chosen groups for his new people (Acts 13:17; 15:7; 1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 1:4), and one of the favored groups is 'the poor.' This election is based on the OT passages in which God is said to care for the poor (e.g. Dt. 16:3; 26:7; cf. Kuschke, 31–57) and the resulting fact that 'poor' became a term for the pious (cf. van der Ploeg, 263–270), not only in the OT, but also in the intertestamental and rabbinic literature (Sir. 10:22–24; Pss. Sol. 5; Eth. Enoch 108:7–15; 1QpHab 12:3, 6, 10; 1QH 3:25; Gn. Rab. 71:1 on 29:31; Ex. Rab. 31:13 on 22:24; Lv. Rab. 13:4 on 35:6; cf. E. Bammel, TDNT VI, 895–898; Percy, 45–70, 73–81). This background naturally stands behind Jesus' declaration of the election of the poor (Lk. 6:20), and Jesus' declaration is certainly behind James's statement.” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 111.]

<sup>30c</sup>The poor are the elect heirs of the kingdom of God. James identified this prominent concept of salvation, election, with this class of humanity. Out of their poverty God brings glory in the bestowal of his heavenly riches. Poor believers are not the only ones who will be saved, but they, above all, demonstrate God's gracious saving work. Their love (cf. 1:12) is typically the most striking. Clearly not all who are poor are lovers of God. Clearly those who love God who are not poor to some degree impoverish themselves when they joyfully give their possessions away to the poor. Certainly there are those who truly love God who are not poor. But spiritual transformation of the rich will not produce the glory that will be produced by the transformation of the poor into the kingdom.” [Kurt A. Richardson, vol. 36, *James*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 115.]

<sup>31c</sup>*Heirs of the kingdom*: the materially poor people are pictured as spiritually rich (see 1:9–11) because, unlike the materially

James to the Kingdom of God, but the phrase ἥς ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν echoes τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν, [the crown which is life that He promised to those loving Him](#), in 1:12. It is thus clear that eternal life equals entering the Kingdom of God in James' thinking. Note the present tense ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν, [loving Him](#), in both expressions. The present tense participle in Greek stresses ongoing action rather than one time occurrence or even random occurrence. To love God is a life long commitment that is expressed consistently over the span of a spiritual journey throughout life. Those who love God in this way become participants in God's rule and reign not just in this life, but throughout the unceasing ages of eternity. James reminds his readers that most of those loving God like this come from the ranks of the poor.

The stark contrast comes in how the church treated the beggar in their gathering: ὑμεῖς δὲ ἠτιμάσατε τὸν πτωχόν, [but you dishonored the beggar](#). By shifting from the plural τοὺς πτωχοὺς back to the singular τὸν πτωχόν, James unquestionably signals an allusion to the beggar in his illustration (vv. 2-3). He characterizes what they had said to the beggar, σὺ στηθὶ ἐκεῖ ἢ κάθου ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου, [you stand there or sit by my footstool](#), now as ὑμεῖς ἠτιμάσατε, [you dishonored](#).<sup>32</sup> The stating of the subject ὑμεῖς, already implicit in the verb ending, only heightens emphasis on the subject. These people claiming faith commitment to the Christ who is the very Presence of Almighty God have taken an action diametrically opposed to God's action toward the poor! No wonder that James had no confidence in the legitimacy of their faith claim.

**Treatment of the rich man:** vv. 6b-7, οὐχ οἱ πλούσιοι καταδυναστεύουσιν ὑμῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλκουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς κριτήρια; οὐκ αὐτοὶ βλασφημοῦσιν τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς; [Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?](#) When James turns back to address the issue of the church's treatment of the rich man, he does it by raising a couple of rhetorical questions, again structured to expect complete agreement from his readers. The two points speak to persecution of Christians by the rich and slanderous blasphemy of the name of Christ by the rich. Notice that he does the same thing here as in the discussion about the beggar.<sup>33</sup> He speaks generally regarding the rich, οἱ πλούσιοι, not specifically about the rich man visiting the Christian meeting. But in the background stands the rich man as a visitor who also comes out of this larger social class of people.

The first question that James raises alludes to persecution of Christians by the wealthy: οὐχ οἱ πλούσιοι καταδυναστεύουσιν ὑμῶν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλκουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς κριτήρια; The wealthy as a class of Jewish people are both καταδυναστεύουσιν and ἔλκουσιν the believing communities. The question naturally arises as to what was the motivation of this oppression of believers by the rich. It is unlikely that such was driven by religious principles. The Jewish rich tended to identify with the Sadducees who generally cared less about religious principles and heretics. The Sadducees opposed Jesus, not because of what He taught but primarily because His teaching undermined the economic streams of resources for the temple in Jerusalem. Had His teaching not threatened their control of the temple and only infuriated the Pharisees, they would have cheered Him on since the Pharisees were their bitter enemies.

Most likely the oppression of believers by the rich was driven by money in some way or another, and not by religious scruples. Some commentators see this oppression stemming from the poverty of most rich people, they have a place in the kingdom of God. That the poor are to receive the kingdom is a concept that appears often in Jesus' teachings (compare Luke 6:20; Matt 5:3). Jesus also uses the expressions 'to inherit the kingdom' (Matt 25:34) and 'to inherit eternal life' (Mark 10:17); and Paul too writes about inheriting the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:21). Heirs are persons who are appointed to receive an inheritance. To be heirs is therefore 'to possess' or 'to inherit' something from the father. This idea is brought out by a number of modern translations; for example, 'to possess the Kingdom' (TEV, so also Gspd, REB), 'to enter into possession of the kingdom' (Brc), 'to inherit the realm' (Mft), and 'a share in the kingdom' (CEV)."<sup>32</sup> [I-Jin Loh and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Letter from James*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 68.]

<sup>32</sup>James gives a distinctive turn to the honor/shame axis of values characteristic of the Greco-Roman world. The term *atimazein* means 'to shame/hold in dishonor' (Plato, *Phaedo* 107B; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1,6,20; see Mark 12:4; Luke 20:11; John 8:49; Acts 5:41). The favoritism shown toward the rich has turned out to be a rejection of the honor God has shown to the poor. As a result, these wicked judges have rejected God's measure of what is truly honorable. James continues the outlook of Prov 14:21: 'The one who dishonors the poor commits sin' (see also Prov 22:22). Once more, Paul shares the same outlook, although he uses different language. With reference to the inequities practiced at the Lord's Supper in Corinth, he accuses those who have eaten while others have gone hungry, 'you have despised the assembly of God and you have shamed those who have nothing' (1 Cor 11:22)."<sup>33</sup> [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 225.]

<sup>33</sup>Regarding the discussion about the beggar in vv. 5b-6a, James spoke first generally about the poor, πλουσίους, before he alluded directly to the beggar τὸν πτωχόν in v. 6a. Here he only treats the rich as a general class in his critique.

lievers in the same pattern of oppression by the rich of the poor that is consistently condemned by the prophets in the Old Testament.<sup>34</sup> The first verb καταδυναστεύω centers on exploitation of individuals.<sup>35</sup> The second verb ἔλκω, *drag*, especially with the prepositional phrase εἰς κριτήρια, *into courts*, defines the nature of the exploitation as connected to legal processes. The picture painted is of the wealthy using the legal system to exploit believers. If there is a legitimate connection between this statement and what James says about the wealthy in 5:1-6, then the picture becomes clearer.

5 Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλοῦσοι, κλαύσατε ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς τάλαιπυρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις. 2 ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν, 3 ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατίωται καὶ ὁ ἰὸς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῖν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ. ἔθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις. **4 ἰδοὺ ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν κράζει, καὶ αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὦτα κυρίου σαβαὼθ εἰσεληλύθασιν.** 5 ἐτρυφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε, ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς, 6 **κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον**, οὐκ ἀντιπάσσειται ὑμῖν.

5 Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. 2 Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. **4 Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.** 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 **You have condemned and murdered the righteous one**, who does not resist you.

Verses four and six define a picture of wealthy landowners not paying proper wages to those who worked in their fields and then of the using the court system to attack any workers who protested this fraud. Historically such practices became ultimately a major source of the so-called Zealot revolt in the middle 60s after simmering for a long period of time prior to this centered mainly in Galilee, according to the Jewish historical Josephus. But in the patronage system that dominated the ancient world, and especially the Roman empire at the beginning of the Christian era, oppression of the poor by powerfully wealthy people was commonplace, and would have provided James with ample illustration materials.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the physical harm coming from the wealthy class James adds the charge of religious blasphemy against them in the second question: οὐκ αὐτοὶ βλασφημοῦσιν τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς: **Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?** The action of βλασφημοῦσιν is

<sup>34</sup>“The rich oppress the church; no distinction is made between oppression because they are poor and oppression because they are Christian. Nor should there be, for the charge stems from the OT tradition of the oppression of the poor by the wealthy. This is precisely the context in which the verb καταδυναστεύω frequently appears in the LXX (Je. 7:6; 22:3; Ezk. 18:7, 12, 16; 22:7, 29; Am. 4:1; 8:4; Hab. 1:4; Zc. 7:10; Mal. 3:5; Wis. 2:10; 17:2). The verb, meaning ‘exploit’ or ‘oppress,’ appears only twice in the NT (here and Acts 10:38). The old charge against the rich is still true (and it will be made more specific in 5:4).” [Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 112-13.]

<sup>35</sup>καταδυναστεύω fut. 3 pl. καταδυναστεύουσιν Ezk 45:8; 1 aor. καταδυνάστευσα LXX, pass. inf. καταδυναστευθῆναι PsSol 17:41 (δυναστεύω ‘hold power’; X.+; PPetr III, 36 (a) verso, 2 [pass.]; POxy 67, 15 [act.]; LXX; PsSol 17:41; EpArist; Jos., Ant. 12, 30) **oppress, exploit, dominate** τινός someone (Diod S 13, 73; EpArist 148 v.l.) of exploitation by the rich (oft. in LXX of outrages against the poor, widows, and orphans) **Js 2:6**; Dg 10:5.—Of the tyrannical rule of the devil (Plut., Mor. 367d of the evil spirit Typhon) Hm 12, 5, 1f; pass. **be dominated Ac 10:38** (ὑπό τινος as Strabo 6, 2, 4 p. 270; Horapollo 1, 6).—DELG s.v. δύναιμι. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 516.]

<sup>36</sup>“The verb *katadynasteuein* means to oppress or exploit someone (Xenophon, Symposium 5:8). It is used in the LXX for the oppression of the Israelites by the Egyptians (Exod 1:13) and of the righteous by the unjust (Wis 2:10; 15:14; Hab 1:4), and especially of the poor by the wealthy (Amos 4:1; 8:4; Zech 7:10; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 18:12; 22:7, 29). James shifts to the third person to speak of these oppressors (Vouga, 75). With the identification of the ‘rich’ as ‘those who oppress you,’ James has tapped into a rich vein of the Jewish tradition (Dibelius, 39–45). Already in the prophets and the psalms, the division between the righteous and the sinners tended to be aligned with that between the powerless poor and powerful wealthy (Johnson, Sharing Possessions, 79–116). In the intertestamental literature the polarity, if anything, became sharper (see, e.g., 1 Enoch 94:6–7; 96:8; 97:8–10; 98:1–16; 100:6; Pss. Sol. 1:4–8; 5:2; 10:6; 15:1; 1QH 1:36; 2:32, 34; 3:25; 5:13; 14:3; 17:22; 1QM 11:9; 13:14; 1QS 2:24; 3:8; 4:3; 5:3; 5:25; 11:1; CD 6:16; 14:14; 4QpH 8:8–12; 9:4–5; 12:3–10; 4QpPs37 2:8–9; 3:10–11) and is reflected also in the sayings of Jesus (see note on 2:5).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 225-26.]

the idea of slandering by making false statements.<sup>37</sup> One should note a translation issue that relates to the English language: one slanders people but blasphemes deity, although the two English verbs refer to the same action. As a powerful class of people James accuses the rich of blaspheming the name given to believers in his day. Literally, it is τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, *the good name that has been called upon you*. Whether implied in this is the name of God or of Christ is not clear, although the more formal designation of the names of Jesus in 2:1 most likely is implied here. Were James implying the name of God, Jewish laws were very clear: such an action required execution of the one blaspheming God's name.<sup>38</sup> His point is that the rich were guilty of a sin that called for their execution in the laws of God in the Torah.

But in the example of the rich man visiting church the believers had played up to such a sinner who came from a class of people not only physically harming believers but also who demeaned and slandered the very name of the God these believers worshiped and served. Such actions by the believers did not make sense. They were buttering up the rich guy in the hopes to materially benefit from his wealth. Yet, the reality was that the group of people he represented were the sources of oppression and exploitation of believers, not to mention how they treated the founder of their religious movement, Jesus Christ.

**Correctly applying the Law of God:** vv. 8-11. The second part of James' explanation addresses two interconnected matters. First (v. 8), James anticipates that some of his readers will vigorously object to

<sup>37</sup>**βλασφημέω** impf. ἐβλασφήμουν; 1 aor. ἐβλασφήμησα. Pass.: 1 fut. βλασφημηθήσομαι; 1 aor. ἐβλασφημήθην (s. next two entries; Pla. et al.; PSI 298, 14; LXX; Alex., Ep. XVI 2f; TestJob 16:7; AssMos Fgm. j p. 67 Denis; Philo, Joseph., Just.) prim. 'to demean through speech', an esp. sensitive matter in an honor-shame oriented society. **to speak in a disrespectful way that demeans, denigrates, maligns**

**a. in relation to humans slander, revile, defame** (Isocr. 10, 45 w. λοιδορεῖν) τινά someone (Socrat., Ep. 22, 2; Chion, Ep. 7, 1 ἡμᾶς) μηδένα (Philo, Spec. Leg. 4, 197; Jos., Vi. 232; Hippol., Ref. 7, 32, 6) speak evil of **Tit 3:2**. Pass. **Ro 3:8; 1 Cor 4:13** v.l.; **10:30** (ὑπὲρ οὗ = ὑπ. τούτου ὑπ. οὗ); Dg 5:14. Abs. **Ac 13:45; 18:6**.

**b. in relation to transcendent or associated entities slander, revile, defame, speak irreverently/impiously/disrespectfully of or about**

α. a Gr-Rom. deity (for Gr-Rom. attitudes respecting deities Ps.-Pla., Alc. II 149c; Diod S 2, 21, 7; Philo, Spec. Leg. 1, 53; Jos., Ant. 4, 207, C. Apion 2, 237 [s. βλασφημία by]; Orig., C. Cels. 8, 43, 27; s. be below and at the very end of the entry) τὴν θεὸν ἡμῶν **Ac 19:37**.

β. God in Israelite/Christian tradition (4 Km 19:4) τὸν θεόν (cp. Philo, Fuga 84b; Jos., Ant. 4, 202; 6, 183; Hippol., Ref. 7, 11) Rv 16:11, 21. Abs. (2 Macc 10:34; 12:14; Orig., C. Cels. 8, 43, 31; Hippol., Ref. 1, Pr. 2) Mt 9:3; 26:65 (JKennard, Jr., ZNW 53, '62, 25–51); **Mk 2:7; J 10:36; Ac 26:11; 1 Ti 1:20; 1 Pt 4:4** (the last 3 passages may be interpr. as not referring exclusively to God). βλασφημία, ὅσα ἐὰν βλασφημήσωσιν whatever impious slanders they utter **Mk 3:28** (cp. Pla., Leg. 7, 800c βλ. βλασφημίαν; Tob 1:18 S).

γ. God's name **Ro 2:24** (contrast the approval expressed OGI 339, 30); 2 Cl 13:2a; ITr 8:2b (all three Is 52:5); **1 Ti 6:1; Rv 13:6; 16:9**; 2 Cl 13:1, 2b (quot. of unknown orig.), 4; Hs 6, 2, 3 v.l.

δ. God's Spirit εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον **Mk 3:29; Lk 12:10**. On impious slander of the Holy Spirit s. WWeber, ZWT 52, 1910, 320–41; HWindisch, in Porter-Bacon Festschr. 1928, 218–21; EBuonaiuti, Ricerche Religiose 6, 1930, 481–91; OEvans, ET 68, '57, 240–44; GFitzer, TZ 13, '57, 161–82; JWilliams, NTS 12, '65, 75–77; CColpe, JJeremias Festschr., '70, 63–79.

ε. Christ **Mt 27:39; Mk 15:29; Lk 23:39**; ἕτερα πολλά β. **22:65** (cp. Vett. Val. 67, 20 πολλά βλασφημήσει θεοῦς). τὸν κύριον Hs 8, 6, 4; 8, 8, 2; 9, 19, 3; ISm 5:2; εἰς τ. κύριον Hv 2, 2, 2; Hs 6, 2, 4; τὸν βασιλέα μου MPol 9:3.—The name of Christ **Js 2:7**.

ζ. angels δόξας β. **2 Pt 2:10; Jd 8**. Angels are also meant in ὅσα οὐκ οἶδασιν β. **Jd 10** and ἐν οἷς ἀγνοοῦσιν β. defaming where they have no knowledge **2 Pt 2:12** (B-D-F §152, 1; Rob. 473). S. δόξα 4.

η. things that constitute the significant possessions of Christians τὴν ὁδὸν τ. δικαιοσύνης ApcPt 7:22; cp. **2 Pt 2:2**. Here and elsewh. pass. ὁ λόγος τ. θεοῦ **Tit 2:5**; ὑμῶν τὸ ἀγαθόν **Ro 14:16**; τὸ ἐν θεῷ πλῆθος ITr 8:2a; τὸ ὄνομα ὑμῶν μεγάλως β. 1 Cl 1:1; τὸν νόμον τοῦ κυρίου Hs 8, 6, 2.—In our lit. β. is used w. the acc. of the pers. or thing (Plut.; Appian [Nägeli 44]; Vett. Val. [s. be above]; Philo [s. ba and bβ above]; Joseph. [s. ba and bβ above]; 4 Km 19:22) or w. εἰς and acc. (Demosth. 51, 3; Philo, Mos. 2, 206; Jos., Bell. 2, 406. Specif. εἰς θεοῦς and the like, Pla., Rep. 2 p. 381e; Vett. Val. 44, 4; 58, 12; Philo, Fuga 84a; Jos., Ant. 8, 392; Da 3:96; Bel 8 Theod.)—S. βλασφημία end. DELG. M-M. s.v.-ος. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 178.]

<sup>38</sup>For blaspheming the name of God (called *kalos* in LXX Ps 134:3), see 1 Tim 6:1; Rev 13:6; 16:9; 2 Clem. 13:1; in the case of Rom 2:24, 2 Clem. 13:2a, and Ign. Tral. 8:2, the text of Isa 52:5 lies in the background: 'Because of you, my name is blasphemed among the nations.' For blasphemy explicitly directed toward Christians, see Acts 26:11; 1 Tim 1:13; Justin, Dialogue with Trypho 117.<sup>27</sup> [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 226.]

his accusations being made against them. The μέντοι in verse eight signals this. Second (vv. 9-11), James demolishes the objection by condemning the selective obedience to the Law of God represented in the contradictory treatment of the two visitors to church in his illustration.

*The assumed objection* to James' accusations center in the claim to be obeying the 'royal Law' by the favored treatment given to the rich man at church. He expects some to say, "But James, we are obeying God. In our treatment of the rich visitor we showed proper love for our neighbor. And this in spite of him coming from people who persecute us! That should count for something!"

In the first class conditional sentence structure used in verse eight, James assumes that his readers are keeping the royal Law: Εἰ μέντοι νόμον τελεῖτε βασιλικὸν κατὰ τὴν γραφήν. He does not question this at all. The phrase royal law can mean several possible things, but the sense here is to stress its heightened importance.<sup>39</sup> What law is James referring to? The syntax of the Greek sentence makes this explicitly clear, although several commentators find ways of ignoring the syntax of the Greek. First, it is a law found in scripture: κατὰ τὴν γραφήν. That is, it was dreamed up by some heretic, nor does it originate from some pagan philosopher of that world. It is embedded into sacred scripture as an expression of God's will for His people. Second, James quotes the scripture: ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτὸν, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. This is a verbatim quote of the LXX version of Leviticus 19:18c. Clearly the special importance of this text for early Christianity is mirrored in the multiple citation of it: Mt. 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 13:31; Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14. Thus not only was it an important part of the Jewish religious tradition, Jesus had put His stamp of approval on it several times in His teachings as well as Paul.<sup>40</sup>

The apodosis of the sentence affirms the propriety of observing this royal law: καλῶς ποιεῖτε, *you are doing well*. Very likely there's a touch of irony in James' words here with the use of καλῶς, since they had used the same word in offering the good seat to the rich man at church (cf. v. 3). To show considerate treatment of the rich man at church, as an expression of obedience to an important scripture principle, was indeed proper and commendable.

*The selective obedience to the Law* comes into stinging condemnation by James in vv. 9-11. James proceeds to blast his readers guilty of favoritism with their violation of sacred scripture, in fact just a couple of verses prior to the royal law in Leviticus. In Lev. 19:15, that same sacred scripture demanded equal treatment for the poor and the powerful: οὐ λήμψη πρόσωπον πτωχοῦ οὐδὲ θαυμάσεις πρόσωπον δυνάστου, *you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great*. In verse 9 James reminds his readers that showing favoritism is a sin before God according this Lev. 19:15: εἰ δὲ προσωπολημπτεῖτε, ἁμαρτίαν ἐργάζεσθε ἐλεγχόμενοι ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου ὡς παραβάται, *But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors*. One should note that James' προσωπολημπτεῖτε is the same meaning as θαυμάσεις πρόσωπον δυνάστου in Lev. 19:15. Thus with blunt and powerful expression he reaffirms his accusation of favoritism, now based on scripture principle, and accuses his readers not only of committing sin, but of standing convicted as sinners by the very Law of God they were appealing to in order to justify their favoritism.

In defense (γὰρ) of this James offers an interesting explanation in vv. 10-11. First he states a general principle (v. 10); and then he illustrates what he means by a clearer example (v. 11). The general principle is simply: ὅστις γὰρ ὄλον τὸν νόμον τηρήσῃ πταισῆ δὲ ἐν ἐνί, γέγονεν πάντων ἔνοχος, *For whoever keeps*

<sup>39</sup>“The adjective *basilikos* can refer to that which is ‘kingly’ in character or excellence (Plato, *Minos* 317C; Epictetus, *Discourses* IV, 6, 20; Philo, *The Posterity and Exile of Cain* 101–2; 4 *Macc* 14:2) or simply because the ‘king’ does it, as in the ‘royal custom’ (Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 1,3,18). The adjective can also be attached to that which belongs to the king in any fashion, such as the road used by the king (*Num* 20:17), or the king’s country (*Acts* 12:20), or the king’s officers (*John* 4:46, 49), or clothing (*Esth* 8:15; *Acts* 12:21), or commandments (see *entolai basilikai* in 2 *Macc* 3:13; 4:25). In the present case, the close proximity to *basileia* in 2:5 suggests a reading like ‘law of the kingdom’ (contra Ropes, 199; with Windisch, 15; see Xenophon, *Oec.* 14,7), meaning the law articulated or ratified by Jesus ‘the glorious Lord,’ whose name ‘is invoked over them’ (2:7). Although a number of commentators think that James restricts the ‘royal law’ to Lev 19:18 (Hort, 54; Martin, 67; *Laws*, 108–9; Mussner, 124), those who think that James means all of the law (given explicit expression by Lev 19:18) are probably correct (Davids, 114; Marty, 82; Dibelius, 144; Cantinat, 132).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 230.]

<sup>40</sup>Additionally, Leviticus chapter 19 seems to have special significance for James since he uses principles contained in it numerous times in the document: “This is a verbatim citation from LXX Lev 19:18c. There will follow in 2:9 an allusion also to Lev 19:15. Other allusions to Leviticus 19 in James are found in 4:11 (Lev 19:16); 5:4 (Lev 19:13); 5:9 (Lev 19:18b); 5:12 (Lev 19:12) and 5:20 (Lev 19:17b) (Johnson, “Use of Leviticus 19”).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 231.]

the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. Essentially he expresses a strong stance against selective obedience to the principles of God. Jewish religion in the first century touted its commitment to obey the Law of God, in contrast to the rest of the world. This has an echo from James' objectors who claimed to keep the royal Law, Lev. 19:18. But the "one point" where they stumbled, πταισῆ δὲ ἐν ἐνί, was revealed in Lev. 19:15. Their assumed obedience was actually disobedience, because it was an act of prohibited favoritism. Thus such a failure represented failure to keep God's Law, and they were accountable for obeying the entire law (γένονεν πάντων ἔνοχος), not just the part they liked. Paul reflects a somewhat similar conviction, although he is dealing with a different topic in Gal. 3:10,

“Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν· γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά.

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.”

The point of commonality between Paul and James is regarding selective obedience to God's Law.<sup>41</sup> To obey some and ignore other principles will not work spiritually. And this is true whether the motivation is highly legalistic as with Gal. 3:10, or more genuine as with Jas. 2:10. Put in modern terms, obeying God is not a cafeteria selection process where one chooses to obey what appeals to him, and can ignore what does not appeal. James takes his readers to task at this very point.<sup>42</sup> If it was convenient to appeal to the better known royal law, and convenient to ignore the prohibition against favoritism in the same scripture text.

In verse 11, in order to make the logic of his argument even clearer James turns to two separate principles in the Decalogue, that part of divine Law considered basic and foundational to all the rest. He sets up his point first as a reminder that the same God who prohibited adultery also prohibited murder: ὁ γὰρ εἰπὼν μὴ μοιχεύσης εἶπεν καὶ μὴ φονεύσης. These very two well known principles of the Decalogue would be readily understandable to his readers, and no one would be inclined to argue with the legitimacy of either of these laws. The second statement is an obvious conclusion to the first statement: εἰ δὲ οὐ μοιχεύεις φονεύεις δέ, γέγονας παραβάτης νόμου. If one doesn't commit adultery but does commit murder, he stands as a transgressor of divine Law. No Jew in the first century would argue with such a conclusion.

James' point in his example is to show that the same principle applies to Lev. 19:18 and 15. God put both principles in force as divine Law. If one doesn't violate one, but does violate the other he stands convicted by Law as a transgressor. That is he has committed sin by violating one of God's laws. Thus their favoritism of the rich man along with their reprehensible treatment of the poor man stands unquestionable as an act of sin. And the accusations leveled at the church in verse four holds up as proven to be correct. The assumed objections to his accusations are invalid and inappropriate.

**Application:** vv. 12-13. The final subunit comes to make an application to what has been said to his readers; the Οὕτως clearly signals this as an adverb of manner. And it is repeated with each of the two imperative verbs in order to heighten the emphasis.

James admonishes his readers to both speak and act in accordance with the insights he has just given them: Οὕτως λαλεῖτε καὶ οὕτως ποιεῖτε. But another dynamic comes into the picture as Christians speaking and acting in correct manner to their faith commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. The eschatological final judgment now enters the picture: ὡς διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας μέλλοντες κρίνεσθαι. Their speaking and acting should be guided by the reality of facing divine accountability on the day of judgement by God Himself.<sup>43</sup> His

<sup>41</sup>“James' focus is on the genuine fulfillment of the law of love in its scriptural context. Yet Paul's statement as well as James' points to a widespread conviction that since the commandments all came from God, all require obedience. For similar passages, see b.Hor. 8b; b.Shab. 70b; b.Yeb. 47b; T.Ash 2:5–10; 1QS 8:16; Philo, Allegorical Laws 3:241; 4 Macc 5:20; Matt 5:18–19; 23:23. In his Epistula 167 (PL 33:733–42), Augustine discusses the apparent similarity of James' statement to the Stoic principle on the unity of virtue and vice (see Marty, 85; Boyle, 611–17).” [Luke Timothy Johnson, vol. 37A, *The Letter of James: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 232.]

<sup>42</sup>“The argument, ‘To infringe one command is to infringe them all,’ enunciated in v. 10, can also be found in rabbinic writings. Thus, ‘If he do all but omit one, he is guilty of all severally,’ is a dictum attributed to rabbi Johanan (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 70B). The Midrash Bemidbar Rabban (9.15) on Num 5:14 claims that to commit adultery involves breaking not one but all ten commandments.” [Marie E. Isaacs, *Reading Hebrews and James: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2002), 199.]

<sup>43</sup>“Belief in the final judgment is another mark of theological background for James's writing. The reality that believers stand before God in the judgment receives more and more attention as the letter progresses (3:1; 4:11f.; 5:5, 9, 12).” [Kurt A. Richardson, vol. 36, *James*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 124.]

expression μέλλοντες κρίνεσθαι, [going to be judged](#), highlights the absolute certainty of that judgment even more than a future tense verb would have.

But also important is James' reference to the standard that God will use in doing that judging: διὰ νόμου ἐλευθερίας, [by a Law of liberty](#). Already in 1:25 he has labeled the Gospel as a νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας, [a perfect law of liberty](#). Why the shift from the Torah of Moses to the Gospel of Jesus as the divine standard of judgment? The Torah only prescribed what to do and not to do; it made no provision for helping the person adhere to its rules. The Gospel contains the same essential foundational rules, but God in the provision made possible through Christ has given believers His Spirit with abundant resources for obeying as well as for knowing God's will. Thus the believer in committing sin has far less justification for such than the legalistic Jew. Both should know better. But the believer is failing to utilize the massive resources that God has provided to insure obedience to His will. This simply adds culpability to the sin of a believer.

In order to add strength to his admonitions James add a defense (γὰρ) in verse 13: ἡ γὰρ κρίσις ἀνέλκος τῷ μὴ ποιήσαντι ἔλεος· κατακαυχᾶται ἔλεος κρίσεως. The first segment is very Jewish and simply asserts that the one not showing mercy (i.e., to the beggar) in this life will not receive divine mercy on the Day of Judgment.<sup>44</sup> Jesus made a similar point very clear in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew:

**5:7.** μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.

[Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy](#)

**6:12.** καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν·

[And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors](#)

**6:14-15.** 14 Ἐὰν γὰρ ἀφήτε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν, ἀφήσει καὶ ὑμῖν ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος· 15 ἐὰν δὲ μὴ ἀφήτε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, οὐδὲ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἀφήσει τὰ παραπτώματα ὑμῶν.

[14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; 15 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.](#)

The clear assumption is that the saving grace of God received in conversion does make a life transforming difference in the life of the believer. And this difference will be reflected in how that believer treats other people. And if that treatment does not reflect the grace of God being present, the likelihood is that this grace of God has not been given entrance into the person's life. And this reality will clearly come to light in final judgment under the intense light of God's thorough evaluation of the behavior of the Christian.

The second statement of James' defense also re-enforces this divine principle, but from the positive angle: κατακαυχᾶται ἔλεος κρίσεως. What can get the believer successfully through (κατακαυχᾶται) divine judgment (κρίσεως)? By the believer showing mercy (ἔλεος) to others in this life as a reflection of a genuine faith commitment to Christ (cf. 2:1). This is the only possible understanding of this statement consistent with the context.<sup>45</sup> What God will expect to see on Judgment Day is the record of a life that has treated other people according to His will. Failure for this to surface in final judgment will produce divine wrath, rather than divine mercy according to the same principles set forth by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup>James described the nature of the second kind of judgment that condemns for every offense as 'judgment without mercy.'<sup>39</sup> To anyone who has not 'acted mercifully,'<sup>40</sup> no mercy will be shown. To those who show mercy, that kind of merciless judgment is swallowed up, as it were, by mercy. What was declared in the previous verse is based on the principle in this verse. Love and mercy define the 'law of freedom.' Rejecting this liberating law means falling under judgment of the whole law.

"A play on words is evident: judgment without mercy on those who have shown no mercy. James supplied the opposite case from the words of Jesus' beatitude that promises mercy to the merciful (Matt 5:7). As in the parable of the unmerciful servant who was shown mercy but did not show mercy to his fellow servant (cf. Matt 18:25-35), James's merciless hearers committed their acts in face of God's mercy. In Jesus' parable the act of mercy pertained to lack of money and the forgiving of debt. Receiving mercy obligates the recipient to show mercy. Although Jesus warned against performing acts of righteousness publicly for human praise, he did not mean that those acts were optional. The greatest act of mercy toward the poor—almsgiving (Matt 6:1-4)—is mandatory, as Jesus' words make clear: 'When you give to the needy ...' Jesus' command contains no conditional 'if' about giving money to the needy. What becomes apparent here is the inter connectedness between fairness toward the poor, neighbor love, and the principle of receiving and showing mercy."

[Kurt A. Richardson, vol. 36, *James*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 125.]

<sup>45</sup>The alternative sometimes proposed is so ludicrous as to hardly be worth mentioning: God's mercy will ultimately prevail over His judging on that day, so that our sins will not ultimately matter. Not only is this based on a perverted understanding of divine grace and mercy, it runs counter to everything James has been arguing throughout this entire section. It unquestionably is contradicted by Jesus' teachings in the Sermon.

<sup>46</sup>The prohibition of showing favoritism (2:1) implies the problem of a hard-heartedness that will finally be rooted out by

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

The implications of 2:1-13 for contemporary Christianity are enormous! At the heart of the issue for James and thus for us is the connection between our faith commitment to Jesus Christ and how we treat other people. When our claim to love Jesus does not issue in a loving others, that claim is bogus and false. The matter of proper treatment of others emerging from genuine faith means an unwillingness to show favoritism to any individual or group of individuals. We treat all people fairly and based on the same guidelines that God Himself follows. Failure to do this reflects the lack of the saving presence of Christ in our life and will surely be brought to light on the Day of Judgment with disastrous consequences.

Built into this responsibility is a commitment to God's Word and a stance of obeying all that it tells us to do as God's will. Selective obedience of only those things we like, and ignoring of what we don't like will spell serious trouble for us.

This teaching of James is not that difficult to understanding theoretically. But implementing it into our daily life and relationships with others is the huge challenge. But we must never forget that God has saved us not by the Torah but through the Law of liberty that sets us free from the stranglehold that sin has over human life. And in the coming of God's Spirit into our lives in conversion we have been given all the needed resources to live the way this scripture directs. And that God's final evaluation of our lives on Judgment Day will take this provision of resources into account regarding how well we lived by these principles.

1. Who is the Jesus that is the object of your faith commitment?
2. How does faith in Christ link itself to not showing partiality in your treatment of other people?
3. What are some of the ways you are tempted to show favoritism to people around you?
4. Why is showing favoritism wrong, according to James?
5. Are you preparing yourself daily to face God in final judgment?

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the judging function of the law of God. The importance of mercy in human relationships is so essential because mercy is a direct indicator of repentance toward God. Although sinners are right to amend their ways, to cease sinning and to make restitution where necessary, nothing is comparable to showing mercy.”

[Kurt A. Richardson, vol. 36, *James*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 125-26.]