

The Image of God

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[0 : 00] Alright, are you all ready? Matt came in Sunday school and he was trying to make sure we had everything arranged for the baptism and all. And he said, you do have a short sermon. I said, no, haven't you ever heard?

The never-ending sermon. Alright, you need to do me a favor because I'm not going to... Well, I just need you to open up a Bible.

Chapter 2 of James. We're going to look at the... I'm going to sign the first 13 verses. We're going to look at the idea. We may not get through every 13th of the verses, but we'll get the idea.

I think James has got something really important for us to hear. You know, James is a very practical book. What he's doing in this book is...

I know sometimes we read it and we go, boy, it's just disjointed. It's jumped from here to there to here to there to everywhere. But it's not. Actually, it's very well structured. It's just that we don't pay attention sometimes to the flow of ideas in it.

[1 : 04] But it was designed to be a very practical letter telling us how to live the life of a Christian. He's saying, here's some things.

If you're a Christian, you claim Christ. If you're a follower of Christ, here's some things you need to pay attention to. That mark that life. Now, again, you have to be careful because if you just take what James says and you do it outwardly, you've missed the point.

Because all the things he tells us to do outwardly should be rooted and sourced and powered by what? The inward life we have in the Spirit.

A newborn life filled with the Spirit. And we're living it out. Not because it's a requirement. You know, you could sit down probably and write out, here are the rules for Christian living.

And it's one, two, three. And today we get the one about don't show partiality. You know, never show partiality. And you go, I'm trying real hard not to show partiality. You know, I had to do that because I'm a Christian.

[2 : 09] And the answer is no, that's not the way it's supposed to work. You don't show partiality because you have Christ living within you. And as he expresses himself outwardly, he shows the same love and character that is his through you.

That's a whole different way of doing things. Now that I've got my sermon, I can sit down. Let's read James 2, verses 1 through 13.

And it goes like this. And I'm reading out of the New English. It says, My brothers and sisters, do not show prejudice, if you want to. Yours probably says partiality.

If you possess faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if someone comes into your assembly wearing a gold ring and fine clothing, and a poor person enters in filthy clothes, do you pay attention to the ones who find me dressed and say, You sit here in the good place.

And to the poor person, you stand over there. Or you can sit on the floor. If so, have you not made distinctions amongst yourselves? And become judges with evil motives?

[3 : 21] Listen, my dear brothers and sisters. Did not God choose the poor of the world to be rich in faith? And heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?

But you have dishonored the poor. Are not the rich oppressing you and dragging you into courts? Do they not blaspheme the good name of the one you belong to? But if you fulfill the royal law as expressed in this scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

You are doing well. But if you show prejudice or partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as violators. For the one who obeys the whole law but fails in one point becomes guilty of it all.

For he who says, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. Now, if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you will become a violator of the law. Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law that gives freedom.

For judgment is merciless for the one who shows no mercy, but mercy triumphs over judgment. All right. He doesn't pull punches.

[4 : 30] He just, There it is. Lays it out there. In this case, it's partiality or prejudice. He says, Do not show prejudice or partiality if you possess faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, I could do a show of hands. How many of you claim Jesus Christ? You have faith in Jesus Christ. And you raise your hand. Okay. Now, leave them up. How many of you have ever showed partiality or prejudice? Oh, my goodness.

We do it all the time. Why? Because that's the way our society is organized. But here, James is telling us, as believers, as Christians, if we possess faith in Christ, we're not to do that.

We're not to show partiality or be prejudiced against anybody. Now, the word partiality shows that we show favor over, for one over another. prejudiced against anybody.

We judge others by some standard or feature or grouping they belong to. You know, right now, this nation is judging each other. If you're a Republican, you're a fascist.

[5 : 34] And if you're a Democrat, you have to be a socialist. I mean, they're going, they don't know me. How do they know that? Well, well, well, who do you vote for?

Well, that's pretty poor. In this election, I go, flip a coin? We're going to lose either way. I think that's another issue. We won't talk about that today.

In James' example, he gives us this of a rich, well-to-do person and a poor person. Now, think about that. Think about that. If someone, by the way, we have visitors today.

If someone comes in, dressed to the nines, now, we don't wear suits. We used to back in the day, but I used to wear ties. You walk in, if someone walked in a suit all dressed up and you recognize it as a fancy suit and you looked at their shoes and they're new and you looked in the parking lot and they're driving a SUV Cadillac thing there and you go, woo-hoo, this guy's got it.

And then, we had this guy come in one time. I don't know if you all remember him. We had a guy, came in long, scraggly hair, wearing a tank top, tattoos all over him and he looked like he hadn't bathed.

[6 : 53] You remember that guy? He sat right over there where Mark is. Which one would you go talk to? Which one would you be interested in having join the church?

The guy with the tank top. Both of them. Both of them. Yeah. What I'm saying is that it's pretty normal to go, wow, this is a pretty, we need to make sure we take care of him.

On the other hand, this other guy, wow, he's just a little strange. Remember Ronnie? Ronnie was one of those persons you had to be willing to approach because he was not visibly approachable.

but he was one of the friendliest, kindest persons I've ever met. When you got to talking to him, you got past the parents, you go, wow, Ronnie's a great guy.

If he can just stay out of trouble. Well, here, here, James says, you got to be careful. Don't treat the well-to-do with deference and respect just because of their appearance of wealth or well-being.

[8 : 03] don't treat them differently than the poor, especially if they appear poor. We got to be really careful about how we approach people.

You know, I'm going to sort of jump to the quick. Why? Why do we have to be careful? What difference does it make?

He says that you dishonor God. How do you dishonor God by showing someone preference over somebody else? You're just doing what's natural. How's that wrong?

Judging. You are judging. And there's a scripture that says by what you judge is how you're going to be judged.

I think James does us a favor. He says there's a royal law and even tells us what it is. A royal law that we're violating.

[9 : 11] Go to the next slide, Mark. Yeah, there are two of them up there. I put two references. One of them is a little bit different than the other but they both had it in there.

Remember when Jesus was talking to the rich young man and he came to him and said, hey, how do I get eternal life? How do I, you know, gain that? And Jesus says, well, keep the commandments.

And he says, well, I've done that since I was a little tyke. You know, and he says, basically he says, well, this is what he quotes. He says, but if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.

And the guy says, which ones? And he says, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false witness, honor your mother and father and love your neighbor as yourself. Now the young man went away because he also said, then, well, I've done that.

He said, well, then sell everything you got and give it to the poor. That's an interesting idea. He said, I kept them. I love my neighbor as myself, but I'm a rich man. And Jesus says, well, let's prove it.

[10 : 13] How do you prove your love for your neighbor? He said, sell all you got and give it to the poor. Those are your neighbors. And the miniature man went away.

And you notice that two of the things James talks about, actually three of them, are in that verse that Jesus said, do not commit adultery, do not murder, love your neighbor. That's why I kept that one.

The second one is a little more clear. That's Matthew 22. It says, Teacher, which commandment of the law is the greatest? And Jesus said to him, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments. So when we say, when we're starting to give deference or preference to someone who appears to be more influential, richer, whatever you want to say, are we loving them the same as we love the person that we don't give up to?

Are you? If I ignore you when you come in and I, or I treat you like, you go over there and I'm going to go over here and enjoy this company because this guy, you know, am I honoring, am I loving you?

[11 : 37] First of all, that's the first question. Am I loving you? And the answer is, not really. And I'm probably not even loving the other guy, the rich guy.

Why? I'm fawning all over him, but that isn't love. And I'm ignoring you or treating you in less than a way you should be treated, and that's not love.

So I broke the law. Now, why, I think we broke, when we do that, we've broke both laws. Why? I'm going to tell you something that I, that's very important.

Next slide, Mark. This is Genesis 1.7. And it says, God created, and it says humankind up there, but man and woman, in his own image.

In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. Now, what other animal, creature, did God create in his image?

[12 : 42] None. Why did he create it in his image? By the way, that makes us image bearers. Human beings are image bearers. We bear the image of God wherever we go.

Now, with the fall, of course, that's gotten distorted and sort of messed up. It's like Paul saying, I'm looking in the mirror. Didn't we? We can see there's some glimmer of God in there, the image of God, but it's kind of messed up.

Christians, on the other hand, what happens when we become a Christian? When we accept Christ and we are reborn, what happens? We become new creatures in Christ.

We're now supposed to, that image is restored, sort of the now, not yet. We're in the process, but it is restored. We now have the Spirit living in us.

What's the purpose of the Spirit in us? To project God's glory and character out. And if I don't bear his image in a way that projects his character and his love and his, all that out, what am I doing?

[13 : 49] What's that called? A three-letter word? Sin. Sin. We need to look at each other, Christian and non-Christian, as image bearers.

Are those unsaved image bearers important to God? Yes. Yes. Why? Because he created them.

Remember Psalm 139? He lived in the womb, knew my part, she put me together. God loves them enough that he made them who they are.

Now, sin and all that stuff is tearing that all apart, trying to shred it, because guess what? Man doesn't want to be made in the image of God. Man wants to be made in the image of man.

So they try to deny that image of God. But God says, no, no, no. I made you in my image. And I give you dignity. And when you treat someone with less than that love, your neighbor type of love, you're bringing that dignity into question.

[15 : 07] You're saying, no, you're not that dignified person that God made. You're less. And in fact, that goes the other way. When you look at that rich person or that well-to-do person or that influential person or that person you're trying to get the favor of, you're saying, oh no, your dignity is much more than what God gave you.

Don't you understand? You're greater. We're studying Daniel on my Sunday school class. One of the kings, the Greek guys that took over after Alexander named himself Epiphanes.

Aristarchus Epiphanes. He did it to himself. You know what Epiphany means? It means magnificent. So here we have Aristarchus the Magnificent. And see, when we do that to the rich people, we're saying, don't you understand?

You're not just Joe. You're Joe the Magnificent. And I just love you. But when we have the poor person, we go, what are you? Have you gone?

We deny the dignity that God gave him. I don't like the system I got here for this.

[16 : 18] We deny that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God. Well, now I've screwed up my whole sermon, but that's alright.

Let me find a good place. Alright. We are becoming what He is. Do you know that? That's what it says. What Christ is, we will be.

We are becoming like Christ. That's the whole goal of our earth and existence is to become like Christ. And if He loves everyone, I mean, who did He die for?

Oh no, I thought it was only those of higher status and dignity. No, He says, I died for everyone. And who did He actually seek out to help the most?

The poor. The helpless. The broken. The sick. He had mercy on them. Did He have much mercy on the rich and the well-to-do?

[17 : 26] Not a whole lot. He was always rebuking them. Why? Because they thought they had it all together. But the poor knew they didn't. That's why James can say the poor are rich in faith.

Why? They need faith. How do they make it from sunup to sundown without faith that their meal is going to be provided, that their health is going to be good enough, that things are going to go the way they need to go so that they can live at all?

Think about the rich. What do they think about from sunup to sundown? Money. Money. How can I get more? What can I do with what I've got? What am I going to do today?

Their favorite thing is to buy stuff. Or to do things that make them look better. They're always building themselves up. They don't need God. They've got money.

By the way, that's our problem. We have to be careful because we Americans are pretty well off. And a lot of times we really rest on the security of our income and our medical insurance and our whatever and say, yeah, I'll trust God for the big things, but the little things, I got this guy.

[18 : 41] Don't worry about it. And then what happens? You get thyroid cancer. Or prostate cancer. Or asthma, like Janet has.

Or I have to have a heart transplant. Or you hit a deer. Think about that. What do you do then? We panic.

Why? Because we haven't built up a relationship where we're trusting God for the big things and the little things. We're trusting ourselves and our resources are stretched. What do I do now? Now here's the other problem for us Christians.

Especially today in our society. We're told to love our neighbor. Now our neighbor is whoever you come into contact with. It is not the person that lives next door. It could be, but it's bigger than that.

Some of my least favorite neighbors are clerks in stores, by the way. Especially when they're pushing a call-in order cart down the aisle and they're not, you're in our wake and they're doing their job and you're just there shopping.

[20 : 02] Alright. We have to be really careful because, think about that. The broken image of God in our general and unsafe population is really, really distorted.

Think about it. Think of some examples of broken image of God in our society today. People, and how they treat people. You know, we are really good at classifying people into categories.

We have male and female. There are those that don't treat them as equals. Do they both have God's image in them? Yes.

Yes. And who am I to say that one's better than the other? Are they loved by God equally? Yes. All right. Well, let's make it a little more challenging.

Let's say we got a gay person and a straight person. Who do I love? Oh, you go, you go, you go, you do, you do, you do, you do, you do, you do, you do, you do, you do, you do, you do, you do, this is hard because you know how I feel about that.

[21 : 14] You love them equally. Why? John's image. They're God's image. Now, it's confused. God made a male and female and they're sort of confused on that, but that's sin.

Who is not a sinner in here? So, if we sin, they can sin too. They don't know any better. All right.

Citizen, illegal immigrant. Oh, that's a big issue in our country. Now, I'm not saying that we don't need to enforce our border laws and all that, but if they're here, who's our neighbor?

In fact, in the Old Testament, it says, in the law, it says, treat the sojourner in your land well. Why? Because they need help.

So, if they're here, what's our responsibility? To love them. Now, how you do that, I don't, you know, you have to figure that out.

[22 : 28] But they're image bearers. Race. That's a big deal. I mean, every time certain political people get into the trouble, they always pull the race card.

hoping to divide us, you know, to tear us up and all that. Does God care if you're brown, white, black, or purple?

No. He doesn't care. Why? He loves us all. Do we have a choice, then, to choose who we love based on race or ethnic background?

No, we don't. Why? They're made in the image of God. They're due a level of dignity and love and respect just because of that.

And we need to love them. We don't have to condone their sin, but we need to remember that we all share that image that God made us in.

[23 : 38] And that everyone has the potential either to be a Christian or already are a Christian. And how are they going to know the love of God if they don't see it in you? And how are they going to see the love of God in you if you're not treating Him in a way that says you are a valuable human being made in the image of God?

And I respect that. I think that's what James is telling us. You've got to remember, too, then he just ends that passage with this.

Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law that gives freedom. For judgment... That's the last slide, by the way. For judgment is merciless for the one who has shown no mercy, but mercy triumphs over judgment.

You want mercy? When I get there before the throne of Christ and he says, okay, we're going to look at everything you've done and I'm going to claim the mercy of Christ and he's going to say, what mercy?

Did you show mercy? Remember the parable of the king who called in his servants and forgave the one huge debt he could never, ever pay and he turned around and went out and then berated one of the others and had him thrown in jail until he paid his debt of just a few pounds?

[25 : 10] And the king found out and called him back and threw him and his family in jail and said, you'll be there until you pay back every bit of it which was impossible. Do you want to go before the throne of Christ and say, I claim your mercy and he's going to look at you and go, did you show mercy?

Were you merciful? Did you show love to those that didn't deserve it? Did you love the least of these? And if the answer is, well, Lord, you know, I didn't do that very well and he's going to say, then I'm not going to do this very well either.

You want mercy? Show mercy. Why? Mercy triumphs over judgment. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you and your word have given us something to think about.

Lord, I know I haven't said everything that needs to be said and I know that I probably didn't say it all right, but I just pray that you can work in our hearts and in our fellowship that we might more fully understand, grasp, and practice what you're telling us and see it.

Thank you, Lord, that you made us in your image that you have given us a purpose and you've given us a place that you love us. Help us to love others in the same way and have the purpose to project your character and your love to others that they may see you in all of us, see your glory, and give you glory, and I pray in Jesus' name.

[26 : 55] Amen. Amen.