

James 26-08-23b

We pick up our study in James chapter two, and what is in view here in the modern day is called discrimination. In this example, how many times have we seen it? Pastors and elders in the pastoral epistles are put for all believers. They are an example.

The 144,000, the tribulational martyrs, the 24 elders that we saw in Revelation are representative of a larger group. There are examples that are given to us that are one of a class, or a grouping, or a category. Here, this is lifting up the face and getting excited by seeing someone influential come into the group.

You have, in years gone by, decades gone by, big institutional brick and mortar churches used to love to have a celebrity come to faith. There would be a football player for the local team, or someone that was prominent and well-known that would come to faith and then be in that church. Well, they've got to speak and give their testimony, and we're going to feature them and make over them because they're an example, and other young men who are interested in sports or young women who want to follow the example of some well-known gal who's a gymnast or an influential person in some light.

Authors and politicians would be treated with great favor and great fanfare should they come to a local assembly. I've seen this at firsthand over the years. But this is put for favoritism versus negative treatment in a wide range of areas.

Many people come to the second chapter of James and talk about racial discrimination. Do you see someone that fits into the group well and somebody else that doesn't? It's unknown if the group to whom James was speaking and had in mind as he writes were well-off Jews who liked other well-off people to join the group and weren't too keen on the poor because that creates a problem. You look at Acts and there were widows and orphans and they needed feeding and you have the early leaders in the church.

And remember, this letter is written very early. You think about those early chapters of Acts where Stephen and others are designated to take over some of the work of caring for the poor so that those who preach and teach could concentrate on that function. So is that the case? Is it kind of a well-off group and here's somebody that doesn't fit? They don't kind of blend? They're gonna cause a problem? Well, I don't have a chair for you.

You could stand over here or you can sit on the floor where my feet are. It's a kind of discrimination. This would be economic or social discrimination that is in view in James.

But you think about our lives, you think about the kinds of treatment that we might be tempted to give someone based on a superficiality. Notice the example here is immediate lifting up of the face or averting the face based on a superficiality. What are these people wearing? Fine clothes or shabby clothes? Shiny clothes or filthy clothes? Based on the clothes, I have an immediate

policy that fits one and not the other.

Well, there are many things that we can sort of instinctively or almost unconsciously hold against someone. We overhear them speaking and they're on the opposite side of the political fence or they embrace social views or they have practices and circumstances as a part of their lifestyle that we disagree with, that we know are biblically wrong. This link, this huparos link, the filthiness word is conscious.

It's on purpose. We are to lay aside wickedness. We could say, well, this person comes from a wicked background.

And so I'm going to rightfully and justifiably treat them differently than somebody who's shiny and blends right in. We just talked about the glory of the Lord Jesus. Here's somebody with shiny clothes.

I can rationalize, I can justify. Well, this person's clothes are gonna reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus better than these filthy, smelly clothes that this person's wearing. Judging based on superficialities and realities.

It isn't as though they're really the same clothes. It's just a bad light or a bad style choice. These are genuinely expensive and nice trappings with the first guy.

And they are genuinely filthy clothes in the second. And we're not told why they're filthy, but it evokes a response. And the key here is, yes, we are to lay aside the overflow of wickedness and filthiness in ourselves and receive with meekness the implanted word.

But here, James kind of turns it around a bit. Lay aside the filthiness that you see in the clothing of this poor individual. Lay aside that prejudice.

Lay aside that partiality. Don't have a different mind for this second individual than you had for the first one. Back to chapter one.

Doubting whether this person ought to be here. Doubting whether they ought to sit in the same seat as everybody else. You say, I think I need to change my mind here and have a different course of action.

If our actions are grounded in the word of God and founded on God's viewpoint, as James is going to go on to argue, then we are not going to be reacting to superficialities. The key here is that both of these individuals have come. It is different, different circumstance if you encounter them out in the world.

Someone is poor and therefore they are stealing. Someone is rich or influential and they are abusing their influence and their power. None of that is present here.

The only thing we know about these two individuals is how they are dressed and that they have come to the assembly of believers who hold the glorious faith of the Lord Jesus or the faith of the glorious Lord Jesus. They have come. This has application for us because there are people who have to go a distance in a bad direction before they wake up and realize that it is a wrong direction.

It is a bad road. Some people have to hit bottom, have to exhaust the possibilities like the prodigal son who would not have appreciated his father except that he went and spent his living with riotous affairs and ended up at the pig trough. Then he was ready to come back to his father and his father slays the fatted calf and puts a ring on his finger, by the way, takes off his filthy garments and puts on clean clothes.

Why? This son that had no ring on his finger because he hocked them all and sold them all and spent his living on wasteful pleasures, momentary stimulation, he has filthy clothes and he has no ring. When he returns to his father, his father rejoices to see him, gives him clean clothes, puts a ring on his finger. There's a lot in that story we could talk about, but here someone has come.

Filthy clothing. There's something filthy that is observable. Maybe they've got unbiblical relationship issues.

Maybe they've got unbiblical practice and viewpoint and habit issues. Maybe they are coming to the group because they realize that they need a change. They are in the process of repentance.

You can't tell from the first superficial glance. All you know is I see that there's a problem or I see that here's somebody really shiny and they have come to the assembly. So what does this really tell us? It's one of the oldest aphorisms in the world.

You can't judge a book by its cover. Reserve judgment. James is gonna go on to talk about judgment.

We read this whole section. Don't immediately react until you find out more. Other places in scripture tell us someone who comes to the assembly, if they don't work, they don't eat.

We do discern those among the group who are doing well. Timothy is told, pay attention to what people are doing and you need to rebuke and correct and instruct with the word of God some of these who are causing problems, who are divisive, who are perpetrating and endeavoring to spread wickedness in the group. You've got to spot that and you may need to send that out.

You may not only tell it, stand in the corner, walk on out the door, you see at that corner. You can't remain a part of the group. But that is after a demonstration of the heart, not based on superficialities.

We are quick to judge. I could give you illustrations in a lot of different areas but I think we can all

fill in the kind of example that would fit our modern day. So, if you pay attention to the one wearing the clothes and say to him, you sit here in a good place.

You say to the poor man, you stand there or sit here at my feet. Have you not shown doubt, double-mindedness? *Dia creno*, *dia* is through. You divide something in half.

There's two sides. Diameter, what goes from one side to the other? And *creno* is to judge. So you're using two different standards of judgment.

You're not using the standard of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. You're using the standard of, wow, this is a person I want to get next to. They can help the group with their funding.

They can make us look good to outsiders. They can have a wonderful testimony if they stay with our group and they're prominent and well-known and this will be a benefit in the social world, in the economic world, rather than using the standard of the word of God. Have you not shown *dia creno* among yourselves, double-mindedness, double standard and become judges with evil thoughts? Judge not lest ye be judged.

The judgment of the judge others will come back upon you. If we are fair, if we are merciful, fairness and mercy will be expressed toward us. If we are bigoted, if we are prejudiced, if we are partial for superficial reasons, ungodly reasons, unbiblical reasons, that is going to come back to haunt us at the judgment.

So he goes on in verse five. Listen, my beloved brethren, again, appeal. Look, my family, I'm not trying to judge you, myself.

This is us. We are brothers. We are family.

So he uses that appeal again. My beloved brethren, has God not chosen the poor of this world? Notice 2B is in italics and I would scratch it out. How does it read without those added words? Has God not chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom? This softens the suggestion that God has picked poor people and he's going to automatically give them an inheritance in the kingdom because they're poor.

God doesn't obstruct the poor. God doesn't push away the poor. God doesn't ignore the poor.

God doesn't fail to save the poor when they are rich in faith. So has God not chosen, this is *eklektos*, this is what Calvinist and Reformed theologians say is election, has God not elected, has he not chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom? This doesn't mean every poor person is rich in faith and inheritance follows in the future kingdoms. But there are plenty of poor people.

Their poverty has nothing to do with how rich they can be in faith or how much inheritance they can have in the future world, even though they lack funding and possessions in this world. God

has chosen the poor without any discrimination, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. Remember in questioning the Lord Jesus from prison, John the Baptist says, are you he that shall come? Are you the conquering king? I already know you're the lamb of God.

You're the suffering servant. And Jesus says, go tell John what you see. And after talking about the healing miracles, he says, and the gospel is preached to the poor.

There had arisen in Judaism, the notion that being well-off signified blessing from God. And if you were poor, there was no good news for you. There is no promise for you.

The promise of God and the favor of God is on the well-off. And Jesus said, go tell John, the gospel is preached to the poor. This is God's good news.

Your poverty has nothing to do with how spiritually rich you can be in faith, in relationship with God and in future inheritance. What happens in this world is superficial. Your clothes may be filthy.

People may look at you askance, but God does not. And we who hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ should not hold superficialities against people. And notice it is specifically superficialities.

There are things that we do hold against people. Those who overtly and verbally reject the Lord Jesus Christ, that's not a superficiality. We are in Christ.

He is our savior. His work on the cross defines us. And people who spit on the savior, I am gonna have a separation policy for such people.

That's not superficial. That's not just my clothes are dirty. That's an overflow of wickedness.

That's the moral huperos that we are to lay aside from chapter one. But withhold judgment until you have information beyond the superficial, beyond the immediately visible. That's the message here.

So listen, my beloved brethren, verse five. Has God not chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him? It doesn't mean only poor people are rich in faith. It means they are included.

God is no respecter of persons. Doesn't matter if you're rich or poor. If you're rich in faith, you are laying hold of inheritance in the eternal future.

This momentary light affliction here, what you have in this world is gonna be a forgotten circumstance in ages to come. Verse six, but you have dishonored. Remember Timothy's name, Timae.

It looks like time in English, but Timae means honor. This is dishonor. You have dishonored.

You've taken away the rightful respect and consideration that a person who comes to your meeting, which is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ, ought to receive. If someone comes and asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, but they're in a homosexual relationship, would you refuse to tell them of the hope that is in you because, well, you're living in a moral lifestyle? If they come to you and ask, who better to share the wonderful good news of deliverance, of freedom in Christ, of forgiveness, of cleansing, of opportunity, of release and escape from the snares of fallen nature and a fallen world and misguided understandings, bad priorities, bad values? If we don't speak, how shall they hear without a preacher? How blessed are the feet of those who spread the good news of the gospel? Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. If someone comes, we should be leaning forward to welcome them, I don't care about the filthy robe.

You have come, let me share the good news of the Savior that had mercy on me and in grace forgave my sins, which are equally bad, by the way. James is going to go forward and talk about, if you break one part of the law, you've broken it all. So don't think because you've got minor peccadilloes that qualify as sin and somebody else has broken one of the major 10 commandments, well, he's evil and I'm not.

Any transgression is a violation of the entire law. We are equally guilty before God and we are equally delivered by God's grace, regardless of the superficialities of what human eyesight can capture. So, you have dishonored the poor man.

Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? I would love to quote some of these verses to people who are embracing democratic socialism and other crazy ideas, get rid of major parts of the government, get rid of law enforcement, get rid of the military, get rid of borders, all of which are biblical structural parts of divine ordinance under the category nation. Families ought to be a certain way. Nations ought to be a certain way.

We have examples of how nations ought and ought not to act in the Old Testament. And unless you have a divine mandate to wipe everybody out to the last animal, there are peacetime conditions, contracts, treaties, agreements. What is James saying here? When you dishonor the poor man and you honor the rich, look at the rich.

If you're gonna go by superficialities, what is a, you know, we're not talking about Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus or the wealthy ladies who financed the Lord Jesus and his disciples throughout his three and a half years of earthly ministry. There were well-off people I have known, wonderful, well-off people, and they have got an inheritance. They were rich in faith.

There's nothing wrong with them because they didn't view their lives through the lens of how many assets they had. Whatever they had, they looked for opportunities to plow into the spreading of the gospel, the celebration of the Lord Jesus, making him known as widely and as

deeply as possible. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with being rich or poor.

There is something intrinsically wrong with treating people on that basis, hoping to either avoid being besmirched by the poor or hoping to be advantaged by closeness with the rich. Got to avoid both. And if you're going to think superficially, you think, oh, it's a disadvantage to associate with the poor.

Well, in your superficial thinking, what about the rich? These are the people that abuse their power, hail you into court, take your stuff. Think about Ahab and what he did to Nabal because he wanted his vineyard. These people drag you into the courts and oppress you.

Verse seven, do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you're going to go by the class, this is what pertains to the class. Now, this rich guy that came to the assembly, is he coming to the assembly to blaspheme or is he coming because he's curious, he's seeking, he's looking for answers? You can distract him. You're actually doing the rich man a disservice.

If you start making over him and fawning upon him and trying to get him to be a prominent symbol of your group, when he's looking for spiritual answers, treat him like everybody else so that you can get to the heart of the matter. Same with the poor person. Is the poor person coming because they think they're going to get a handout? I heard there's fellowship meals.

Maybe I can get some food. For whatever reason they're coming, don't prejudge them. Treat everyone alike.

That's what God does. He's got just as many poor people, probably more, that are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. And there's going to be rich people as well.

Don't judge on superficialities. And if someone is coming in the direction, now this is a judgment we have to make. We say, judge not lest you be judged.

And I'm going to pretend like I don't know anything out of anybody. That is not biblical. We are commanded to discern.

Mark out those who are divisive. Mark out those who are not interested and separate from them. That is a command of scripture.

Hate the garment spotted by the flesh. Touch not the unclean thing. If there is someone we can save by pulling them out of the fire, that's different.

But every time you reach for them and they draw their hands back, after a couple of experiences, it is time to separate. That is not someone who is seeking. If a rich person comes for reasons of their own and we discern that they are not seeking, they're not asking questions, they're not humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God.

Remember, we just had an exhortation about the way the rich and the poor ought to think. Verse nine of chapter one, let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation. When the lowly brother comes, tell him what he can exalt in.

God has chosen you. You can be as rich in faith as anybody. You can have an inheritance in the kingdom as large and as grand and as wonderful and as reflective of God's glory as anybody.

Your poverty is no obstacle. Let the lowly brother exalt glory in his exaltation. We're back to that idea of glory.

And the rich needs to be aware that his riches aren't gonna get him anywhere. The rich should glory in his humiliation. He needs to remember that these riches are transient.

Everything he's got belonged to somebody else before he got it. And after he leaves, it's gonna belong to somebody else. Read Kohelet, read Ecclesiastes.

Solomon goes on at length about this. No matter how big an empire you build, you're gonna die and hand it off to somebody else. And you can concentrate on the things that count, on eternal values.

That's what we should do as a group. This is what the group ethos ought to be. As brethren, this is the way we should think.

Don't dishonor the poor man. And remember that the rich as a class have their own set of problems. They blaspheme the noble name by which you are called.

It is the rare rich man. That isn't corrupted and co-opted by his wealth. What did Jesus say? About a camel in the eye of the needle.

So, if you really fulfill the royal law, this is a wonderful phrase. We looked at it a session or two back, looking at the law of liberty. This is the royal law.

The word here is the Greek word for kingdom. It's the king's law, *basileia* in Greek. This is a variant of that word.

It is the law of the kingdom. We're looking ahead to that kingdom. If you really fulfill the royal law according to scripture, and this means the prevailing law that affects everyone.

And again, James is speaking to Jewish brethren. We don't even see Gentiles in this picture yet. It is so early, but you fulfill the royal law.

And this is Old Testament. This comes from the theocratic kingdom. God, who is the king.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. You do well. And he's getting this from Leviticus 19.18. There's gonna be another reference.

Let's turn back to Leviticus 19 right quick, because as you know, anytime you have a reference back, it is a footnote. Leviticus 19. We'll start a bit earlier because James is going to allude to this.

Chapter 19 is moral and ceremonial laws. Verse 11, you shall not steal nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God.

I am the Lord. You shall not cheat your neighbor nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.

If he's worked a day, you remember the parable the Lord Jesus told about the laborers in the field. Some came early and some only came an hour before work was over. And they all got the day's wage, but they were paid at the end of the day.

Don't owe, owe no man anything. Don't keep his wages overnight. Shall not remain with you until morning.

Verse 14, you shall not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling block before the blind. Notice somebody yelling insults and epithets at someone who can't hear them. In a mocking, jeering, and derisive, and very inconsiderate fashion.

Boy, is that gonna come back to bite those people at the judgment. Do not curse the deaf. Do not put a stumbling block before the blind.

Don't take advantage of someone's weakness, someone's vulnerability. And in this case, these are things that these people can't help. They didn't blind themselves.

They didn't remove their own hearing. But there's a deficit. There's an inability.

Don't take advantage of it for fun or for spite. You shall fear your God. Notice it isn't, you don't wanna hurt their feelings.

God is watching. Fear God. And that should determine how you treat others.

This is the principle now. This is the background for what we're coming up to. Verse 15, you shall do no injustice in judgment.

You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness, you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go about as a tail bearer among your people, nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor.

I am the Lord. Fear God. You shall not hate your brother in your heart.

You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him. Notice, and there's a lot we could say about this. We could spend the afternoon noting our circles of love and circles of

responsibility.

There's a brother in view. There's a neighbor in view. There's an outsider in view.

Don't hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him. Verse 18, you shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people.

My brethren, my beloved brethren. This is those who are outside my people. This doesn't necessarily apply to those who are beyond the borders of Israel, the children of your people.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. Keep my statutes, and so on.

This is the context. James, I think, had this fresh in his mind. Again, under the inspiration of the Spirit, writing these words.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the writing, according to the scriptures, according to the law, love your neighbor as yourself, you do well. But if you diacreno, if you doubt that keeping the law is the best way to go, if you don't really consider God and fear Him and remember that He is the Lord and we have responsibilities to Him, you're double-minded, you're unstable, you're like a wave that is blown by a fresh wind. If you show diacreno, if you show too standard thinking, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

This treatment is all the same in terms of whether or not you have broken the law as if you committed adultery or murdered someone. It is all a piece. They are all the same.

They counted up, there are something like 613 commands in the Mosaic law. You violate one, you've broken the entire law. That's coming up.

Whoever shall keep the whole law yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. He who said, do not commit adultery also said, do not murder. Now, if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

I wrestled with this for quite a while because it seems to me that the line of thought ought to be, well, I haven't committed a major sin like adultery, but if you commit an attitude sin or a treatment sin, if you lie about your neighbor or do some small thing, but this seems like an acceleration. In our moral standard, you can hardly think of anything worse than murder. He says, well, I pride myself on not committing adultery, but you murder.

And I think who in this synagogue assembly, who in this realm of those who hold the faith of the Lord Jesus is committing murder. There is a nearly identical word. This is phonu, P-H-O-N-E-U-O, phonuo.

There's another one that is phonuo, P-H-T-H-O-N-E-U-O, that means to envy or be jealous. I

thought, well, maybe there's been some textual confusion. Maybe he says, I haven't committed adultery, but I've been jealous or I've envied.

I wanna get next to the rich guy because I envy his stuff or whatever. There's no text evidence for it. And I finally decided that's not what's going on here.

So how do you get from a group of believers holding the faith of the Lord Jesus? And the example is, well, I don't commit adultery, but I commit the occasional murder. It's a bump under the carpet here. What does this mean? Why is this the example? Because he's saying, if you break one part of the law, even a minor part, maybe you pick up sticks on the Sabbath, but you didn't commit adultery or any of the 10 commandments.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, do no work. And think, well, picking up a stick is that minor. Well, somebody got stoned for it.

But what does this mean? Remember, in the ancient world and in these days, there was a huge difference. And this is what our context provides for us. There was a huge difference in treatment of those who were citizens, those who were of the elite or the aristocracy.

They were scribes, Pharisees. They were in the wealthy class. They owned slaves.

And then there were the slaves. Throughout the Roman Empire. And even in the law of Moses, there is a different standard of punishment.

If you beat a slave until he dies, it doesn't seem to rise to the same level as killing a fellow Israelite. Slaves were foreigners in almost all cases. And this says, I haven't committed adultery.

I'm shiny when it comes to the morality that shows with my group of brethren here. But they would kill a slave and it wasn't a big deal. Or you could deny someone aid and they would die.

Leave the Samaritan also doesn't help the guy in the ditch and he dies. And you've essentially killed him by failing to aid him. And this murder had the poor as its object.

It wasn't considered a big deal. He didn't do what I wanted. I hit him and he died.

He was just a slave. It is a radical example of this attitude. This is what it can lead to.

If you begin thinking in partial terms, discriminatory terms, bigoted terms, you take offense at something in someone's life to the extent that you, as the Lord Jesus said, if you hate your brother, it's all the same as if you've murdered him in your heart. And this hatred and disrespect is what is in view. And it's a radical, startling example.

So how important is it for us to pay attention to what James is saying here, examine ourselves and ensure that we are uniformly applying a biblical standard, which is characterized by grace and mercy and granting of opportunity, regardless of superficialities. While at the same time,

there is the need to separate. There is the need to keep things at a distance when they are genuinely chuparas and an overflow of wickedness, when there is no seeking, there is no holding of the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus in view.

But if someone comes, we have to be willing to accept them and to encourage them because we have been accepted, we have been encouraged, and we are just as sinful. All of us have broken God's moral law, be it large, be it small. Who are we to judge another? It's all about the seeking.

If someone comes, we watch for that seeking. We look for clues. Is someone asking questions? Are they kind of hanging around? Are they listening? Are they contributing? Are they sharing thoughts? Are they willing to discuss? Or is it that whole Christianity thing is right out? I don't believe it.

I don't care about it. I think you're nuts to embrace it. That's a whole different standard.

That's why it's so important to remember our spheres of love study. And there are different standards of behavior depending on where someone falls. This is someone who is coming voluntarily.

Love your neighbor as yourself. They have moved into the neighborhood, at least at that moment. We'll watch and see if they have the attitude to remain in the group or not.

Something to think about as we curate our own relationships and the attitudes toward those that are in our periphery, what we watch for, what we don't stand for. The glory of the Lord Jesus Christ should shine in our lives. And be visible in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

Father, thank you for this set of principles from your word. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will help us to understand them and to properly apply them in the contacts that we have with people, in the circumstances and situations that we encounter. We pray that in all things, the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in our lives, in our brotherhood.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.