

JAMES, RIGHTLY DIVIDED & VERSE-BY-VERSE

SESSION 5 | JAMES 1:26-2:5

JAMES 1:17-27 | THE KINGDOM WAY

Verse 17 – see session 3.

Verses 18-25 – see session 4.

VERSE 26 –

As in verse 19, the **any man** in reference is *any man of the brethren* (the 12 tribes), thus James clarifies **any man among you**. James speaks of those who **seem to be religious**. If this man **bridleth not his tongue** then he is deceived and his **religion is vain**.

As throughout this segment, the tone of works speaks loudly in this statement. Does the value of our “Pauline” religion rest upon the bridling of the tongue? Absolutely not. Should we (or anyone) attempt to bridle the tongue? Absolutely!

VERSE 27 –

Could James (as so many attest) simply be teaching *religious behavior for those who are saved*? Or, as it seems, is he speaking about *the activities of the Jew in order that his religion be no vain* (v. 26)?

If the activities of verse 27 are **pure religion**, then is there any conceivable way that most Christendom would be pure in their religion? While most in the Christian religion work to keep themselves **unspotted from the world**, Christianity has almost no effort to **visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction**, and local churches even less so. Furthermore, every direct cross-reference for the visitations prescribed in verse 27 would be in Jewish portions of the Scripture. Paul has nothing to say about work with **the fatherless and widows**.

JAMES 2:1-9 | KINGDOM PRINCIPLES FOR DEALING WITH ECONOMIC STATUS

VERSE 1 –

James prohibits the **brethren** from having a **respect of persons** when carrying out **the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

But what is this faith? As shocking as it is to the evangelical ear, *Jesus was not a Christian in the sense we use it today*. Nor was Jesus *the founder of Christianity*. Jesus is the *foundation* but not the *founder*. Jesus was **made under the law** (Gal. 4:4) and He died, rose again, and ascended as one who obeyed the law. His “great commission” to His disciples was **observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you** (Mat. 28:20). And what did He command? Obedience to the law! Can Matthew 19:17 and Matthew 5:19 be taken any differently than their plain sense?

If we let Scripture interpret itself, then this verse says that *Torah abiding Jewish faith must be carried out without respect of persons*.

Would we want the same for our Pauline faith? Absolutely. Would we want the same for a person of no faith? Absolutely. Would we make the same conclusions made by James before this chapter is out? Absolutely not!

VERSE 2 –

With no surprise, James uses the word συναγωγή [synagoge], translated **assembly** to refer to the gathering place of those who hold to **the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ** (v. 1). This word is *never used of the assembly of the body of Christ* in the Scriptures, it is *only used of the Jews*. Even the root συναγω [sunago] is only used of Paul once, and in that case is referring to the Corinthian assembly, a largely (if not wholly) Jewish assembly. Thus, both the word *synagogue* and the root word *sunago* are only used of Jewish assemblies in the Scripture. The word *ecclesia* is used in a much broader sense, referring to Pauline believers, Jews, and even public gatherings.

It is interesting that very few English translations choose *synagogue* as the translation. Most use *assembly* (KJV, NKJV, NASB, each with footnotes, and ESV with no footnote). Some use *meeting* (CSB, NIV). The NET Bible has a note that says, “here it refers specifically to a Christian assembly,”¹ which is simply an expression of their theological persuasion. The only translations I found that use *synagogue* are the Darby Bible and Young’s Literal Translation (both which are used for study purposes rather than general use Bibles).

To this synagogue gathering comes one with **goodly apparel** and another **in vile raiment**. This becomes the basis for James’ illustration on observing the faith **with respect of persons** (v. 1).

VERSE 3 –

James continues the illustration with a scene which, though imaginary, is not hard to imagine, whether in a synagogue or in a church or in any assembly.

Of side-note interest is that the word **clothing** is the same Greek word as **apparel** and **raiment** in verse 2. Also, the word **gay** is the same Greek word as **goodly** in verse 2. This displays one of the fundamental translation principles of the King James, that it was *translated to be read aloud*. A variety of words aids in audible speech.

VERSE 4 –

Should this activity happen, James asks the brethren to consider that they **are become judges of evil thoughts**. It would be hard to imagine any answer except the affirmative. Deuteronomy 1:16 commands that the judges of Israel **judge righteously**. Leviticus 19:15 is even more clear: **thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor**.

Again, we say that the Body of Christ should not give preferential treatment to the rich and disregard the poor, but it seems plain that James is giving Torah-based instruction to the 12 tribes, and the words of the epistle heretofore would demand such a conclusion.

VERSE 5 –

As right dividers, we must ask, *how in the wildest stretch of the imagination does this verse apply to our age of grace?*

Would any evangelical dare take this verse literally? Surprisingly, some do, but always with both a Calvinist and subtle Marxist viewpoint. For example, the New American Commentary on James says this,

“God’s marvelous decision puts the poor at the center of his saving work. This should not be surprising because salvation reverses the effects of sin, especially those effects that leave people destitute and harassed. God has chosen the poor in the eyes of the world to inherit his salvation. God will put the glories of his redeeming work

¹ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition*; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

on display in them. The saving work of God reverses the status of those who were most afflicted by the curse of sin.”²

Somehow the author seamlessly moves from literal to spiritualistic, taking **the poor of this world** literally but **heirs of the kingdom** to be the “saving work of God.” In fact, he continues by saying, “To be heirs of God’s kingdom is to become his children and to share in his nature through resurrection.”³

In verse 5, if we begin with a Biblical understanding of **the kingdom** as *future, physical, and fraternal* (that is, Davidic and theocratic), then we must ask whether this kingdom is **promised to them that love him** and is it given to **the poor of this world**?

Concerning the promise to those who love God, consider Exodus 20:6. Concerning the poor, consider the first words of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:3. Many other examples could be given.

With the Biblical assumption that the **chosen** is the nation of Israel, the Calvinistic perversion of this passage dissipates. Israel was chosen as **the poor of this world rich in faith**. Consider, for example Deuteronomy 7:7-9, with special notice of the poverty of the people (they were **the fewest of all people** (v. 7) and redeemed **out of the house of bondmen** (v. 8)) as well as the requirement of love (**God keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him** - v. 9).

As we have found consistently in this epistle, when taken literally it works perfectly for Israel. To apply it to the Body of Christ one must allegorize, spiritualize, and skim by quickly without asking questions.

² Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, vol. 36, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 114.

³ *Ibid.* pg. 115.