

10.31.10 / James 2:1-7**Passage Insight**

Our actions reveal the source of our faith and the orientation of our hearts, and this passage is ultimately about this revelation. We see at first glance that all within the body of Christ are equal, that none, regardless of worldly status, are to be considered more or less worthy than another. This is because it is God who gives us our value. The fact of the matter is that we are lured and enticed by our own desire for glory and the desire to ascribe glory to that which is in fact NOT glorious, the things of this world. Verses 1-4 contrast two kinds of glory: the glory of Christ (the LORD of glory) vs. glory of the world, i.e. worldly riches. Where we seek glory and that to which we ascribe glory make evident the source of our faith and the condition of our hearts. Showing partiality within the body of Christ reveals a sick heart that has faith in itself rather than in the Lord.

We should ask the question, “Why would people within the body of Christ show partiality?” While the reasons are many (fear of loss, hope for personal gain, desire to control), they all have a common source of their sin: pride. This is because regardless of the reason, showing partiality within the body of Christ shows that someone is trying to get something they want on their own terms. Doing what they want to get what they want. Again, our actions reveal the source and orientation of our true faith, and these actions of partiality display a belief that God’s provision on His terms is insufficient, resulting in trying to provide for oneself by showing partiality. This points ultimately to a faith in oneself rather than a faith in Jesus, which is a glorification of self rather than a glorification of the true Lord of glory. To show partiality is to deny our faith in Jesus Christ and instead put our faith in ourselves.

Verse 4 tells us that when we show partiality we are having evil thoughts. Because James was writing this letter to Christians, we see that it’s possible to believe in Jesus and still have the capacity for evil thoughts and sin against the body of Christ. What’s the remedy for evil thoughts? Operating with the mind of Christ, which we as followers have been given. Consider 1 Corinthians 2: 14 and 16, where it says this:

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned . . . “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Having the mind of Christ allows us the power to accept the things of the Spirit of God and to spiritually discern the situations and relationships we find ourselves in, and it means surrendering control of our thoughts to the Spirit of God within us. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 shows us that we as Christians are to measure every thought against Christ and hold all thoughts captive to our Lord, where it says, “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” Philippians 4:8-9 reminds us that our minds should be focused on the things of the Lord:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

The orientation of our hearts determines our thoughts, and our thoughts lead to our actions. When we follow Jesus, our affection for Him should result in honoring those He honors, those whom He has chosen. We should ask here, “Is God saying he hates the rich?” Not at all. It’s clear that a rich man can enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:23-26). Though difficult, it’s not impossible, and the reason it’s possible is because of God’s power. The example of rich vs. poor is being used here because those being addressed are showing partiality to the very people who are oppressing them and are against God (verse 7), and in this case, those people are the wealthy who are oppressing the poor.

This passage is not about being rich or poor, but rather about the orientation of our hearts. It is ultimately a question of the source of our faith. If our faith is in Christ, we will have the mind of Christ and the capacity for pure thoughts, we will show honor to those who have the Lord’s favor, and our actions will be impartial to those within the body of Christ, regardless of their perceived social or worldly status. If our faith is in ourselves, we will, for the sake of personal gain, honor those the Lord hates (Psalm 5:4-6) and demonstrate our selfishness by showing partiality for the sake of getting what we want on our terms and in our own way. It all comes back to the orientation of our hearts. Do we have faith in Jesus or in ourselves?

Application Questions

Showing Partiality

- 1) How do you treat people differently within the body of Christ?
- 2) What are your evil thoughts when you do this?
- 3) For those who follow Christ, there is immeasurable grace for you in this. What does it look like for you to repent and to trust the Lord instead of yourself?

Genuine Faith

- 1) What is the fruit of our lives according to Scripture that proves our faith to be in Christ rather than in ourselves (consider James 1:26-27 and Galatians 5:22-23)?
- 2) Where do you see evidence in your own life that your faith is in yourself other than the Lord?
- 3) Where does this lead (remember James 1:14-15)?
- 4) Evil thoughts are the fruit of faith in ourselves. Where do your own thoughts need to be made captive to Christ and compared to His standard rather than your own?
- 5) Who will pray for this with you?

Sources

- Prayer
- Bible Speaks Today