

1. Introduction

- a. An overarching principle of the book of James is that a Christian grows and changes by letting the word of God tell us who we are in relation to God—our status with God then moves us out into action for God
- b. James reminds us of who we are as Christians (saved by grace, rescued freely and unconditionally), then he moves from awareness to action—in this case for what we term “mercy ministry” (see v. 13 for the repetition and specification of “mercy” to the poor and those in need)

2. What We Do: Mercy

- a. We are supposed to honor the poor. V5. He says we have insulted the poor in v. 6. Instead, God has “chosen” them.
 - i. Choose means to deliberately choose to move towards the poor. Eklego—to elect or deliberately choose. Why not choose the middle-class in spirit?
 - ii. It means not waiting until the poor come to you. That's them choosing you.
 - iii. He says that we have to choose them. In an uninsulting way (opposite of “dishonored” in v. 6). This means not condescending to them.
- b. Then v14-16 shows that mercy ministry is wholistic
 - i. There are specific concerns and needs we are to meet
 - ii. Concern for the body and not only the soul
- c. V8-11 shows that James doesn't make this act of mercy an option in ministry—it's on par with following the rest of the “Law” (Old Testament commands for purity and behavior in light of the relationship we have as God's people)
 - i. He says it's incumbent on us to advocate for and serve the poor.
 - ii. He connects this to something as similar to adultery, murder and the whole law. We can't minimize the call to serve the poor.
 - iii. We tend to think adultery is wrong but indifference to the poor is just human nature.
 - iv. James links the two (see also Amos 2—indifference to the poor is equally punishable as lying and idol worship)
- d. Note: He's not saying that we are saved by good works.
 - i. Saved by faith. But a saving faith is known by good deeds. (v. 17)
 - ii. Good deeds are the fruit and evidence of our faith in God—when we begin to pour out our heart towards the poor and those in need of mercy.
- e. This is a challenge for his audience
 - i. They are foreigners living far from home and just trying to survive and make lives for themselves
 - ii. They are about self-preservation as we foreigners all are. It's natural.
 - iii. To curry favor and influence. Control. Stability for ourselves. He's calling them to do something different. To live outwardly. To choose the poor.
 - iv. James goes so far to say that there will be judgement for those who don't show mercy (implied “to the poor”)

3. Why We Do It: Grace

- a. Because God chose them. Why not choose the elite—who have earned it? Why not choose the “middle-class in heart?” Why did God choose the poor?
 - i. Christianity has never really been popular in the elite classes because, typically, the elite don't know they were “chosen”—they don't have a continual reminder of free grace for lost people
 - ii. The elite live not clearly seeing their condition.
 - iii. Christianity has always tended to spread among the poor Why?
 - 1. Because the poor tend to see reality clearer—they know their spiritual condition is as bankrupt as their physical condition (typically, speaking, of course but it's not true for every person who's poor)
 - 2. We most often tend to live as if we have what we have in life based on our effort

3. But poverty brings reality home to us—to see how desperate we really are
- b. Where do we get the ultimate motivation to help the poor in need? When we see ourselves as poor and in need but helped
 - i. James calls back to the law of loving thy neighbor as thyself as the way to embrace the poor and show mercy—there's another time this law gets brought up (Luke 10 to Jesus)
 - ii. Story of Good Samaritan in Luke 10.
 1. Jesus attempts to show the “legal expert” who is neighbor truly is
 2. A racial outsider (the Samaritan) risks everything to bend down and help the man in the ditch beaten, bloodied, poor and in need
 3. But it's only a story of morality and social justice. It's a model we will never live up to in relation to caring for the poor among us.
 4. Jesus' whole point is not a lesson in morality—it's an impossible story to fulfill!
 5. He's not asking us to be the Samaritan—that would be near impossible considering the context of the story
 6. Rather, it's to point out to the law expert in the story that he is spiritually bankrupt (which is why it says that the man was “trying to justify himself”)
 7. It's an impossible picture of love, sacrifice and risk unless we see that we are not the Samaritans but rather the one bloodied and in the ditch unable to help ourselves up
 - iii. We need to see that we were the ones in the ditch and he came to us. Outsiders. Bloodied. Fallen down. He is the Good Samaritan. It's more than a play on morality.
 - iv. We leap when we realize that mercy triumphed in our lives. Jesus went to the ditch and came to us. We need to reverse the story if it will ever make us a people of mercy.
 - v. The man in the story was left half dead until the Samaritan risked everything—it was Jesus who would be fully killed by risking everything for us spiritually poor people
 - vi. This radically changes our motivations for helping the poor (because we know we were poor when Jesus stooped down) as well as our objections for helping the poor:
 1. “Objection: my money is my own. Answer: well Christ might have said my blood is my own and my life is my own, then where should you have been. Objection: the poor are undeserving. Answer: well Christ might have said, ‘these are wicked rebels, shall I lay down my life for these? Or shall I give to the good angels, the deserving poor?’ But no, he left the 99 and came after the lost; he gave his blood for the undeserving. Objection: well if I give my charity the poor may abuse it. Answer: Christ might have said the same thing, yea with far greater truth, Christ knew that thousands would trample his blood under their feet, that most would despise it, that many would make it an excuse for sinning more and yet he gave his own blood. My dear Christians if you would be like Christ, give much, give often, give freely to the vile and the poor, the thankless and the undeserving. Christ is glorious and happy and so will you be. It is not your money I want but your happiness, remember his own word: it is more happy, more blessed, to give than to receive. —Robert Murray McCheyne 1830s
- c. We will never help those who are bankrupt until we've seen how spiritually bankrupt we ourselves are.

4. Conclusion

- a. The interesting thing is that this type of radical inclusiveness changes us—mercy given is mercy received and thanked for
- b. We show mercy to others in need because we received the ultimate mercy when we were in need—it provides a new appreciation for mercy ministry and opens our minds to giving and receiving
- c. Helping the poor then becomes not just an item on our “social justice agenda” to be checked off but a passion to spread the mercy that first bound our wounds—the gospel of Jesus Christ!