

Denying, Dishonouring & Despising our Lord

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn this evening now to our Bible reading, and we are continuing through the letter of James. If you don't have a Bible with you, you have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side or the back, so please do grab hold of a Bible.

Page 1011 in the visitor Bible. And James chapter 2, and I'll be reading the first half, so verses 1 to 13.

James chapter 2, and beginning at verse 1. My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place, while you say to the poor man, you stand over there, or sit down at my feet, have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

[1 : 25] But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin, are convicted by the law as transgressors.

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, do not commit adultery, also said, do not murder.

If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Well, may God bless to us his word this evening.

[2 : 37] Well, let's turn again, shall we, to James chapter 2. And if you need a Bible, as Paul said, the ones at the side and the backs, and they're there for you to use.

One of the joys, I think, for all of us in recent years here has been the baby boom in the church. Although it's really getting quite hard to keep up, to remember the number of kids in a family, never mind the names and the ages, at least for me.

And, of course, after a service, you see babies being passed around. And it really can be quite difficult to know who belongs to whom. Especially if, as Edward Lobb so famously says, all babies just look like Winston Churchill.

There's a man speaking for you. It can be hard to recognize, can't it? A very small baby. But it's lovely when, as those little ones begin to grow, you begin to recognize much more clearly a look of their parents in them.

Maybe it's because I've recently become a grandparent. Maybe I've become attuned to such things a bit more. But I do find it moving sometimes when I see in the little ones in the congregation, and I see a look in them that just immediately reminds me of their parents.

[3 : 49] And you think, yeah, that's right. There's a family likeness there. For better or for worse sometimes, as to be said. But in that same way, it is so, isn't it, with those who are brought to birth, brought forth by our Heavenly Father.

If they're growing right, as James would say, then that family resemblance will be reflected in them. And it will become more and more recognizable.

But for that growth to be right, as we saw last time, there has to be a hearing and a receiving and an obeying of the Word of life. So as to bear fruit in them doing the Word, as James puts it, not deceiving themselves.

And so to use James' metaphor, we are to look intently into God's perfect Word. And when we do that, we see, like in a mirror, His character reflected in it. And that character is seen in chapter 1, verse 18.

We say His care for the helpless, choosing to give them life. See, His Word of truth that does that, works life, not harm and death.

[5 : 04] And it bestows fruit in His true treasure. That is, people who are set apart as His first fruits, holy for Him out of all creation. And so if we examine ourselves as in a mirror, then these same characteristics ought to be what a child of the Father will express.

And that's what verses 26 and 27 at the end of the chapter are telling us. Not worthless religion, self-deception, but the same life-giving words in their talk. The same compassion and care in their treatment of others, especially the most needy.

And the same treasuring of all that is holy and good, unstained by the appetites and the ambitions of this broken world. And so James is posing these tests, eternity tests, if you like.

And he's asking, does the reflection you see show a child of God? Or does it just show a child of our time? A child of our culture that much more resembles a friend of this world than the kingdom of Christ?

And it is a vital question, isn't it? Because as he says very boldly later on in chapter 4, verse 4, friendship with the world is enmity with God. So are we keeping ourselves unstained from the world?

[6 : 30] As that last line of chapter 1 says, religion that is pure, that is undefiled before God the Father must be. Well, one clear test that James puts to us now is to ask, by what standard do we judge?

And especially in relation to people and their value. Are we just slave to the world's false standards? Or are we, as true kingdom people, liberated to live by the true standards of our king's royal family code?

Because how we treat people, how we evaluate them, tells us a lot about what we do treasure.

Whether it is God's riches of grace and his eternal glory.

Or whether it is just, in fact, the world's riches and ephemeral glory. Do we reflect the God who shows no partiality, who Moses declared as the God of gods, Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner and gives him food and clothing?

If we call him our father, as Peter says, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, if we call him father, then do we treat others, especially those in his church, do we treat them as he does?

[8 : 00] Do we evaluate them in God's way? Or do we just think of them in the way that the world thinks and judges? Well, that's the key issue that James addresses here in chapter 2.

By way of the example he gives in verses 2 to 4, concerning partiality in respect of persons. And he tells us plainly that if we do just echo the world's standards, that it will show up a self-deceived, divided heart that has actually chosen friendship with the world over true kinship with God in Christ. And that's obvious, he says, because you are totally at odds with God in both his family choice and in his family code. That is, in choosing those he wants to belong to his family, his household, those who bear his noble name, as verses 5 to 7 describe, and also the way he commands behavior for all who bear that name.

And that's what he lays out in verses 8 to 13. And he warns us not to be slaves to this world's false standards. Verse 1, show no partiality. But rather, as those who live as true kingdom people be those who are liberated for the kingdom standards that he speaks about in verses 12 and 13.

At the end, speaking and acting as those who know God's liberating way and who live in God's triumphant mercy. This whole section is one unit, really, but there's so much to think about.

[9 : 29] Tonight, we're just going to focus on verses 1 to 7, where James really challenges us to see some of the ways that those who profess Christ, in fact, can be deceiving their own hearts.

So that actually, they've got very dangerously divided hearts. They say, Lord, Lord, but far louder is the voice of what they proclaim in reality, in the way they live and act, which says that they're

deceiving, that they're denying and dishonoring and despising our glorious Lord.

So look first at verses 1 to 4, because we have an example here that demonstrates an attitude that is denying God's glory. Denying God's glory, which is seen above all in his Christ, who himself became nothing poor in order to serve.

And James' point here is that showing partiality in respect to persons by judging according to the world's valuations contradicts the faith which is centered and stands on the true glory of God, which is made known in a naked, suffering Savior on a cross.

And such behavior betrays her true belief because loyalty to what this world treasures, not what God treasures, reveals a heart divided within itself.

[11:01] And that, says James, is the root, as we know, of all kinds of evil thoughts and actions. In chapter 1, verse 27, James speaks about religion that is pure and undefiled before God.

And here in verse 1, he makes clear that such religion, as he calls it, is found in one place alone, the faith. Do you see? The faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory.

That's the literal reading there. And I think James means the Lord Jesus Christ who is the glory.

Peter speaks in a very similar way in 1 Peter 4, verse 14, where he speaks of the Spirit of the glory, that is of God, resting upon you.

He means the Spirit of Jesus. He is the glory of God made manifest at last fully on this earth. He is the radiance of the glory of God, says Hebrews 1.

He is the exact imprint of His nature. Remember when Moses asks for the Lord to show me your glory, God makes His presence pass by Him in all His goodness and grace.

[12:10] But Moses can't look upon Him, can't behold it. But when God the Son became human flesh, John tells us, doesn't he, at the beginning of his Gospel, we have seen, literally, with our own eyes, His glory.

The glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. But when did He see most fully that glory?

When did Jesus say that the hour had come at last for the Son to be glorified? Well, He said it as He was about to be betrayed, as He was about to be delivered to be crucified.

And it was there, wasn't it? Not robed in splendor, but stripped and beaten and naked and spat upon. It was there that He glorified the Father on earth, accomplishing the work that the Father had given Him to do.

It is accomplished. And as Paul said to the church in Philippi, Jesus Christ, being in the form of God, made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant and humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

[13:28] And therefore, He says, God has glorified Him, bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the glory, but seen in His abject poverty and suffering, serving and saving even His enemies.

And James is saying it is in and by His glory, that glory, that our faith stands. But look at verse 2 because here's a very different kind of glory on shore, a glory of gold rings and fine robes.

And what no true follower of the glory of the cross can do, possibly, is show fawning desire for that kind of glory, the glory of this world. To show partiality towards that would be clear evidence, wouldn't it, of being badly stained and tarnished by the world.

And so James says, show no partiality. Actually, the word there is plural. He's showing no kind of partiality at all as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the true glory.

[14:51] And so he gives us a clear example of what that means for a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in. And if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, oh, you sit here in a good place or you say to the poor man, you stand over there or sit down at my feet.

Have you not then made distinctions? Well, better, have you not then made yourself divided within yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

I'll come back to that sentence. By the way, I just noticed that these Christians, despite trials of many kinds, economic pain and persecution, they did meet together as a church.

There was no staying at home with pretend remote worship. And it seems that visitors, new converts, also came into their assembly. Scholars argue about whether these two men coming in were actually Christians or whether they were just inquiries.

It really doesn't matter because the whole focus is on the reaction of the believers to these two very different people, clearly fawning over one of them and ignoring the other, fawning over the rings and the fancy clothes.

[16:07] What exactly is this partiality, this favoritism that James is addressing? Well, the emphasis is clearly, isn't it, on looks, on appearances. That's the crucial point.

Let's be clear about what he's not forbidding. He's not saying that we shouldn't give proper respect where respect is due. He's not saying that you don't offer an elderly person perhaps a convenient seat or a cushion or something like that.

He's not saying you don't give a special welcome to a visitor or to a visiting speaker, maybe, or to a senior leader or a dignitary, even a city dignitary or something like that.

No, he's not saying that at all. Proper politeness, proper courtesy is just a Christian duty. We're to honor age and authority, aren't we? That's the fifth commandment. We're to honor the emperor, says Peter.

I suppose the world emperor today, at least in the free world, is Mr. Trump. So there you are. That's a tricky one for some. We're to submit to our masters who employ us.

[17:07] We're to obey our Christian leaders joyfully, says Hebrews, and so on. So James, James' words are not any grounds here for rudeness or to fail to treat people with proper dignity and respect.

In fact, his point's quite the opposite, isn't it? We're not to respect only some persons because we're to respect and honor everybody. Nor is James saying anything here that would give us an excuse for being purposefully shabby in appearance or even carelessly shabby, especially when you come to meet with the people of God and the assembly of God.

Sometimes people have overreacted, haven't they, against a rather overformal culture in the past and want to be almost defiantly scruffy in order to offend people. Sometimes that can be just a reverse kind of snobbery and actually that's just as egocentric and unattractive as any other kind of snobbery.

James isn't giving encouragement to any of that kind of thing. That's to totally trivialize. That's to miss the point completely. Although I'd have to say that I do think that showing honor to all and including the Lord himself who surely is the one in whose presence we gather, I do think that we ought to give some degree of thought as to what our appearance in church says, what our behavior says.

It says something, doesn't it, about our attitude to God and what ought to be the most important gathering of our week. I guess if most of us were invited to the king's palace or to a garden party or something, we probably wouldn't turn up 10 or 15 minutes late wandering in with our cup of Starbucks, would we?

[18:41] Looking as if we'd just woken up and been dragged through a hedge backwards. I'm not looking at anybody in particular by the way, but if the cap fits as they say. Now it's perfectly plain here, isn't it, what James is actually decrying.

He's decrying a pandering to merely worldly distinctions, worldly advantages by Christians and by Christian churches, judging people purely by the standards of this world.

And here the specific example is about the preferential treatment of the wealthy merely because they are wealthy. And the situation James is writing to, that was the chief factor of social importance.

And that's certainly still so today, isn't it, in many places, maybe in most places. And that can also show itself in the church of Jesus Christ. And that's despite the fact that, as my father writes in his notes on this, money and possessions have little to do with character except that they're likely to make it deteriorate.

But despite that, the truth is that money often does far too much talking in Christian churches. And it's entirely understandable. isn't it? If a church is very needy financially, it's natural to try and court those who are able to give substantially.

[20:04] That's very tempting for pastors in poor countries and maybe also in those that are not so poor. And it can so easily corrupt them. And it can so easily corrupt the wealthy patrons too into wanting to wield too much power in the church.

And people can flaunt their potential for generosity in order to seek power and influence in the church. And in fact, the expression here in verse 2 about the rings and the fine clothing implies a

degree of showiness. Now maybe you feel in our situation, maybe you feel in your mind, you're quite satisfied that we're not at all partial in that way.

But it's not just gold rings and robes that constitute worldly ideas of importance, is it? Now just think about being on the church door. Maybe you're on the welcome team.

Who are you really glad to see coming in? Who do you immediately want to talk to? Is it the attractive person? Is it the young person? The interesting looking person?

Well, of course. But what about the not so attractive person? Or the not so young person? Or the person who looks quite boring and uninteresting to you?

[21 : 14] Or whatever it is. Are we so impartial? Who do you look to sit beside when you come to church? Well, of course. It's natural, isn't it, to sit beside a friend or someone you know or somebody in your own age group or whatever.

Fine. That's not a problem. But it's easy, isn't it, for that to become cliquish. For that friendship to actually become an invisible barrier to others who maybe feel excluded because perhaps their face doesn't fit in your group.

Who do I, as a pastor, get excited about? When you people show up, am I more impressed by so-called educated people or professional people or students?

I shouldn't really use students and educated people in the same sentence these days, but... But are we interested in all those kind of things?

Or are we really much more interested in spiritual maturity, real grace, people who are obviously very spiritually needy?

[22 : 26] Whoever they are, do we have a sense of joy at a lost sheep finding their way home, even though they're going to be a problem person who we have to put a lot of input into and effort into?

Who do the leaders of the life course want to see coming to the next life course? Or the on-board course? Is it people with the clothing, with the demeanor, with the accent perhaps to impress us? People who we think might have a lot to offer if they join our church? Or are we really as thrilled to see people who might very obviously need a very great deal from us?

I mean, let's be honest and admit, I think, that very often our benchmark is just the benchmark of the world around us.

We're impressed, aren't we, by successful careers? We're impressed by powerful people, by influential people. We idolize education, we idolize health and fitness, increasingly we idolize celebrity status in the social media and all the rest of it.

[23 : 38] You can have evangelical Christian versions of all of these things, there are plenty of them. It's just so easy, isn't it, to forget that this is exactly the same value system that places so little value on, well, unborn babies in the womb, the elderly, the weak, the handicapped, the same society that wants to make it easier and easier to dispose of all of these undesirable and unwanted human beings.

As we look in the mirror, it's important to ask not just how we view others, but how we view ourselves and how we want others to view us. Do we want to impress others with what we know or who we know?

It's easy, isn't it, to put a Christian veneer on that by wanting to talk about all of our spiritual learning, our theological learning. We want to talk about all the important Christian people that we know.

Christian name-dropping. It's really one of the most tiresome habits some people have. But it's easy, isn't it, to want to impress others with all sorts of things.

What you wear, yes, how you talk, certain airs you adopt. God, it's so easy to want to seek significance and status from valuing the very things that our world values as glorious and successful.

[25 : 07] Whether it's money, whether it's education, whether it's professional status, or whether it's roles and positions in church to have a ministry. That's the gold ring, that's the rich clothing that some people really crave.

And they can tell themselves, oh, it's a noble aspiration, quoting Paul in 1 Timothy 3, except that, of course, Paul's saying nothing there about aspiration. He's talking there about ministry as a noble task.

He says nothing at all about the aspiration, which might be entirely selfish, entirely worldly. We've got to be honest, haven't we? Because Jeremiah reminds us the heart is dishonest above all things, deceitful above all things.

And James says, yes, we are easily lured and enticed by our own heart's desire, remember. And so what he's doing here, you see, is he's challenging our whole outlook on life by this one simple example.

What is your real scale of values, my brothers? That's what he's asking. Whose position in the faith is yours merely through undeserved grace, undeserved generosity of our Father, who has put His family name on you, having brought you forth by His word of life, love from nothing, and all through the glory of the cross of our Savior.

[26 : 30] So do your values reflect those of your heavenly Father? What's your gold standard of glory, he's asking. Is it the Lord Jesus Christ who is the glory of earth and heaven?

Or is it, in fact, the tawdry standard of this present world that you've been saved from? Is it the gold and fine jewels that adorn those that this world values and honors and listens to and envies?

Have a long, hard look in the mirror of your life and see what it's revealing about you if you're going to be honest about it. That's what James is saying. And in fact, how we do treat the apparently flourishing person and the apparently failing one at the church door or in the pew or as a matter of fact anywhere else.

It may be a very revealing commentary on where our heart actually is, where our real values are, where our real benchmark of glory is. And it's a vital matter because James says very clearly that that kind of partiality is a denial of the faith, a denial of the only religion that is not utterly worthless and that is pure and undefiled before God.

those who hold the faith of our Lord Jesus, James says in verse 1, are defined by that true glory, the glory of the cross of Christ that alone will save them.

[28 : 00] And they're aligned with him, a crucified Savior. They belong to him, they share his name. Verse 7, they're called by his name. Remember in our studies in Genesis, in Genesis chapter 48, Jacob adopts Joseph's two sons and he confers his name upon them.

They'll be known by my name. But we're known by his name. But to show partiality like this, James says in verse 4, it denies all that. And it shows the divided loyalties of a divided heart, that you're deceiving your heart.

Have you not then made distinctions, he says. It's an unhelpful translation here. Better to read it. Have you not been inconsistent within yourselves? In the other place James uses this verb, we saw it in chapter 1, verse 6, where he's talking about the divided heart of the double-minded man praying with doubting, with inconsistency.

Let him ask in faith with no doubting, with no dividedness, no inconsistency, no wavering, no dividedness in devotion to the Lord, but wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord.

And this is the same dividedness in heart, the same double-mindedness that's at issue here. Do we always put the true glory of our Lord first in our evaluation of people, in our evaluation of the whole of life?

[29 : 27] Or, do we allow ourselves in fact to embrace the standards of this world to decide who and what is admirable and is worthwhile?

Are we outwardly professing the Lord's glory, but inwardly acting by the world's standards? In other words, living life in exactly the way James condemns in chapter 1, verse 22, being hearers only, but not being actual doers of the word, and therefore deceiving ourselves.

One commentator paraphrases this verb about being inconsistent as facing both ways. I think that's good. Nominally facing Christ, but actually living facing the opposite direction, the way of worldly snobbery.

And that's the worst kind of hypocrisy. The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways, said James in chapter 1, verse 8. He'll receive nothing from the Lord. He deceives himself.

And his religion is worthless. And the height of the arrogance, you see, is betrayed there at the end of verse 4. Because acting in this way, he says, means that you've made yourself judges with evil thoughts.

[30 : 48] You've presumptuously usurped the place of God himself, forgetting what James says later in chapter 4, that there's only one lawgiver and judge who's able to save and able to destroy God.

But who are you to judge your neighbor, he says. And not only have they become judges, but their judgment is all wrong because James says their thoughts are evil. Because they emanate from a heart that is divided within themselves.

A heart that actually denies God's glory seen in Christ, who became nothing, poor, in order to save us. But James lays on more reasons why such partiality is a denial of the faith.

In verses 5 and the first half of verse 6, he says that such an attitude also dishonors God's grace. Dishonoring God's grace seen in his choice of those who were nothing when they were saved. He's saying that showing partiality with respect to persons by judging with the world's valuations dishonors both the child of grace and the God of grace.

[31 : 57] Because it's the humble poor, he says, who are heirs of the promise. It's the reviled who are truly rich both now and forever. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?

But you dishonor the poor so that you put yourself against God and his choice. because that despises the things that are true riches.

Faith, which will not fade like rings and clothes. Being heirs of the kingdom which is eternal. And belonging to the honorable name.

One writer says, a man leaves his money and his will when he dies. But what counts is what he takes with him. The qualities of integrity and honor, purity, humility, and love.

These, being imperishable, are the real riches. So partiality despises these true riches. And it despises God's sovereign grace, God's choice, calling those who are with nothing and those who had nothing and were nothing, indeed those who are enemies.

[33 : 16] But calling people like that, people like us, to his eternal life. How can we then dare to judge anyone at all? Far less to do so by the world's pathetic and corrupt standards.

Notice, of course, James is not saying, don't misunderstand, he's not saying all the poor are true Christians or that only the poor can be saved. Paul said to the Corinthians, didn't he, not many of them were powerful, not many of them were of noble birth.

And the Countess of Huntington once famously said, do you remember, I was saved by an M. Because Paul said, not many, not any, wealthy and noble. Now he says clearly here, doesn't he, his kingdom is promised as he said, the crown of life was promised to those who love him.

Those who love him. But the reality in the world is that not many rich in this world's ways do love him, do they? How hard it is, said Jesus, for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Why? Because you cannot serve God and mammon. And mammon has a powerful, powerful hold on our hearts. And now, just as it was then, very often it is the poor who hear the call of Christ and who do love him and follow him and become truly rich, become truly blessed.

[34 : 46] And indeed, especially blessed are those whose poverty and pain is caused by their love to Christ. never forget these words. Everyone who has left houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands for my name's sake, everyone will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first, now that is, will be last. Then, the world standard on that day, the day of judgment, will be shown to be utterly back to front and utterly upside down, absolutely and eternally. And that's why it's such folly as well as so wrong and such hypocrisy to live, saying that we follow Jesus, but actually fawning over this world's glory. And that brings us to James' final point you see in the second half of verse 6 and in verse 7.

Acting this way is not only denying God's glory, it's not only dishonoring God's grace, but actually it can leave you despising God's church. Despising Christ's church seen in the cursing of those who bear his name.

Are not the rich the ones who oppress you? The ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called, the name of Christ?

[36 : 11] Showing partiality with respect to persons by judging with the world's valuations aligns you with those who despise Christ and his people.

And your friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God and therefore an enemy of his true church. because the rich harass and chase Christians says verse 6 here because they hate and curse Christ.

It's a fact of history isn't it? Going right back to the very beginning. So often it's those who are at the top in the world's eyes, those who set the trends, those who make the rules both legally and the

social rules that they have so much status and influence.

It's these people who oppose the Lord's people, the church of Jesus Christ who harass them, who persecute them. Why do they do that? Because they hate and despise the Lord Jesus.

Just read through the book of Acts. It's so clear there in Acts chapter 13. It's the chief men of the city, isn't it? Who stir up the persecution and drive out the apostles.

[37 : 26] It's the same in Philippi in Acts chapter 16. Same in Ephesus. It's the wealthy silversmiths, remember, who were threatened in their lucrative business by so many converts away from their pagan temples who persecute them just as, in fact, it was the publicans who were so threatened by the mass sobering up in the great awakenings of the 18th century who hated the evangelists.

And so often it has been so since. Popular cultural icons, media influencers, media influencers, the value setters in our world.

So often these are the ones who are so cynically opposed to the gospel of Christ and to the people of Christ. No wonder then, says John Blanchard, James points out the stupendous folly of toadying to men for whom Christ is no more than a swear word.

They blaspheme the honourable name of our Lord by which we are called, called to life, called Christian. And yet here it's they who are being fettered by the church.

Isn't that extraordinary? Of course, it can be very subtle, you see. That's why we don't see it ourselves. It could be a Christian denomination today wanting to be noticed, wanting to be taken seriously, wanting to have a seat at the table in the establishment with the government or wherever.

[38 : 56] But as a result, they find themselves aligned with those who have no care at all and they curse for the church of Jesus Christ. They find themselves being used by being flung a few titles, a few positions used to actually harm the true church of Jesus Christ.

Don't have to look very far to see that sort of thing in our own country. Or it could be a local church that wants to be well thought of in the community, wants to seek that approval the world's way by impressing with the devotion to the culture around with things that will be approved by the culture around and its view of what's glorious and what's praiseworthy.

So they'll fly the rainbow LGBT flags, they'll fly the Ukrainian flags, they'll fly the Palestine flags, they'll fly the green flags, any flags it seems but our own country's flag, to gain acceptance.

Or Christians, you see, who want to be naturally in a way winsome. They want to make their faith attractive to their middle class friends but in the world's way. So they want to avoid talking about any controversial subjects.

And they remain silent passively when any biblical truth that challenges their lifestyle is brought up or anything that might make them be mocked in conversation.

[40 : 24] And they don't want to be part of a church where these things are spoken about because they don't want their friends to think that they're beyond the pale in their sort of right-on thinking. No, no, we're with you too. It's very tempting that, isn't it?

But we have to ask, could we, by the scale of values we're actually living by, could we be siding with those who blaspheme the honorable name, the lovely name of Christ to whom we belong?

How hurtful that must be to our Savior who Himself bore such slander, such shame on the cross for you if that should be you or me.

very painful, isn't it, to have your name besmirched and slandered. Very painful too for a wife who shares that name of her husband to share in that hurt and pain.

It would be terrible, wouldn't it, to find ourselves aligned with those who hate and curse our Lord and His bride, His precious bride, His church. And what if we were further adding to that slander ourselves by our behavior?

[41 : 36] What if our utterly anti-Christian partiality, our failure to live by our true family values, actually turned other people away from the gospel of Christ because of our hypocrisy?

That was the terrible indictment, wasn't it, of the people of God that Ezekiel the prophet had to constantly give. Do you remember in our studies of Ezekiel? God's voice through him consistently said, you, my people, have profaned my name among the nations.

That's why in the New Testament, Paul urges Timothy and urges Titus to make sure that the church's life adorns the gospel, doesn't besmirch it. That they would live as authentic followers of Christ so that God and the teaching of Christ is not reviled.

far better that we're reviled and we're slandered because we won't besmirch the true way of Christ. Then we should be found facing both ways so that our Savior's name is actually damaged and His dignity is damaged by our attempt to be friends with the world as well as friends with God. What did Jesus say? Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man for you're persevering in doing the Word of God. [43 : 08] But woe to you, he says, when all people speak well of you for so their fathers did to the false prophets. The kind of people who told the king and told people what they wanted to hear and who valued and cherished what they valued and what they cherished.

But James is saying, no, faith and favoritism, favoring what the world favors, they are non-compatible. Because the gospel is one of undeserved grace and sheer generosity from God to those who can offer nothing.

Not pedigree, not prominence, not performance. Only God's unaccountable, generous choice. It's God alone who gives the riches that really matter.

Faith and love for Him. The promise of His kingdom. The honor of bearing His name. Cherishing any other gain, any other worldly gain.

We'll not only diminish these true riches, but we'll diminish everything about us. And we have to vigorously oppose all that kind of fawning over worldly wealth, worldly glory in the church.

[44 : 20] Status comes from godliness, not from gold. It comes from faith, not from fashions. It comes from our service, not our spending ability.

Worldly wealth of whatever form doesn't preserve us so often what it actually does is it poisons us. It leads to poverty of faith and love because it's a holy false security.

Isn't that right? And currying favor in terms of the world with those who we think are important, who we think might help us, that's not the road to influence.

That's not the road to importance for the gospel. So often, alas, all we're doing is actually aligning ourselves with those who are really enemies of the cross of Christ. So away with the sycophantic obsequiousness that often adulterates the life of the church in our time.

It's from my father's notes on these verses which were written in 1964. Well, how much more relevant they are today, aren't they? But to conclude then, how can we live personally as hearers and doers of the true faith that stands in the glory of Jesus?

[45 : 40] Well, James gives us these three mirror checks for all of our attitudes, all of our actions. And to use and to recall in hard practical situations too, maybe when we are tempted to favor the great and the good in the world and to dishonor the lowly.

He tells us, verse 1, remember our faith. We stand in Christ Jesus who is the true glory, who came down, who washed his disciples' feet, who showed true glory on the cross for the least, for the worst of people, for me and for you.

If our faith is in him, how will we behave towards others? Remember our faith and the glory of Christ. Second, remember our Father and the grace of his choice.

He says in verse 5, he chose us to be rich in faith, to be heirs of his kingdom, not for what we were in the world, but in sheer grace and mercy. Well, how would he chose now?

And how will my choices, my actions towards people reflect his? Remember our Father and the grace of his choice. And thirdly, he says, remember our future and the greatness of our call.

[46 : 58] Think of the great dignity that we have of bearing his name, the honorable name of our Lord, sharing his eternal kingdom with riches that will never fade, never fail us.

How then will we honor the family name and not dishonor it and show that that true family likeness and not obscure it, not diminish it, in our assessment of mere earthly wealth, earthly priorities, in the light of those true eternal riches, of all that has come down from above, of all that will outlast the Son.

Remember our future. Remember the greatness of our call. Brothers and sisters, we want to live not denying God's glory, not dishonoring his grace, not despising his church.

And we need to live like that, don't we? Remembering our true faith in the glory of Christ.

Remembering our true Father and the grace of his choice. And remembering our true future and the greatness of his call.

That's how we'll be not just hearers, but doers of his word. That's how we'll honor, not dishonor, the noble name, the honorable name, the beautiful name, which has been conferred upon us from above by his sheer grace and mercy.

[48 : 25] Well, let's pray together. Amen. Almighty and merciful God, of whose gift alone it comes that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service.

Grant, we beseech thee that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises! Through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen. Amen.