

Note: The first four Beatitudes paint a picture of the experience we had when we were first saved. We should also experience this everyday of our Christian walk. We should constantly be aware that we are “poor in spirit” which leads us to being filled with His righteousness. The rest of the Beatitudes are the outflow to other sinners from the inner workings of our heart.

- 1) Read Matthew 5:17-18, Matthew 7:12, and Romans 3:31. From what you have learned thus far in our study of James, how do you think the commands and instructions of the Old Testament laws and prophets are accomplished through our love of Christ?

James 2:1-13

- 2) Read James 2:1. What do you think the danger was as the new Christian church was being formed?

- a) What forms of favoritism do you see in the Christian church today?

- 3) Read James 2:2-4. How were the rich treated? How were the poor treated?

- a) The Jewish Christians should have known better. Look up the Old Testament law in Deuteronomy 15:7-8 and 12-13. How were the poor to be treated?

- b) In verse 4, James told them that they had become judges with evil motives or thoughts. What motivates people to treat the rich better than the poor?

- i) Look at Matthew 23:5-7. What is the evil motivation in these verses?

- ii) Read Luke 14:12-14. What lesson is being taught? Do you think Jesus means that we are never to invite friends or relatives or dinner?

- (1) Is your social circle only with those who can meet your need for importance, attention, love, favors, finances, fun, or even spiritual growth? If so, I encourage you to pray that the Lord would give you increased compassion for those that can give you nothing in return.

Note: The Greek word for poor is more of the idea of posture rather than bank account. It is the posture of begging, crouching, or cringing. In both Matthew 5:3 (Blessed are the poor in spirit) and in James 2:5 (Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith), the concept is of someone who is utterly in a humbled position.

- 4) Read James 2:5-7. Also read Matthew 19:16-26. Why did the young man go away grieving?
- a) Why do you think wealth is such a deterrent from trusting God?
- i) God is totally impartial. Both rich and poor can be saved. With God, all things are possible. From James 2:5, to whom did God promise they would be heirs of the kingdom?
- b) Look at Luke 7:37-38 and 44-48. This woman was truly “poor in spirit.” From verse 47, why were her sins forgiven?
- i) God does not care about our bank account or about how important we are. He is looking for true brokenness over our sinful nature. If Jesus walked into a social gathering (e.g. church, school, or work), who do you think He would sit next to? Part of your homework this week (this is not forced but encouraged ☺) is to pray that God would open your eyes to the “poor” around you and give you the courage to intentionally go “sit next to them” and somehow bless them.
- Note: *Roman courts always favored the rich, who could initiate lawsuits against social inferiors, although social inferiors could not initiate lawsuits against them. In theory, Jewish courts sought to avoid this discrimination, but as in most cultures, people of means naturally had legal advantages: they were able to argue their cases more articulately or to hire others to do so for them.* (from IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament by Craig S. Keener Copyright © 1993 by Craig S. Keener. Published by InterVarsity Press. All rights reserved.)
- c) All of us hate to be cheated. The tragedy is when we are cheated and then we turn around and treat someone else unfairly. That is what the Jewish Christians were doing. They were being hauled to court by those who didn’t know God and then they were doing the same thing. Read 1 Corinthians 6:1. How should disputes be settled?

d) Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. What should be the attitude of those who happen to have wealth?

5) Read James 2:8-11. From verse 8, what is the royal law?

a) Look up Matthew 22:36-40. There are two commandments that the whole Bible hinges on. You've already named the second one in the previous question. What is the first?

Note: When I look at this verse I think of heart as my attitude, soul as my personality, and mind as my intellect. Similar verses (e.g. Mark 12:30) add the words "all my strength" which is my energy. Attitude reminds me of my daily attitudes that don't glorify God. I know my personality has major flaws. For example, people can be too shy to share the gospel or too outgoing to be a compassionate listener. My intellect doesn't always stand on the truth of God's Word. Finally, my low energy can tempt me to sit and watch TV rather than do my Bible study! Can I love God with all of my attitude, personality, intellect, and energy? NO!

I also blow the second commandment every day. I'm pretty self-focused and think of myself before others. If you've ever heard the saying, "You can't love others until you love yourself," it's a lie from the world of psychology. There are two commandments here, not three. It doesn't say, "Love God, love yourself, and love others." It's assumed that we already love ourselves. All of us love ourselves over loving God and loving others. It is the great battle of sin.

Praise God that Jesus died for me! How blessed I am when I am poor in spirit and yet filled with His righteousness. Incredible joy fills my heart when I am humbled before Him daily and receive His love and grace.

b) Look again at James 2:9-11. Given the two great commandments above, why are we guilty of breaking all of the laws when we break just one?

i) Why do you think the sins of partiality, adultery, and murder are all equally grievous to the Lord? (This will take some thought. Answers may vary.)

c) Read James 2:12-13. From verse 12, what will we be judged by? From last week's lesson, what is the law of liberty?

d) Thinking about the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:7), mercy is the natural outgrowth of being saved and walking in His mercy. When we judge others, our focus is not on the Lord, the law of love is tossed out of our attitude, and we will reap the consequences of our bitterness. From verse 13, what triumphs over our temptation to judge?