

2:1 Impartiality

All of One Body.

Chrysostom: What does it matter if you think highly of yourself, when someone else despises you? Are we not all one body, both great and small? Therefore if in principle we are all one and members of each other, why do you mindlessly exalt yourself? Why do you bring shame on your brother? For just as he is a part of you, so you too are a part of him. Catena.¹

Favoritism.

Oecumenius: Anyone who does things by showing favoritism covers himself with great shame and reproach, for that way he brings disdain not only on his neighbor but much more on himself as well. Commentary on James.³

2:2 Rich and Poor

God Chooses the Weak.

Augustine: Far from me is the notion that in your tabernacle, Lord, the rich should be more highly regarded than the poor, or the noble than the less well-born. You have chosen the weak things of this world to put the strong to shame, and you have chosen things which are dishonorable, despised and of no account, in order to bring to nothing the things which are. Confessions 8.4.9.⁴

Gold Rings.

Hilary of Arles: What James says here applies not just to rings but to any sign of wealth, for the ring is meant to stand for a treasure house of riches. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.⁵

2:3 Discrimination

Attend to Inward Faith.

Chrysostom: There is no difference between rich and poor in Christ. Pay no attention to the outward appearance, but look for the inner faith instead. Catena.⁶

2:4 Judging Others by Appearances

The Rich Not More Holy.

Augustine: Who could bear to see a rich man chosen to occupy a seat of honor in the church when a more learned and holier man is passed over because he is poor? Is it not a sin to judge by appearances that a rich man is a better man? Letters 167.18.7

An Ancient Stylistic Indicator.

Theophylact: The word *and* often occurs here, where we would expect subordinate clauses instead. This was the older way of speaking, which James records for us. Commentary on James.8

2:5 Rich in Faith

Choosing the Poor.

Augustine: It is by choosing the poor that God makes them rich in faith, just as he makes them heirs of the kingdom. It is rightly said that he chose this faith in them, since it was in order to bring it about that he chose them. On the Predestination of the Saints 17 (34).9

Comforting the Displaced Poor.

Hilary of Arles: Some people say that this is meant to be a comfort to the poor who have been thrown out of the houses of the rich or who dwell in inferior accommodations. Even if they are poor in material things, they may be rich in faith. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.11

The Energies of the Poor.

Oecumenius: When poor people are not preoccupied with the things of the world, when they come to faith, they often become more energetic and more determined to work at it than rich people do. Commentary on James.12

2:6 The Rich Are Oppressors

The Greedy Are Poorest of All.

Chrysostom: Bear their greed as patiently as you can! Those people destroy themselves, not you. For while they rob you of your money, they strip themselves of God's favor and help. For the one who bases his life on greed and gathers all the wealth of the world around him is in fact the poorest of all. Catena.¹³

2:7 The Rich Blaspheme Christ

They Blaspheme.

Hilary of Arles: This is the name of the God of Israel, which was invoked on your behalf in Egypt, as well as in your baptism. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.¹⁶

2:8 Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Literal, Spiritual and Contemplative Dimensions Intertwined.

Hilary of Arles: "Love your neighbor" means three different things. The first is corporal, that is, the literal sense of the words. The second is spiritual, according to which we love those close to us even though we may be absent from them. The third is contemplative, by which love itself is beheld. But we have to understand that one leads to another. The corporal inspires us to go on to the spiritual, and that in turn lifts us up to the contemplative. The spiritual may sometimes regress to the merely corporal, but the contemplative never fails us. The corporal and spiritual forms of love are common to human beings and have analogies in animals, but the contemplative is reserved for humans alone. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.¹⁷

As Toward a Child of God.

Andreas: Just as you want to be treated justly and properly by your neighbor, so you must behave toward him as you would towards your kinsman and child of God. What our Savior said about this is absolutely right: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. For this is the law and the prophets." ¹⁸
Catena.¹⁹

2:9 *Discrimination Is Sin*

Show No Partiality.

Hilary of Arles: It is a sin to show any class distinction among persons, for the law says: “You shall not be partial in judgment, you shall hear the small and the great alike.”²⁰ Jesus confirmed this when he said: “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”²¹ Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.²²

2:10 *Breaking the Law*

Guilty Before the Lawgiver.

Augustine: Is it possible that the person who has discriminated between rich and poor is guilty of murder, adultery and sacrilege? That does indeed seem to be the conclusion which James is drawing. Such a man is guilty of every crime, because by offending in one point he has become guilty of them all. Letters 167.3.²³

Love Is the Sum of the Law.

Andreas: To fail in one point is to lack perfect love, for this is the source of all good deeds. If something in the head is not right, the rest of the body suffers as a result. The entire purpose and plan of God is designed to lead to perfect love. That is the meaning of the commandments such as “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not kill” and so on. Catena.²⁶

2:11 *Adultery and Murder*

Extreme Examples.

Hilary of Arles: Why does James choose these two commandments as his examples? Because they are the ones which deal most closely with loving and with hating one’s neighbors. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.²⁷

Murder and Adultery Show Hate.

Oecumenius: James added these commandments in order to give examples of what he was talking about, which was love. For someone who loves his neighbors as he ought to will neither commit adultery with them nor kill them. When these things are done, they indicate contempt for the neighbor. Commentary on James.²⁸

2:12 Judged by the Law of Liberty

Everyone Free and Equal.

Hilary of Arles: By the New Testament law everyone is born again, free and equal with one another. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James.²⁹

No Favoritism.

Oecumenius: The law of liberty is the one which does not recognize classes of persons. This is the law of Christ. Whoever shows favoritism is not free but a slave, for “A man is a slave to the one by whom he has been overcome.”³⁰ Commentary on James.³¹

2:13 Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

The Art of Showing Mercy.

Chrysostom: Mercy is the highest art and the shield of those who practice it. It is the friend of God, standing always next to him and freely blessing whatever he wishes. It must not be despised by us. For in its purity it grants great liberty to those who respond to it in kind. It must be shown to those who have quarreled with us, as well as to those who have sinned against us, so great is its power. It breaks chains, dispels darkness, extinguishes fire, kills the worm and takes away the gnashing of teeth.³² By it the gates of heaven open with the greatest of ease. In short, mercy is a queen which makes men like God. Catena.³³

One Who Has Shown No Mercy.

Augustine: He who judges without mercy will be judged without mercy. And in this sense only is the “same measure” to be understood, that the mercy which he did not show will not be shown to him, and that the

judgment which he makes will be eternal, even though the thing judged cannot be eternal. Letter 102.4.

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An Oil of Escape.

Hesychius: Just as oil enables athletes to escape the hands of their opponents, so mercy prepares those who practice it to avoid and escape the demons. Catena.³⁵

Your Judgment and God's.

Hilary of Arles: If you are merciful and lenient to the poor in your judgment, you will have nothing to fear from the judgment of God. Introductory Tractate on the Letter of James. ³⁷

Forgiving as We Are Forgiven.

Oecumenius: If we forgive others the sins which they have committed against us and give alms to the poor and needy among us, then God's mercy will deliver us from judgment. But if, on the other hand, we are not well-disposed toward those around us, we shall receive the condemnation handed out to the wicked servant, along with the retribution which is mentioned in the Lord's Prayer. For there we ask God to forgive us as we forgive those who have sinned against us, ³⁸ but if we do not forgive them, we shall not be forgiven either. Commentary on James.³⁹