

**Message #8****James 2:1-13**

Back in the mid to late 1800's in the Old West, western cities and towns were looking for medical doctors. They took out advertisements in papers asking for doctors to come to their towns, promising them a good career. Their advertisement would often say, "No women need apply."

In 1893, Susan Anderson enrolled in the University of Michigan medical school. She graduated in 1897 and decided to move west to Colorado. When she moved there she discovered she was up against 55 doctors who were all men. Most people were prejudiced against women doctors, until she started to treat people rather than amputate limbs. She earned a reputation for herself and ended up practicing medicine in Colorado for 50 years. Many people were thankful Susan did not listen to the ad that said, "No women need apply."

The prejudices of people cause many problems. Let me define prejudice. **Prejudice is the feeling favorable or unfavorable toward someone or something before you know the actual truth or facts. What prejudice actually turns out to be is making some judgment about someone before you even know the actual truth about them.**

When it comes to people, there are about 11 causes of prejudice:

1) Race; 2) Sex; 3) Age; 4) Ethnicity; 5) Language; 6) Religion; 7) Nationality; 8) Education; 9) Interests; 10) Clothing; 11) Social and Economic Status.

It is the tenth one James had in mind when he wrote this. Prejudice has no place in Grace Age Christianity and certainly it should never be in the Church.

Jesus said, "do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" John 7:24

Paul said, "there is no partiality with God" Rom. 2:11

Solomon said, "to show partiality in judgment is not good" Prov. 24:22

This problem of prejudice favoritism really began to creep into the church during the days of James. Apparently someone would come into the church who had money and appeared to be classy and people were drawn to them and showed favoritism to them. On the other hand, the poor sinner who came into the church was made to feel like he didn't even matter and James says that needs to be stopped because this has no place in the Church. In fact, what he writes here is this:

**PREJUDICE AND FAVORITISM HAS NO PLACE IN THE CHURCH OR IN GRACE AGE CHRISTIANITY AND THOSE WHO ARE PREJUDICED ARE INVOLVED IN EVIL SIN.**

One can go to church every Sunday and be committing evil sin. They aren't involved in adultery or drunkenness or drugs or stealing but they are people who are prejudiced and are involved in committing evil sin.

**Verse 1** begins with James saying, “my brethren.” So he is writing this to the “brothers.” He is writing this to the family of God. What he says is do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of “personal favoritism.”

Clearly we see here in **verse 1** that James believed one was saved by “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.” James did not believe one was saved by works, but by faith. In fact, the whole basis of this challenge is that they had believed on Jesus Christ and were saved.

James says, “do not continually (present tense) hold fast or possess your faith in an attitude of personal favoritism.” That word “favoritism” is one that means to be a respecter of someone simply because of their appearance or face” (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 388-389). Do not base your attitudes about people on face value appearances.

What James is talking about here is showing favor simply based on how a person looks or what a person appears to be or have. That should not ever happen in the church. Every person should be of equal significance. The church is not about the haves and have nots, it is about God.

The church is about all kinds of people doing honest business with God. So there is no place for having personal favoritism when you go to church. All are there and they need the Word of God and they need to learn and grow.

The “for” that begins **verse 2** gives four reasons why there is no place for favoritism or partiality in the church, simply based on social or financial status:

**REASON #1** – Because showing favoritism makes you a judge with evil motives. **2:2-4**

**Certainly one thing we are learning from this book of James and that is external religious appearances at church can be one big sham show.** People can come to church and really put on a religious show. They are not there to hear God’s Word. They are there to talk and gossip and put on their worthless show.

What all need to know is that God is a gracious God and God is an impartial judge. His evaluations are always based on facts and truth. But apparently another problem was beginning to surface among the early Jewish believers.

According to **verse 2**, two men walked into a synagogue or supposed place of worship. One of the men was wearing “fine” clothing, which means he was wearing very expensive shining clothing. In fact, that man had a “gold ring” which at that time was a tremendous status symbol of wealth. This man was not only wealthy, but this was a man of real class.

Another man came in and he was poor and was not wearing nice clothes; in fact, his clothes looked kind of dirty. He looked more like a beggar or poverty-stricken bum.

Now let's keep in mind that these believers at this church are scattered (**1:1**); and most of them don't have much money themselves (**1:9-10**).

So right away when they see these two guys come to church, they think "wow" if we could get this rich man in our church he would be a real prize catch. He would bring money and social status to our church. He is one of the real success stories. He knows big people with a lot of money.

So according to **verse 3**, what some were apparently doing is that they spotted that person and said, let us usher you into the good seat; the best seat in the place. This would be some seat that was a real place of honor. This would be some seat up front. Barnes said this may have even been near the pulpit. They treat this rich man who comes to church as a great man. They don't know a thing about him; they base this on what he is wearing.

On the other hand, they say to the poor man, you go stand over there or sit here on my footstool. They don't even give the poor guy a seat at the service. At best they give him a bench to sit on where they put their feet. They don't know a thing about this man either, except they see the way he is dressed and their attitude is we don't really care if you even have a seat.

According to **verse 4**, they made their personal favoritism distinction solely on money. The well-dressed man was great in their view and the poor man was nothing.

I will never forget a story told to me by Bob Kregel, when I was working for him. He got a call one day from a man who said he wanted to leave Bob money to publish Sir Robert Anderson books to give away. The man lived in California and Bob was going to be in California and he said he would come by and talk with the man. Well Bob said he got to this old shack. It did not have electricity or running water as I recall. Bob said the guy had lanterns and an old cot to sleep on and that was the guy's house. Bob said he would be happy to publish the books and give them away so he said to the man, how much money are we talking about and the man said \$600,000 dollars. Bob said I learned you never judge a book by its cover.

These people were seating people at church based on the cover. **God says this is "evil."** The motives for this treatment were "evil." This word is used for Satan. This word is used for sexual immorality (*Ibid.*, p. 373). It is a word that describes something God views as wicked, evil, worthless and very bad. That is how God views it. It is evil to cater to the rich and ignore the poor.

Any church that shows favoritism based on what a person has or how much they have without getting to know them is committing evil sin. That is the way God sees it.

If someone pulled up to the church in a limousine and got out wearing a \$5,000 dollar silk suit and came into the church at the same time a poor widow walked in, I wonder how we would do.

**REASON #2** – Because showing favoritism dishonor's God's election. **2:5-7**

These are fascinating verses which are in many ways an evangelistic goldmine because we get a glimpse here of who it is God typically elects and saves.

**Verse 5** says that for the most part, God saves poor, despised, down and out people. God does the choosing and He does the saving and He gives the faith and the vast majority of people that He saves are not the high class, wealthy, upper echelon. God typically does not do His greatest work with the elite rich.

This fact was taught by Jesus Christ who said He came to preach the Gospel to the poor (Luke 4:16-18). This fact was also taught by the Apostle Paul who said that God does not choose “many” of upper class (I Cor. 1:26-27). He did not say He does not choose “any,” but “many.” Most Christians were poor, so if some rich successful person came to the church the people could view him as some special trophy. The fact is, none are trophies; we are all sinners who need God's grace.

So here is the issue. The vast majority of people who will end up rich in eternity because they have been chosen by God will not be the rich and famous. So to show partiality to one who comes into church simply because they appear to be wealthy is foolish and dishonorable to God's elective decisions.

Generally speaking, God saves nobodies in this world. Abraham Lincoln was right; “God must love the common people because He made so many of them.”

When we get into eternity, for the most part it won't be the rich and famous who will reign in the millennial kingdom with Christ (**v. 5**); it will be those who didn't have much.

In fact, God says in **verse 6** that if you show favoritism, you “dishonor the poor man” who is probably the most important man in God's eternal Kingdom.

In **verses 6- 7**, James reminds the believers of three important realities:

**Reality #1** - It is the rich who oppress you. **2:6b**

The word “oppress” means to exercise power over someone in an oppressive and enslaving way. Think about this for a second.

**Reality #2** - It is the rich who drag you into court. **2:6c**

Rich people owned things and they lent things and did business with people and if a payment were a little late and someone was struggling, they could haul you into court and demand full payment.

**Reality #3** - It is the rich who blaspheme Jesus Christ. **2:7**

For the most part, it is the rich who mock Biblical Christianity and mock the Bible.

James' point is if a rich person comes into the church and you simply judge based on wealth, you are actually showing favoritism to one who mistreats you and mocks your God.

**REASON #3** – Because showing favoritism is sin against God's Word and law. **2:8-11**

If you asked these people who went to church what do you think about God's Word, they would probably say they love it.

James says, well then fulfill the "royal or supreme" part of the law that says you are to love your neighbor and treat people fairly and equally.

In fact, in **verse 9** James says if you show partiality you are committing transgression and sin. Prejudice is sin. If a person comes into the church and we treat them with partiality based on what they do or don't have, we are committing sin and the law of God condemns us. The law of God treats people equally; it condemns every one of us.

In fact, according to **verse 10**, God views a person who does that as breaking the whole law. In fact, God equates showing partiality with murder in **verse 11**.

We can destroy and kill a person by showing partiality against someone. Look carefully at **verse 11**, God considers this sin on the same level with murder and adultery.

People who have experienced God's grace are gracious to all equally.

**REASON #4** – Because showing favoritism is contrary to God's mercy. **2:12-13**

Look carefully at these verses. We are saved not by the law but by the mercy of God. We do not live our lives by the law, but by the law of liberty.

The point of these verses is this—we who have experienced the mercy of God need to show it to others.