

James 2:1-13

"The Folly Of Favoritism"

My reception of God's Word is made manifest in my response to God's Word. That's the life lesson James has just rehearsed w/us in this last portion of Ch 1. If my *observation* of God's word never translates into an *application* of God's Word, than it's not doing me any good. It doesn't matter how much I study it, how accurately I can quote it or how well I think I know it... As the curtain draws back on Ch 2, James continues to build upon that principle, but he zeroes in on the specific point of *partiality* (or favoritism).

In particular, the way we might be inclined to treat someone who's rich as opposed to someone who is poor. He throws in the balance 2 individuals who visit your church on the same day who are on the radically opposite ends of the social strata. & He highlights the sinful tendency that we have as humanity to show great respect toward the rich man while simultaneously showing utter disregard for the poor man. – *Ultimately*, what he wants us to know is that we're to *consistently* show the same courtesy *toward* & have the same compassion *for* everyone alike.

Listen, it doesn't matter who the individual may be, or upon what rung of the social ladder they may stand. They're someone whom either Christ lives *in* or someone whom Christ died *for* & that should impact/equalize how we treat them.

Vs 1

That is, there should never be any prejudice or discrimination associated *with* or linked *to* your/my life as a believer. When he says, "...hold the faith *of*" we could also understand that to say, "your belief *in*". Don't taint or contaminate your belief in J.C. through prejudice or partiality.

Now; we're obviously going to spend the lion share of our time today (through the exhortation/illustration James give us) on this point. But before we do our deep dive, I want you to notice something that he says here that we have a tendency to read *almost* in passing but it's a powerful point that deserves our time and attention...

He says, "Do not hold the faith of our Lord J.C. (notice) the Lord of glory..." Of course, if you'll notice, the words "the Lord" before "of glory" are in italics which means the translators added them for clarification (which is completely appropriate in this case, the grammatical phrasing makes that clear). But more literally it's just, "...our Lord J.C., of glory" or "the glory". Here's what I want you to understand. James is pointing to Jesus as the divine Glory, the full manifestation of the divine presence & majesty.

It is an unmistakable reference to the fullness of deity. It's what the Jews referred to as the "Shekinah" of God, the glory of God. Remember Heb 1:3? It says (in speaking of Jesus), *"...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,"*¹ This is Jesus, the Lord of glory, who transforms you from glory to greater glory, the fullness of the Godhead bodily who has loved you & given Himself for you...

It's the wonder & the beauty & the mystery of the message of the gospel. That God (veiled in human flesh) would lay down His life upon the altar of the cross so that you & I might have life by God's grace through faith in Him. – You say, "How does that work?" I wish I knew... 😊

What I can tell you is that God has established what's called a "federal headship" of man (mankind) (humankind). Just like our government is a "federal government" 1 man by the people, for the people. & It was by 1 man (Adam) that sin came into the world (Paul touches on this in Rom 5) & death spread to all mankind because in Adam all sinned. (Meaning that once Adam had a sin nature, that's all he could pass on). **But Jesus isn't of the lineage of Adam, He was conceived of a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is His Father. Being born of Mary, He's fully Man, being born of God, He's fully God. Therefore, He didn't have a sin nature, & being w/out sin He was qualified to atone (or make amends) for the sin of the world. For if by 1 man sin can enter the world, then through 1 Man the sin of the world can be forgiven.**

& This is why the Bible teaches that we must be "born again". We've all been born once through the natural process. We've got to be "born again" through a supernatural process of the Spirit of God through faith in J.C. & His work for us upon the cross. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is spirit...

All that to say, James make clear here, in no uncertain terms that J.C. is God. He is "the glory".

& The exhortation is not to hold our faith in Him, w/partiality. That is, don't contaminate your reflection of who He is through prejudice & favoritism. That's not who He is. God is not a respecter of persons. When Jesus was upon the earth, that was one of the things that even His enemies made note of.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Heb 1:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

When the Pharisees were trying to entangle/entrap Him in His words they said, *“Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.”*² Meaning, “You don’t play favorites, make exceptions *for* or allow Yourself to be influenced *by* people just because they’re rich, or just because they’re poor. You treat everyone the same.” Everyone is on equal footing before God.

& This would be revolutionary for James’ readers. Because regardless of what you may think of social, ethnic or class distinctions in our day, I promise you it’s *nothing* compared to what it was in James’ day. James wrote to an incredibly partial age. It was *filled w/prejudice* based upon nationality, ethnicity, where you sat economically, religious background. People were *permanently* categorized by being male, female, Jew, Gentile, slave or free.

But James is saying what Paul would later pen as well. Jesus breaks down those barriers & sets us all equally before Him. We read in Gal 3, *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*³ You might write down Acts 10 & read it later. That’s where Peter learned this same lesson...

So; the exhortation? Don’t show discrimination. Now James offers an *illustration*.

Vs 2-4

Pretty easy to see this in our minds eye. Elon Musk drives up in his high-performance Tesla, dressed for a red-carpet kind of showing & someone else gets dropped off from the homeless shelter at the same time. – How we react or respond toward these guys is going to demonstrate the reality of what’s happening in our hearts.

There’s no denying that we’re all somewhat susceptible; we’re all guilty of treating people differently, depending on how we view them outwardly. But generally speaking, the bitter irony is that the people we try to impress the most are those who care about us the least—while the people who really would be open to receiving from us are the ones we think we don’t have time for. (James will lean into that in just a minute).

But he talks here about these gold rings & extravagant clothes. This was a measure of wealth in the ancient world.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 22:16]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ga 3:26-28]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

There were even shops where you could rent rings for special occasions to put on an appearance of greater wealth. (Much like renting a tuxedo or something). & It wouldn't be one ring on one finger. They would layer them up! The more rings, the greater the wealth!

So, this guy comes in & man, he's decked out. It's obvious he has a lot of money. He's powerful, he's important (you get the idea). So you usher him down to the front, you kick someone out of their chair & you supply him w/the best seat in the house... In contrast, a man comes in, his clothes are tattered, perhaps patched. I mean, he's tried to clean himself up but it's obvious he's impoverished. The van from the homeless shelter dropped him off... So, you're like, "Hey buddy, you can stand back here. Or if you want to sit down, just have a seat on the floor."

What a revelation. What illumination. It's incriminating evidence of deep carnality among Christians. It's a demonstration of evil thoughts by their partial (biased) actions. It shows that we care more for outward appearance than what's happening in the heart. We place more value upon the man w/riches when God values all men the same. Do you remember 1 Samuel 16? *"For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*⁴ & Again, partiality is usually more of a revelation of carnality w/in us. We favor the rich over the poor because we believe they can do something for us that the poor can't. The motive for partiality is self-centered.

& Listen, the problem isn't that they treated the rich man so great. Had they treated the poor man w/the same kind of enthusiasm/hospitality then everything would be fantastic... Or, had they each been offered a place to stand (taking for granted the place was simply full) that would be fine too. But the comparison/contrast in treatment presents the problem of partiality.

Aren't you glad that we serve a God who is *impartial*? Who doesn't one over the other based upon nationality, ethnicity, or the social construct of society? But that salvation is available to *all equally*... *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*⁵ & Again, *"For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*⁶ So when we show partiality we represent Him unfairly, in a way that's not true to who He is in reality. (Rom 2:11)

Vs 5-7

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Sa 16:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 3:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 10:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

I should probably point out the fact that James isn't speaking categorically. There are incredibly godly people who are rich, incredibly ungodly people who are poor. But the principle in play is that (generally speaking), riches can be an obstacle to the kingdom of God. Jesus put it plainly in Matt 19, "*Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*"⁷ Why? Because it's more difficult for the rich to see their genuine need. To recognize the poverty of their soul. If I have everything you want, if I don't really have a sense of need, then why do I need God? (Obviously, scripturally we could explain that, but this is the rationale of the natural man).

The poor (on the other hand) readily recognize their need. They're open to a message of hope, the promise of eternal life which is readily available to *all* but most eagerly accepted by those who are looking for more than this life has to offer. (You might do a quick search in your Bible later. Vs' that speak to God's heart going out to the poor, the fatherless, those who are oppressed & afflicted are not in short supply).

So, in despising the poor, we so often turn away from the very one who is open the message that you have to bring them. The Bible teaches us that *Jesus Himself was a poor Man.* & It wasn't that His heavenly Father didn't provide for Him, but He said, "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have their nests, I don't even have anywhere to lay My head at night." Had you met Him when He was ministering on the earth, you wouldn't have seen anything physically or materially about Him that drew you in...

Think about it. He was born in a borrowed stable. He spoke from a borrowed boat. When He fed the 5,000, it was from loaves & fish He borrowed from a young boy. He borrowed a coin to illustrate a truth. He borrowed a donkey to ride into Jerusalem. He borrowed a room to celebrate the Passover. He died on a borrowed cross—it was intended originally for Barabbas, not Him. They put Him in a borrowed tomb—it was Joseph of Arimathaea's... & He was despised & rejected by the religious leaders of His day... Yet He was/is the very glory of God... It's no wonder then that He rebuked them saying, "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.*"⁸

But so often we make the same mistake... we "dishonor" the poor man. What does it mean when it speaks of the poor being rich in faith? It means that the rich "might" trust God. The poor "must" trust God. The poor will generally have a much "richer" faith, more abundant faith because they've had to trust God for everything.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 19:23]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 7:24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“Do not the rich oppress you & drag you into the courts?” This was a custom that was readily practiced in James’ day. If you owed a debt, someone lent you money, & then they saw you on the street, they could grab hold of you & drag you before the magistrate right then & there. If you weren’t able to pay, you’d be put in a debtor’s prison...

James is saying, “Hey, you’re showing partiality toward the very one most likely to oppress you... why would you do that?” Now, he’s not saying that we should show partiality *against* the rich either. The idea is that of a just, fair, equitable, impartial attitude toward all.

Vs 8-9

James here is anticipating some kick back. He’s envisioning the argument, “I’m just loving my neighbor as myself!” He says, “Well; if you’re really doing that, great. But by only doing that for the rich, & not for the poor, you’re not doing that. You’re being partial, which is sin.”

Now, why is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” called the “royal” law? #1 It was decreed by the King of kings. #2 It rules every other law. Meaning, if people just did this, there would be no need for any other moral/civil law (what was right/wrong toward others). All of the law is summed up in loving God, loving others, therefore “love” (as Paul would say) is the fulfillment of the law.

All the way back in the book of Leviticus (Ch 19) God was laying down this edict. They weren’t to respect the poor (meaning don’t give them favor just because they’re poor) nor honor the rich/mighty (give favor to someone else because of their money or political position etc). What’s right is right, regardless of who is involved in a matter.

Vs 10-13

The warning is against selective obedience. As if I’m minimizing my guilt. He’s essentially saying, “Look, you’re either guilty of breaking the law, or not. You can’t say, ‘Well, *this* is a big deal (murder) so I won’t do that. But to have a little extra-marital fun (adultery) isn’t that big of deal so I’ll disregard that.’” The same law that says don’t murder, forbids adultery. I might have a chain here & only break one link, but I’ve broken the chain nonetheless. & James is using these fairly obvious examples to show the absurdity of inconsistent obedience.

The law is a body (the body of the law). If someone punches me in the face, they didn’t hurt every part of me, but my body has been hurt just the same. There’s either been a violation or there hasn’t. There’s nothing in between.

& Here's the hard lesson. It only takes one sin to be found guilty before God. In other words, you've either sinned or you haven't. & The truth is, we don't sin & then become sinners. We're sinners & we prove it when we sin. (Remember that sin nature we inherited in Adam?)

So speak & so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. The law of Christ, the law of love... "For judgment is w/out mercy to the one who has shown no mercy..." Question: Who here could use a heaping helping of *not only* the mercy of others, but the mercy of God? Jesus said, *"...be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*⁹ That last portion there is often used w/in the context of money (& the application is there, you can't out give God, He'll be a debtor to no man). But the true interpretation has nothing to do w/money, it has everything to do w/mercy. If we desire mercy, then we should be *merciful*.

It's the principle of sowing & reaping in effect. Our belief will control our behavior. The Christian should be marked by courtesy, compassion & consistency. If God has shown compassion toward you, then you should show compassion toward others.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy...

Prayer Points:

God we thank You that *Your* mercies are new every morning. May we never take Your mercies for granted & may we accurately, appropriately reflect Your heart to those around us. Make us more like Jesus & may Your love pour forth from us that others might be drawn to You in us.

Jesus was "the Friend of sinners". But it wasn't compromise that placed Him in their midst, it was compassion. For God did not send His Son into the world to *condemn* the world. But that the world through Him might be saved... Turn from your sin, trust in J.C. today & you will be saved, for *whoever* calls on the name of the Lord, shall be saved.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 6:36-38]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.