

# Out of Step

**E.T.S.:** James addresses the sin of partiality in the church.

**E.S.S.:** We need to identify and remove any traces of partiality from our personal and corporate lives.

**Christ Follower:** If you are a believer in and follower of Christ, identify and remove the traces of partiality in your life. Additionally, speak up for the "poor and needy" (see Proverbs 31:8-9).

**Christ Seeker:** If you have not believed in Christ for salvation, know that He left all the glory and goodness of heaven to experience all the brokenness of the earth for you. Believe in Him and receive forgiveness of sin and salvation.

## Introduction

Would you join me in James chapter two?

## Illustration

When someone lacks an understanding of the perspective, thoughts, or beliefs of another person, we can describe that relation as being out-of-step.

How many of you have heard or used that phrase?

James, the half-brother of Jesus who wrote the epistle of James in the New Testament, spoke to the believers of his day about a specific way that they were out-of-step in relation to God. A particular behavior showed up in the early, first-century church that required correction.

Follow along as I read James 2:1-13 where we see this addressed.

## **Bible**

*(1) My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. (2) For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; (3) And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: (4) Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? (5) Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? (6) But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? (7) Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? (8) If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: (9) But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. (10) For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (11) For he that said, Do not commit*

*adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. (12) So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

*James 2:1-13 - KJV*

## Introduction

How was the church demonstrating being out of step with God?

Through the activity of partiality.

What does James reveal about this sin?

# 1...Partiality is out-of-step with God's Character (vv. 1-4)

## Explanation

Wrapped up in the command from James, we receive a snapshot of God's character. Notice that James identifies Jesus Christ as *the Lord of glory*. One Bible teacher remarks that this reference means that Jesus is the divine glory. He is what the Jews would call the *shekinah*.

Do you remember the burning, penetrating light of God's presence that descended on the tabernacle and Temple of the Old Testament?

That was called *shekinah*.

John describes heaven in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. He describes heaven as a place without need for the sun, moon, or stars because the glory of the Lamb (Jesus) lights the place at all times.

This identifies evidence of the earliest Christians' belief that Jesus is God. He's not just a man, teacher, or prophet, but God incarnate.

Why is this important to this discussion?

We're exhorted not to hold faith (believe in and follow Jesus) with respect of persons. This phrase, *respect of persons*, comes from a Hebrew idiom that literally means to lift up the face on a person. It identifies the idea of partiality and favoritism. We may think of it in terms of discrimination. The phrase is used four times in the New Testament; here, as well as in Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, and Colossians 3:25. In each of the three passage before this passage, the Bible describes God as no respecter of persons. In other words, God does not show partiality or favoritism. In fact, one of the results of Jesus' death was the removal of racial lines or a focus on dividing walls.

## **Bible**

*(14) For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; (15) Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;*

## **Application**

So, what do I do with this?

God does not practice partiality. Jesus, Who is God, demonstrated that in His life and abolished it by His death. When I practice partiality, I am living out-of-step with God's character demonstrated by the perfect life of Jesus. His death tore down the walls, and only my sinful nature builds them back up.

How is this revealed?

James provides an illustration before pointing the finger back at the church.

## **Illustration**

*"Rick Warren said that there are at least five areas where we as believers can be tempted to discriminate:*

- *We can discriminate on the basis of appearance.*
- *We can discriminate on the basis of ancestry.*
- *We can discriminate on the basis of age.*
- *We can discriminate on the basis of achievement.*
- *We can discriminate on the basis of affluence" (Turning Toward Integrity by David Jeremiah).*

## Application

If we practice these or similar behaviors, we are not aligning with God's character. We're out-of-step.

## 2...Partiality is out-of-step with God's Choice (vv. 5-7)

### Explanation

How does God choose the poor?

While *poor* in this context identifies material poverty, God's choice is spiritual. Those who are poor in material things are chosen by God to partake equally with all believers in the inheritance of Jesus Christ. Like racial status, national status, or gender status, social status does not tell the story of someone's relationship with God, nor does it exclude someone from coming into relationship with God.

So, James tells believers that these issues should not influence their treatment of or attentiveness to others. In reality, the wealthy of this world can be prone to be antagonistic to Christianity.

### Application

God does not show partiality based on status, and neither should we. Never forget that we are

equals in Christ. Christ should be the defining reality of our lives and relationships with others.

## **3...Partiality is out-of-step with God's Command (vv. 8-11)**

### **Explanation**

James introduced the familiar command of Jesus as the *royal law*. The language identifies a law fit to guide a king, a law such as a king would choose, or the king of laws. It is the law to guide all other laws or the law above all other laws. This command should guide the believers. When believers obey this law, they do well.

However, partiality is both a sin of omission and commission; it is both a failure to do what one should do and a failure of doing something that one shouldn't.

As a sin of omission, partiality fails to love others.

### **Application**

When you and I individually or corporately practice partiality, we fail to love others the way God loves others and the way He commands us to love others.

### **Explanation**

As a sin of commission, partiality practices active behavior contrary to God's command.

## Application

When we practice partiality, we behave in a sinful way. It is sin to be repented of.

# 4...Partiality is out-of-step with God's Compassion (vv. 12-13)

## Explanation

Believers will be judged by the *law of liberty*. This seems paradoxical, doesn't it? How can judgment and law relate to liberty.

I appreciate the way Douglas Moo described it:

*No longer is God's law a threatening, confining burden. For the will of God now confronts us as a law of liberty—an obligation that is discharged in the joyful knowledge that God has both 'liberated' us from the penalty of sin and given us, in his Spirit, the power to obey his will*

## Explanation

Paul describes it this way:

## Bible

*(1) Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not*

*entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

*Galatians 5:1 - KJV*

*(13) For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*

*Galatians 5:13 - KJV*

## **Explanation**

Judgment for believers is not about retribution because of disobedience. The retribution of disobedience was all judged in Christ. The judgment for believers is about reception because of obedience. Fulfillment of this law leads to reward.

However, notice that the focus of the text is not judgment, but mercy. The idea that *mercy rejoiceth against judgment* is that mercy exults over, glories over, or boasts over judgment. This concurs with the Old Testament statement from Hosea 6:6:

## **Bible**

*(6) For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

*Hosea 6:6 - KJV*

## **Explanation**

If you remember, the sacrifice dealt with judgment. God does not dismiss sin, nor diminish His

holiness or justice. Yet, He lovingly and graciously delights in mercy.

## Application

Does that show up in our lives and the demonstration of our character?

If partiality makes up part of your life, you and I fail to demonstrate the compassion that God demonstrates to us.

## Bible

*(32) Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant,*

*I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: (33) Shouldest not thou also*

*have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?*

*Matthew 18:32-33 - KJV*

## Conclusion

**Christ Follower:** If you are a believer in and follower of Christ, identify and remove the traces of partiality in your life. Additionally, speak up for the "poor and needy" (see Proverbs 31:8-9).

**Christ Seeker:** If you have not believed in Christ for salvation, know that He left all the glory and goodness of heaven to experience all the brokenness of the earth for you. Believe in Him and receive forgiveness of sin and salvation.