

James 2:1-13 Partiality with Evil Motives

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The theme of the book of James is about living out our faith, and being a doer of the Word, not just a hearer. In chapter one, James taught on our faithful response to trials and tribulation, our correct response to temptations, and our correct response to the precepts of the Word of God. Now in James 2:1-13, the author will deal with our treatment of people that are less fortunate than ourselves. In the first century Roman Empire, as well as now, there was social disconnect between rich and poor, slaves and free, and other factions in the church. James will rebuke his audience for their materialistic and nationalistic view toward others. The first century church was much more severe in these areas than even we are today. Almost one half of the Roman Empire were slaves, so it is likely that almost half the members of the churches would have been slaves. Can you imagine slave owners sitting in church with slaves as their equal? In the first century when this was written, there was no such thing as women's rights, or any kind of individual rights unless you were a male Roman citizen of the Patrician class. Rome was a republic, but women and slaves were not allowed to vote. Plebeians, the poor lower class had no legal rights under the law. Therefore, there was tremendous discrimination by gender, class, and nationality. Nevertheless, the Apostles taught the New Covenant ushered in by Jesus Christ and wrote, "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" (Gal.3:28). This meant that spiritually, and in the church, God recognized none of these differences. The only thing God recognizes is whether a person believes in Jesus as their Savior. Of course God alone knows what is in a person's heart, whether they truly believe or not, and that is how He judges them. Even in the Old Testament God told Samuel, "Do not look at the outward appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart." (1 Sam.16:7) In the New Testament in Matthew 11:11, Jesus said "Among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist". That's amazing because John was a lonely character like Elijah who owned nothing, lived in the wilderness, and ate locusts and wild honey. Do you think Jesus was looking at John's bank account or John's heart? Nevertheless, you have to wonder if this guy showed up at your church looking like a street person if he would be welcomed.

One of my favorite stories is about a young man from Boston who applied for a position with a Chicago bank. Naturally his references were from Boston, so the bank contacted them. They replied, "He has an excellent family background, his father is a Saltonstall, and his mother is a Thurston and a cousin of the Rockefellers. His family tree can be traced back to nobility in England." The bank wrote back, "We do not need the young man for breeding purposes, just work!"

Correct and Proper Partiality and Discrimination

At this point I think it is valuable to point out what the author James is NOT talking about here in this passage. It is absolutely necessary to discriminate and judge people in certain situations. For instance, you want your children to be friends with kids who are good influences and will not lead them astray. If a teenager with a Mohawk and a van with a mattress in back shows up to take your daughter out, then by all means discriminate! In business be partial in choosing to deal with those with integrity. Avoid the dishonest and deceptive people, and if John Dillinger shows up at your church—call the police! James 2:1-13, is saying don't be a judge with evil motives or selfish reasons. Instead of being partial to the rich in money, be partial to those rich in faith. The church needs all believers in Christ to share whatever gifts and talents they may have for the edification of the entire "body of Christ".

The Sin of Partiality, James 2:1-7

In James 2:1, the author addresses his audience as "My brothers", which indicates he is speaking out of love to fellow believers who profess belief in Christ. Yet his principle is that having genuine faith in Christ is contradictory to an attitude of personal favoritism for some, but rejection of others in the church. Consider Jesus Himself born in a stable in Bethlehem and raised in a Podunk town like Nazareth. Nathaniel said in Jn.1:46, "Can any good thing come from Nazareth?" James stated the key problem in v.2-4 of showing partiality to the rich and influential, but making the poor feel unloved by ignoring them and making them stand in the back was akin to becoming "judges with evil motives". This should convict all of us, because it seems natural to give all the attention to the powerful and influential. We could easily say that practically the rich and powerful can do more and give more to the church, not to mention they can do more for me personally. We become like a judge who takes bribes, and makes judgments based on our own personal superficial motives. In v.5, James says that God has chosen those who are poor to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom. Selfish partiality is inconsistent with the purpose and plan of God in choosing those who are rich spiritually. The irony is that the rich are often the more ruthless people who

oppress others and would just as soon sue you as look at you. Many of them actually worship money instead of God.

In Matthew 22, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was and He answered “Love God with all your heart, mind, body, and soul; and one like it is you shall love your neighbor as yourself”. If you show selfish partiality, aren't you breaking the “royal law”? If you are an usher at your church and you seat Mr. Potter on the front row in the cushioned seats, but tell the poor rough looking John the Baptist to stand in the back—we have a problem!

Self Deception, James 2:8-13

Don't deceive yourself into thinking you are obediently serving the Lord, because if you are showing partiality, you are not loving your neighbor. Maybe you are not an adulterer or a thief, but the Scripture says that we are to keep the “whole law”. This means we can't pick and choose which precepts of God are valuable for us and which don't matter. God holds us accountable to all of them. We are free from the Law as a judge over our salvation and forgiveness, but we are still accountable to do the right thing. The point of verse 12-13 is that since we are free in Christ, we will be judged with mercy and grace, therefore we also should show mercy to others. If we say those down and outers don't deserve our attention or help, we must ask ourselves the question, “Do you want to get what you deserve, or do you want mercy and grace? We believe that we are saved by grace and God has shown us mercy, therefore we should be merciful to others. Our beliefs should control our behavior.

Luke 10:29, The Parable of the Good Samaritan

In Luke 10:29, a lawyer asked Jesus “And who is my neighbor?” that he should love. This was an inappropriate question because the lawyer was trying to avoid some people who might be excluded as neighbors. He should have asked how he could love anyone who needed it. Jesus replied with this famous parable. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was straight down a winding road through the mountains. Many well to do Jewish priests took this road to vacation homes in Jericho. A common man was attacked by robbers and left for dead by the side of the road. Later a priest came walking by, but he passed by the poor man on the other side. Someone asked me why the priest passed by and I said “Because the guy had already been robbed!” Likewise a Levite who you would expect to be good passed him by. But a Samaritan had compassion on him, bound his wounds, put him on his animal and took him to the inn. He paid the guys bill and came back the next day to check on him. The Samaritan was used by Jesus as shock value since Jews hated Samaritans. They were the last people the Jews would expect to do the right thing. Therefore Jesus was making the point that the lawyer's question “Who is my neighbor?” was inappropriate since he was trying to limit who he had to help. The real question for him and us is “How can I be a good neighbor?” Also we need to realize that our neighbor is anyone who has a need that we can meet!

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