
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

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James 2: 1-13: “The Call to Avoid Favoritism!”

General idea: What are your motivations? Do they line up with God’s precepts? James calls us away from the way we think we should do our daily life and our church and how we should treat people, and into the precepts Jesus gave us. People, within the new church that at this time was still a part of Judaism, were playing favorites, as was the tradition. Rich people were being catered to. They received the best seats and respect and were honored from the pulpit while the poor were being ignored, rebuked, and seated in the back—if they were allowed inside at all. The new Christians were doing the same as the Jews; not only was there no distinction in character or love, neither were the teachings of Jesus being adhered to. Perhaps, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount was being read; a poor person, hearing this for the first time, hears *blessed are the meek*, and *blessed are the poor*. How excited he must have gotten, only to be disillusioned by an usher who kicked him to the back or out on the streets. Prejudice and hypocrisy were in action!

Vs. 1-4: The early Christians were favoring the rich; ironically, they had been oppressed by these rich ones themselves, as most had. Thus, James’ question was, *how could they favor them?* They put their favor, not in faith, but in personal motives which is foolishness because it is based on inferior guidelines. They were seeing fancy clothes and putting their efforts into evangelizing the rich while ignoring the poor and were not interested in what is in the heart. They were giving the wrong people special attention and missing the point of Jesus’ teachings.

- *Lord of Glory* means God is Glorious, Wondrous, All Powerful, All Knowing and All Important (Psalm 24:7-8). This describes God in the most powerful and profound language we have. In context, Jesus is God and has all of these attributes, referring to Immanuel, *God is with us* (Prov. 1; Matt. 1:23).
- *Partiality/ favoritism* means to receive by face value only, like judging a book by its cover. It is to favor someone externally based on their appearance, race, economic status, or value in society. Here, racism is superficial and it is condemned as being evil! Jewish wisdom stressed (but did not always practice) when our focus is on God, we are to see others in Him, not what they can do to or for us. We are called to discern evil from good, but not make judgments based on appearances only (Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6-8 Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25).
- *Assembly* refers to the Synagogue. The Christians had not broken away from Judaism yet (James 5:14). James was passionate that the Christians be

messianic (follow Christ) and, thus, stand out with more character and morality than their Jewish cousins.

- *Gold Rings* were the symbols of status for the aristocracy; it is the archetypal element of status and wealth. It literally means *you carry your financial portfolio with you to show others up*.
- *Poor man* refers to the beggar, who wants to work, versus the “sluggard” who does not (Prov. 6:6-11; 13:4; 19:24). The poor man wants to be in society and work but is being oppressed and cannot; the poor were the lowest level of Jewish and Greek society.
- *Fine apparel*. People gave respect and honor because of the outward appearance of a person. The motivation for seeking favor with the rich is they were seeking funds for themselves, a self-demeaning act, but something the poor could not do as they could give no special favor. The Greeks were famous for catering to the rich who wore elaborate clothes; the rich and politicians sought votes while the people sought favor. James says this is immoral!
- *Filthy clothes*. The poor often had only one set of clothing, thus it would be dirty because they both worked and slept in it! Clothes were some of the most expensive items a person had. Those who were poor, or, at least not rich, usually had only one or two outfits, while the rich had many elaborate robes. Thus, clothes were the symbol of who you were in society. In contrast, maturity and character is the “status symbol” of who we are in Christ. Christ wants to see our love, not our clothes or bank account!

The advice James gives us is to seek within ourselves and observe in our actions whether true faith is working; and, if so, we will have no partiality. We will not show favoritism, rather believing and acting as if all who are in Christ are equal, which they are. The true measure of a person is not in his wealth or his estate; rather it is his character and maturity, how he exhibits the precepts of our Lord, how he lives his life. These are the true marks that are to be honored. The early Christians missed this point, as do many Christians today! The call is that we are to love and respect one another because of who we are in Christ, not because of our looks, clothes, or bank account.

Vs. 5-7: The rich were honored; yet, it was the rich who did them the most harm and even slandered our Lord. James tells us the true wealth is in our faith, the fact that we are chosen by God! The rich are only rich temporarily while the poor will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven—not for being poor, but for being in Christ (Matt. 25:34, 46; John 3:3-5). Insulting those who are in Christ is an attack on Christ Himself!

- *Has God not chosen?* Our status in the Kingdom and our salvation is predestined by God alone. We are not chosen by any work, merit, popularity, or wealth; thus there should be no reason for us to treat others with favor because of what they can do or for whom they are in the world (1 Cor. 1:28-29; Eph. 1:4).
- *Dishonored the poor.* Treating others by the ways of the world and not the way of our Lord brings disgrace to people and God (Deut. 15:7-11). The poor gain grace and favor because they have learned to trust and rely on God alone, not just for being poor. Thus, they were, and are the ones with the most faith and contribute to the church the most in what matters (Psalm 9:18; Luke 6:20; 1 Cor. 1:26-31)!
- *Drag you into courts.* Some Jewish judges forced all litigant parties in court to wear the same clothes, thus show the public that no favoritism took place (Lev. 19:15). The Romans were the opposite and always favored the rich; in fact, you could not accuse a person of any wrong doing who was in a higher class than you. As today, the rich had more favor in the courts because they could hire lawyers and witnesses. Greek philosophers said this was immoral, and got themselves into trouble for saying so!
- *Oppress* is a very harsh word, normally attributed to Satan, meaning *an immense and cruel work* (Acts 10:38). The rich had a bad habit of oppressing people and creating a feudal system. It makes no sense to honor those who dishonor you. The contrast is that the rich rely on their wealth while the poor rely on God; the poor have honor, and the rich are typically reprobate (Matt. 10:25).
- *Blasphemed.* God's Name is sacred (Yahweh), especially for the Jews. To even say His name or write it directly was considered a curse. This is why there are over 100 names of God in the Bible that describes His character and attributes, but do not name Him directly.

Prejudice is defined as *forming an opinion without knowing the facts*. Prejudice, discrimination, and favoritism are heinous things before God the Father, who sees us as all His children. The biggest problems, both in the family and in nations, are the superficial ways we judge each other and do not love. Looking at someone with favor or disgust because of appearance, ancestry, wealth, achievements, gender, age, theological position, or education is purely *dumb*. In God's eyes, we are forsaking our brother for superficial and meaningless reasons. We have to remember, God accepts us and calls us to do likewise with others (1 Sam. 2:7; 16:7; Prov. 14: 31; 17:5; 22:2; Job. 34:19; Matt. 28:19-20; John 13:34-35; Acts. 10:34; 17:24-28; Rom. 2:11; 15:7; 1 Cor. 1:25-29; Gal. 3:26-27; 5:14; Eph. 6:9; Phil. 2:3-5; 1 Thess. 5:11; 1 John 4:7-21)!

Vs. 8-13: God is honored, not by our worth in society, but, rather, how we obey His precepts and trust in Him. We sin by playing favorites and having skewed values; and we are bringing shame to God and His Church. We cannot take comfort thinking *I keep these precepts of our Lord*, and not worry about the ones we ignore. For, when we break one law, we are guilty of it all. How we use mercy will tell God how He should be merciful with us! Beware that being partial will cause an encounter between you and judgment!

- *Royal law* refers to an imperial edict which became a supreme law and overwrote other laws (Ezra 6:11; Est. 8). Here, it refers to God being the Supreme King and His Law as absolute; thus, we are to follow His decrees (Lev. 19:15-18; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:8-10)!
- *Whole law*. The Bible teaches that some sins are more heinous than others; however, in God's sight, *sin is sin*. A small sin will condemn you just as a much bigger one. James warns us not to have a superficial understating of the Law (God's Word) (Matt. 5:17-20). Stoic philosophers also stated that all sins are equal.
- *Adultery, Murder*. James quotes His Brother, Jesus (Mark 12:29-34). James is putting the abuse of the poor and favoritism as a violation of the Great Commandment, and in the same category as murder and adultery! During this time, Zealots who were too religious to commit adultery would stab the aristocrats in the Temple court. James is also saying not to go to the other extreme, either.
- *Transgressors, stumble* means those who sin. The Jews, classically, had a hierarchy of sins—which were the real bad ones, and which were minor. The point James is making, as did Jesus, is that when we sin, we sin; there is no “pecking order” or hierarchy (Matt. 5:18-19; 23:23).
- *Be judged* refers to how our words and actions reflect who we are and what is in our heart (1 John 3:18).
- *Law of liberty* refers to being free from the ways of the world. It can also mean being wise in our own eyes. Most scholars believe it means being freed from sin (James 1:25).
- *Mercy*. God is not obligated to give mercy to anyone; yet, He does so anyway, and in abundance (Zech. 7:9; Matt. 5:7; 18:21-25; Rom. 9). Judaism recognized that God's greatest attributes are His mercy and Judgment. If we are not impartial in our judgments, it will fall back upon our selves! We always have to remember we are given grace, liberty, and forgiveness, but never forget we also have responsibility. We are called to give mercy and forgive—as God has done with us (Matt. 18:23-35).

The basic, simple, and true thought is that we are to treat others as Christ has treated us! Being a Christian means we are to see one another as who we are in Christ. We are to treat one another the way Christ has treated us, because He first loved us. Thus, we see each other as the children of God just as we are the child of God (1 John 2:28-3:3). Each of us is a brother or sister in the Lord. So, we must treat one another as Christ has treated us! We do this through the empowerment of the Spirit! Worldly ways must not have an influence on we who are in Christ—period!—nor on how we run our church or our daily lives. As God is not influenced by societal desires, neither should we be (Mark 12:30-31; 1 Cor. 1:28-29; Eph. 1:4)! We need to realize this is important. We sin by playing favorites. This dishonors our Lord and diminishes our witness.

To receive God's mercy, we need to be merciful to others. Yes, we have grace (praise God!), but why be the fool when we can be mature! We were under the moral law of God through which there was no way to be pleasing and saved unless we obeyed it fully. Our weakness, situations, and experiences could not help us, nor could our education or will. We need to come to a point where we will surrender to Him fully, allowing His Way to infuse our way (John 3:30)! We are no longer under the law, but the law reveals who we are, our infirmities, and our need for Christ as Lord and Savior (Romans 7:1-14). When we know we are bad but we can be better, then we can begin to strive for goodness—with the Spirit's help!

The way of our sinful nature is to gravitate to those that are like us. God calls us to rise toward Him and see others as His children too (Gen. 1:26-27). Remember how our Lord reached out to the woman in Samaria (John 4:1-42). Who do you reach out too? The call is to act in accordingly to what we believe, and our beliefs need to be rooted in Christ! Two of God's greatest attributes are *mercy* and *judgment*. They go together and they do not operate without the other. Neither should we judge or show favoritism. God's mercy is dominant; we have grace, but His judgments are still available. Do not allow yourself to fall into judgment. Saved, yes we are, but consider what rewards and opportunities can be wasted by you. Our efforts and ways only serve to glorify us while we ignore God and His Glory

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does it say?
2. What does it mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How can I be changed so I can learn and grow?

5. What is in the way from these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of me listening to God?
6. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
7. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Have you ever treated someone with extra respect and honor because they were rich or a celebrity? Is this wrong? If so, how?
2. How would you and your church respond if a poor person who was dressed badly and dirty, came to your services? How would they be treated? How does God say for us to treat them?
3. How would you define *partiality* and *favoritism*?
4. What are your motivations for your dealings at church, work, or with family? Have you considered if they line up with God's precepts?
5. James calls us away from the way we think we should do daily church life. What do you think about what James has to say in this passage? Do you realize that many Christians will ignore these precepts? How do you feel about that?
6. Do you believe that how we treat a person is rooted in our spiritual maturity and character growth in Christ? How so?
7. How have you shown favoritism? How should you?
8. How would you define the true measure of a person? How should you? How does God? How should the church? How would these precepts affect the way your church chooses its pastors and leaders? Why would a church not follow these precepts?
9. Take what James is saying and read Colossians 3:25. How do love and respect for each other contribute to your witness, spiritual growth, church culture, workplace, spouse, school or etc.?
10. God is not honored by our worth in society. How so? Why or why not? What would your life look like if you followed this basic, simple, and true thought that *we are to treat others as Christ has treated us*?

11. What do you need to do to look inside yourself and observe, in your actions, whether or not true faith is working?
12. How can you be a person who is slow to show favoritism and gives respect to those that even a liberal society may not give to? Who would that be? What will you do?

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:28-29)

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