

## No Place for Partiality

### James 2:1-13

In the beginning of Chapter 2, James directs our attention to the topic of showing partiality. His instruction for the church is simple: show NO partiality to the rich, but rather LOVE everyone as yourself.

He starts with the command to not show partiality: <sup>1</sup>**My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.** Then, he gives a general example of what he means: <sup>2</sup>**For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,** <sup>3</sup>**and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,”** <sup>4</sup>**have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?** So let’s think through his example in our world today. If you walked into a Harvest assembly wearing a gold ring, no one would notice. Most of us probably have gold on right now, but it would have been more uncommon then and was a sign of wealth and a higher socioeconomic status.

I did a wedding, a few years ago, for a couple who had a simple, but very nice wedding. They seemed to be well off, their guests were very well dressed and everyone looked nice. However, there was one guy that stood out from the rest of the guests. I can’t remember his name or which college he played for, but he was part of a national championship football team. He had this ring on that you could literally see from the other side of the room, and it wasn’t long before everyone was talking and asking about the ring and who he was and how he got that ring. Now, at a wedding that’s an interesting thing to have happen. I’ve been to probably 75 weddings, and they’re all important. But they’re all pretty similar, and you can’t help but hope that something unique or memorable happens. And so this was a welcome surprise, something to talk about.

But imagine this type of distraction at a church gathering. We all gather together to worship the Lord, to hear the Word and to serve and care for each other, but instead of that all happening, the gathering turns into a spectacle where everyone is fussing over someone who’s well dressed and presumably has more money, power, or influence than others. In the same gathering, there are people who not only don’t have the clothes and jewelry to show how important they are, but in contrast, their clothes would suggest they are not very important at all. They have no influence in the world.

A church that shows favoritism to the wealthy or powerful and gives them preferential treatment and ignores or humiliates the poor is not a church that reflects the heart of her Savior.

Now, I think this in an area in which I would like to commend us as a church. One of the things that I’ve always loved about Harvest is that it’s always been a welcoming place for people who may have less value in the eyes of the world, but we’ve been far from perfect and there’s more than enough room for growth. So, let’s look closely at James’ case for not showing partiality, and then we’ll talk about how we can do this.

James’ argument is three-fold. First he says that **Showing partiality rejects God’s view of people.**

<sup>5</sup>**Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?**

James reminds us that when we pass judgment on people based on their wealth, we are forgetting how God judges people. God sees right past those outer things and judges people very differently.

There was then, and always has been, this idea that riches and wealth are a sign of God's blessing or favor and that poverty is a sign of God's judgment. According to this idea, poor people are those whom God is displeased with and the rich are the ones with whom He's happy. We can easily observe that this is not a good rule of thumb by simply looking around and seeing that there are many poor people who are rich in faith and whose lives are full of his goodness. At the same time, we can also see many wealthy people whose lives are quite the opposite, and vice versa. There are many Jesus-loving Christians who have great wealth and are seeking to use that wealth for the Kingdom of God, and there are plenty of poor people who curse God and despise him.

Indeed, this is James' point: God has chosen many who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom. Likewise, many people who are wealthy in this current state will be rejected by Him at the Final Judgment.

Therefore, why would we judge people according to their current level of wealth in this world? It's important to remember that every human being is created in the image of God. Even when we can find nothing else lovable within them, we can always remind ourselves of this. As marred as the image of God may be by their sin, they still bare that image and are, at any moment, capable of being born again!

We see, then, that God shows no partiality to the rich or the poor. He has created both! Abraham was rich, but Jesus was poor. Both the rich and the poor are capable of knowing and loving God. That's why John 7:24 says, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." And Romans 2:11 says "For God shows no partiality." Job 34 says that the rich and the poor are "all the work of His hands". Are we getting the picture?

You have to love the story of David's being selected to be the King of Israel.

### **1 Samuel 16**

**The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." <sup>2</sup> And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' <sup>3</sup> And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you." <sup>4</sup> Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.**

**<sup>6</sup> When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." <sup>7</sup> But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his 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 the Lord looks on the heart." <sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." <sup>9</sup> Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." <sup>10</sup> And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." <sup>11</sup> Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And**

**Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.”<sup>12</sup> And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.”<sup>13</sup> Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.**

David was smaller and less physically impressive than his brothers, yet God saw his heart. Even his own dad didn't think this was a possibility. He had some impressive sons, sons who if you needed a king, would be good options in his eyes. Even Samuel, when he saw Eliab, said, “Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.” But David was just a shepherd boy. **But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his 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 the Lord looks on the heart.”**

There should be NO partiality among us as Christians. View everyone, regardless of their outward appearance, regardless of their social status with love and acceptance.

**1 Corinthians 1:26-31<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;<sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,<sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.<sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,<sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”**

This is one of the ways that God turns the world onto its head and completely reverses its way of viewing things. In the world, the rich, the powerful, the beautiful, and the accomplished are at the top of the social ladder, and the poor and needy are at the bottom. In God's Kingdom, He often chooses the lowly to show his goodness and to erase sinful human boastful. So, let us boast in the fact that God chooses the lowly, because most of us aren't too noteworthy in this world. Yet, He has chosen us to be with Him forever. This is for His glory!

When kids want to play a pickup game of any sort, football, kickball, whatever, they usually pick the two best players to be captains (so that they don't end up on the same team together and dominate the game). Then, those two take turns picking the players for their team. If you have even half a heart as a human being, it's one of the saddest things in the world to watch because the athletic kids are fought over for the first couple of rounds and then it quickly descends into which one of these “losers” left over will hurt my team the least. Sometimes, the kids that are left are so bad that someone will suggest that they are left out altogether. Like, if there are 12 kids, someone might suggest, “let's just play 5 on 5 and you guys can play next time”. Jesus' strategy, though, is the opposite of this. He picks the outcasts first and displays His glory by winning with the ones that everyone else had written off as useless.

And so, we must view people through God's eyes: as loved and created by Him, regardless of what is seen on the outside, or how the world sees them.

**Showing partiality undermines God's sovereignty.**

**But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?**

Showing special favor to the rich is often motivated by a desire to have that favor reciprocated. This is a rejection of God's sovereignty. It's not rich people who determine your fate, but God. James points out that, far more often, the opposite is true. You kiss up to the rich, hoping to get a little piece of the action, and instead they oppress you, drag you into court and make a mockery of your faith and your Savior. Rather, we should honor God and let him reward us.

James points out that, in spite of their efforts to gain the favor of the rich (by exalting them in their gatherings), it is the rich who have often been the ones oppressing them. They have even taken them into court, presumably to sue them and take away what little they have in order to increase their own excessive wealth.

The efforts of these Christians has proved futile. Instead of trusting in God for favor with the right people, they have kissed up to the rich and despised the poor. The result is their humiliation. They've been betrayed by the rich.

Furthermore, many of these rich oppressors have proven to be blasphemers of the God that we love and serve. They mock our Savior and our faith in Him.

So, how about instead of showing partiality to the rich, we love everyone and trust in God's sovereignty? I find the story of Joseph's life very helpful on this point. Joseph's life included great misfortune and unbelievably great fortune, depending on which point of his story that you enter into. In the end, however, he looks back and confidently declares that it was God's hand that directed his life, not the evil intentions of his enemies nor the favorable treatment of powerful men. It was just a sovereign God who controls all things.

Joseph lost everything, including his family, when his brothers sold him into slavery as a teenager. But God was with him and brought him into the house of an important Egyptian named, Potiphar. Genesis 39 says, **"<sup>2</sup> The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. <sup>3</sup> His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. <sup>4</sup> So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had."** But then Joseph was wrongly accused of coming onto Potiphar's wife, and was thrown into prison. In prison, his story followed the same cycle. Even though he was a victim of someone else's malice, the Lord was with him. He was put in charge of the affairs of the prison and his management was blessed by God. Despite all of that, he remained a prisoner.

Then, one day, his chance at deliverance came. He interpreted the dreams of two other prisoners who were very close to Pharaoh. One of them would soon be released back into the service of Pharaoh, and Joseph asked him to remember him when he returns to Pharaoh's service. He forgot him, and Joseph remained in prison until one day when Pharaoh had a dream that no one was able to interpret. The man remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about him. Joseph explained Pharaoh's dream to him, was released from prison and became Pharaoh's right-hand man. As Pharaoh's second in command, Joseph was tasked with preparing Egypt for a coming famine. He stored up enough food to not only feed all of Egypt, but also to feed many people from surrounding areas. Through this process, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt seeking food for their family. In doing so, they discovered that the brother they had sold as a slave became one of the

most influential and powerful men in the world. They were afraid of him because of what they had done, but he simply responded to them with, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

God is in sovereign control over the events of our lives!!! We need not worry about kissing up to others to get what we want. We will always have what God wants us to have. God controls our fate, not men. If you’re kissing up to someone to gain something that you desire from them, you are contending against a sovereign God. Rest in him. Be faithful with whatever you have and wherever He has you, and let him use your life as he intends.

So, James has shown us that showing partiality rejects God’s view of people and undermines His sovereignty. Most importantly, however, James wants us to know that:

**Showing partiality violates the law of love for one another.**

This is the biggest problem with the sin of partiality. It completely violates the central and foundational Christian command to love each other.

**<sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.**

**Matthew 22:36-40 <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”**

Paul said in **Galatians 5:14 <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

And in **Romans 13:8-10, <sup>8</sup> “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.**

Showing partiality is not loving one another. When we gather together, instead of trying to recreate the world’s pecking order or social structure, we are supposed to love one another as we love ourselves. Love is the perfect commandment because all other commandments are fulfilled by love. Love always does the right thing.

When Christ saved me at about 16 years old, I immediately started going to church. I got saved one night alone in my bedroom, just me and the Lord. However, I knew right away that I needed to be in church. So, I went to church the following Sunday at the church that my sister was going to. It was close to our house, and I had been there several times over the years. I knew a lot of people there, and my sister was going. So, why not? I don’t remember if it was the first Sunday I went, but very early on in my church attendance as a believer I ran into some other teens that I knew from school. One of the girls looked at me and said, “What are YOU doing here?” At that church, the teens sat together in the balcony in the back row because they

really loved being in church. Haha! That warm welcome was enough to convince me that I didn't want to sit with them, and so I sat on the main floor with the adults. Again, I don't know if it was the first Sunday that I was there or not, but very early on in my attendance there, I was greeted by an adult couple that taught a Sunday school class that I had been in there when I was younger. They smiled, as big as people can smile, and said, "We're so glad to see you here!" I don't remember the girl who thought I wasn't good enough to be at her church, but I'll never forget the couple who welcomed me with open and loving arms. They would later leave that church and become a part of the youth ministry here at Harvest while I was the youth pastor. They still smile and hug me every time we see each other at church.

Another memory I have from that time period of my life was at another church that my sister and I started attending with my mom a few months or so after I got saved. There, a fellow teenager, whom I had never met, came up to me at church, introduced himself to me, and asked me to come back that evening for youth group. I accepted his invitation, made many great friends there and received my call into pastoral ministry while I was part of that youth ministry.

My point is that it's not just about how we treat the rich and the poor. It's about how we treat everyone. We treat different people differently based on a lot of different things, such as how attractive they are or are not or how popular, athletic, funny or whatever they may be. What we should do, though, is love each other as we love ourselves. How do you like to be treated when you walk into church? Treat others the same way.

I'm not talking about the modern idea of tolerance where everyone defines what is right for them and we all have to accept their truth as being as valid as any truth. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about loving people beyond what is visible on the outside, like Jesus did.

James goes on to say: <sup>10</sup> **For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.** <sup>11</sup> **For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.** <sup>12</sup> **So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.** <sup>13</sup> **For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.**

Under OT law, it was understood that if you broke the law at any point you were guilty of all of it. James reminds the Jewish audience of this as a way of saying that partiality is as serious a sin as any other, in that it makes you a lawbreaker. It may also have been his way of reminding them that we're all sinners in many ways. No one keeps the whole law. Therefore, we are to treat each other with mercy, just like we want to be treated with mercy. <sup>13</sup> **For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.**

**Faith that works treats others with love and mercy- not with partiality and judgment.**

Let that be our guiding rule!--to treat each with love and mercy, not with partiality. There's enough of that in the world. People don't need to come into the church and experience the same thing. Let's make our gatherings different.

If the church has failed you in this regard and you've been treated as less valuable than other people, I'm sorry. I know at least a little of what that feels like, but there are a couple of things you need to remember: 1) Jesus loves you with a perfect love, 2) other people are trying, but we're not perfect, 3) you have to work through that and be the person you want others to be. In other words, it's not an excuse for you

to not get connected, or to not come, or whatever. Furthermore, don't be bitter. Learn from it and do your best to show others the kind of love and acceptance you like to be shown. You are the church, just as much as anybody else is.

Lastly, this passage ends with this simple, yet liberating statement: **Mercy triumphs over judgment.**

The foundation of the Christian message is the love and mercy of our Creator. We all deserve judgment, but God offers us mercy. Jesus died to make this possible for us, and perhaps today is the day you need to confess to Him that you are a sinner in need of His mercy and ask Him to forgive you.