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The Sin of Partiality – James Chapter 2 verses 1-13

Chapter 2 'My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² 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, ³ 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", ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ 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? ⁶ But you have dishonoured the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honourable name by which you were called?

⁸ If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself", you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹ 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. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgement is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgement.

In Chapter 1 James was impressing on the early church the need to guard their tongues, that a thoughtless word could so easily cause hurt and damage to any attempt at Christian witness if they are not Christlike when delivered.

In verse one of chapter two James is seeking to keep the feet of the early Christians (and ours) on the right track. He instructs that they show no Partiality or Favouritism.



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In the scenario he then sets out we see an obviously rich man compared to a poor man. The favouritism displayed is nothing short of Sin. Favouritism along socio-economic lines is sinful because it defines a person in terms apart from God's grace. Love demands seeing people as God sees them, in need of being lifted up.

This love is the real basis of God's law. To reject love is to be guilty of rejecting the whole law. The moral law of God is not a collection of separate pieces from which we can pick and choose. It is a "whole" glued together by love. Refusal to love lead to disobeying one commandment, but it also leads to sinning against the motivation and purpose of the "whole".

Lack of love and mercy leading to acts of compassion is the basis of immorality, it brings estrangement and distrust amongst humans and between God and us. In the world today there are enough stresses and strains to cope with, trouble of every sort tearing families apart, nations at war with one another.

And then there is Mr Trump whatever we may think of him as a person, we have to remember that God is in control of all things. He put Mr Trump into his place of power for Gods purposes. He put Benjamin Netanyahu in the position of Prime Minister of Israel with the foreknowledge of what that would bring about. So, who are we to doubt His wisdom over things we have no control over, very thankfully or for certain the outcome would be far worse.

Back to our text following that slight diversion!! Christian disciples are not to show partiality. Favouritism in relating to others is sin. It breaks the law of neighbour love, which James called the "royal law".

James focused on the tendency to be partial toward the rich. Such favouritism results in being manipulated by the rich and also insults the poor. Churches today may reveal the need for this word from James.

Luke in his gospel, chapter 10 verses 25 to 37 recounts Jesus' use of the Parable of the Good Samaritan to enable the lawyer who had quizzed him to understand the full and true meaning of being a neighbour. In those days Jews and Samaritans were not "The best of buddies". This love is the real basis of God's law. To reject love is to be guilty of rejecting the whole law.

Google defines this as "A close friend who accompanies his buddies in their activities". That problem unfortunately mankind is very, very slow to learn and the lessons that Jesus spoke so clearly on, His words are still not being listened to despite all the blood spilt, families torn apart and lives lost. Blind anger is a cruel master, we need to keep our eyes fixed on the only one who has the answer, our Lord and Saviour.

The poor suffer oppression, injustice and ridicule at the hands of the rich in so many cases. Still the poor even in church do everything possible to impress and please the rich. We are to treat the rich with love due to any other person, but favouritism shown for the rich is a sin God judges.

James pressed his case so far as to say that the credibility of one's relationship with God can be perceived through one's treatment of the poor. In fact, a faith that does not produce loving treatment of others leaves some doubt as to whether it has been a faith leading to salvation.

As part of our walk with the Lord, and an integral part of church life, meeting together for Bible study is a core component. Something to look forward to as part of our fellowship not just with each other, but more importantly, to deepen our love for our Saviour and guide our path to grow more like Him.

After all, our Saviour watches over us, so we should watch out for those around us. In Matthew Chapter 5 verse 3 we read in the Beatitudes "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". In Luke Chapter 6 verse 20 we have his interpretation "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God".

James, bless him, is trying to get his readers to look at ALL people with the same love that Jesus has for them. That of a loving Heavenly Father who loves everyone equally, why, because ALL have sinned and come short of God's mark.

The moral law has integrity built into it which links the various guidelines given in the Bible. The integrity comes because the one, perfect God, inspired the whole law.

The integrity is such that one can do wrong by overdoing a right. Also, one who is consistent at some points but inconsistent at others comes under the judgement of the whole law. The purpose of the law is to bring mercy and compassion into the world, not legalism. Life without mercy faces judgement. Life lived in love and mercy has no fear of Gods judgement.

Transcript of the presentation given by Deacon Rodney Burge and discussed at the church-based, morning home group on Tuesday 27th May 2025. All scripture is from the ESV Translation.