

James 2:1-13 - No Partiality and the Law of Liberty

Last week we covered James 1:17-27 and learned what true religion looks like; what thoughts, words, and deeds, are pleasing to God and reflect His nature. This includes the importance of listening before we speak, how only the word of God is able to save our souls, being a doer and not just a hearer, and what true repentance looks like — a changed life which is focused on serving others, just like Jesus didn't come to be served, but to serve. This week we continue our journey through the book of James in Chapter 2 where we learn how to apply the royal law, the law of love, as we put into practice our faith by loving others by not showing partiality or favouritism and showing mercy.

Let's read together our memory verses for the book of James:

James 1:2-4 NKJV

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

For today's message we'll start reading from James 2:1.

James 2:1-8 NKJV

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality. ² For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³ and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," ⁴ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

Jon Courson sums these verses up really well:

If you knew that in ten minutes you would have a half-hour meeting with Donald Trump, would you comb your hair, brush your teeth, think about what you would say? What if you knew that in ten minutes you would meet with a homeless man? Would you expend the same kind of energy?

This is what James is getting at. We're all vulnerable; we're all guilty of treating people differently, depending on how we view them outwardly. But almost without exception, the irony is that the people we try to impress the most are those who care about us the least—while the people who really would be open to receiving from us are those for whom we think we don't have time.

On the high-school campus, so often the goal is to see the quarterback or the head cheerleader saved. The real key, however, is to go for the kid who sits in the back of the cafeteria all alone, for he's the one who is most often the one ready to listen. The same holds true where you work. We tend to get all excited about the people we highly esteem financially or professionally, economically or intellectually. But it's the poor people who will be most responsive to the gospel and most welcoming of us. Because we so often waste our time trying to impress people who are impressed with themselves, we need to change our perspective.

That is what James is championing. "Why is it," he asks, "that when someone comes into your congregation who is dressed in fine clothes, who has a name, or who is esteemed highly, you give him the best seat in the house?" Oh, how we need to be aware of our own fleshly tendencies."

Think about it. Why do we show partiality? Because we are selfish. We think that we can get more from the rich man than the poor man. We think that the rich man can do favours for us that the poor man can't. We have "**become judges with evil thoughts**" (verse 4).

No partiality

James 2:1

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with partiality.

v 1 **do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ... with partiality:** Why not show partiality, discriminate or show favouritism? Because showing partiality, discrimination or showing favouritism is in not consistent with faith in **our Lord Jesus Christ**. James is saying that those who practice favouritism contradict their profession of faith; they are denying the truth that they claim to believe. We are not living in accordance with the character of God. Why? Because God doesn't show partiality. This is what James means when he says, "**do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with partiality.**" We could also say, don't claim to be living as a Christian if you are showing favouritism or partiality." The scriptures clearly show that God is not partial to any man:

Deuteronomy 10:17 NKJV

For the Lord your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

Acts 10:34-35 NKJV

Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. ³⁵ But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

Acts 10:34-35 AMP

And Peter opened his mouth and said: Most certainly *and* thoroughly I now perceive *and* understand that God shows no partiality *and* is no respecter of persons, ³⁵ But in every nation he who venerates *and* has a reverential fear for God, treating Him with worshipful obedience and living uprightly, is acceptable to Him *and* sure of being received and welcomed [by Him].

The fact that God doesn't show partiality or favouritism with whom He accepts in the church is also seen in:

1 Corinthians 12:13-14 NKJV

For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Galatians 3:26-29 NKJV

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

What this means is that, to be accepted into God's family, to receive the adoption as a child of God, it doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, the big boss or the lowest employee, male or female, Jewish or non-Jewish, rich or poor; all are accepted. The cross makes life a level playing field for everyone.

Practically speaking, this means that in God's eyes, everyone has the same worth or value in God's eyes. No-one is more or less important than another — God loves everyone the same. Therefore, it is wrong to treat someone as if they are better or worse than someone else, because we are not demonstrating the same love and care that God has for them. We should be just as willing and likely to invite the cleaner over for dinner as we would the pastor. Consider:

1 Corinthians 12:18-22 NLT

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ How strange a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. ²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

²² In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary.

It's important though to recognise that equal value does not mean that all parts have the same role. The foot has the same value in the body as the eye, but obviously plays a different role. In the same way, different people have different gifts, and, in addition to the gifts, God has set in place specific roles for men and women, both in the family, and in the church. Just like we experience in life, different roles have different levels of authority. Just as there is an authority structure in the Godhead, with God the Father being the head of God the Son; so there is an authority structure in the home and church, with man being the head of the woman.

1 Corinthians 11:2 NKJV

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.

According to 1 Corinthians 11:2, God's authority structure goes like this: The Father is the head of the Son, who is the head of the man, who is the head of the woman.

Remember that having different gifts, roles, responsibilities, and levels of authority doesn't make us more or less important or valuable than anyone else, but rather those differences enable the body to function as God intended it to function, and to bring glory to God in many different ways.

Jesus Christ, Lord of Glory

Something that is really inspiring to me is the reference to Jesus as "**the Lord of Glory.**" What does this mean? Moffatt comments: "The Christian religion [is here called] more explicitly **belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the divine Glory**—a striking term for Christ as the full manifestation of the divine presence and majesty. The Jews called this the *shekinah*." The shekinah glory was the presence of God in the temple back in the days of Solomon. Therefore, this is a great verse to show someone that the early church definitely did believe in the deity of Jesus Christ.

God has chosen the poor

James 2:5 NKJV

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

We may show partiality to the rich, but God seems to show partiality to the poor. How does this work, given that we have just read that God shows no partiality to anyone?

They are **chosen ... to be rich in faith** because the **poor of this world** simply have more opportunities to trust God, and are therefore more likely to be **rich in faith** than the rich man. Meyer says, "The rich man *may* trust Him; but the poor man must.... the poor man has no fortress in which to hide, except the two strong arms of God."

It's not that God loves the poor man more than the rich, it's just that it is harder for the rich to enter into the Kingdom of God. Jesus said in:

Matthew 19:21-24

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

²² But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Paul also says in:

1 Corinthians 1:26 NLT

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.

Church history confirms that proportionally more poor people come to Christ than rich people.

Another sense that God chooses the poor is that when Jesus came to earth as a man, He lived in poverty. Meyer says, “There is nothing that men dread more than poverty. They will break every commandment in the Decalogue [10 commandments] rather than be poor. But it is God’s chosen lot. He had one opportunity only of living our life, and He chose to be born of parents too poor to present more than two doves at his presentation in the temple.”

James 2:6-7 NKJV

But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

Why is this? It is often because the love of money is a root of all evil. If money rules you, then it is a terrible master, and as its slave we can do some terrible things.

1 Timothy 6:10

For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The Royal Law — Love your neighbour

James 2:8-9 NKJV

⁸ If you really fulfil *the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,”* you do well; ⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

James now explains why partiality is wrong by quoting **the royal law**. What is the “royal law?”

Leviticus 19:18

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I *am* the Lord.

Matthew 22:35-40 NKJV

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, ³⁶ “Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?”

³⁷ Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Remember that these two great commandments, the “royal law”, sum up the 10 commandments. The first four commandments refer to our relationship with God, and the last 6 to our relationship with other men. By showing partiality, we inevitably break at least one of the last 6 commandments: disobedient to parents, hating, lusting, stealing, lying, and coveting. In summary, discriminating against or showing partiality to someone is to deny them their right to fair treatment, or to exclude them. This is the opposite to loving your neighbour. We need to be careful that we don’t end up hating our neighbour by being partial to someone else ahead of them.

At the same time, we are commanded not to compromise with sin; we are not to accept professing Christians who are living a sinful lifestyle into our churches. The boat belongs in the water, but the water doesn't belong in the boat. We must be careful to, in love, use church discipline to keep professing Christians who choose to persist in sinful activities out of our churches. Otherwise the sin will spread like leaven spreads in dough, and the whole church will become contaminated and will lose its power. God calls us to be holy. Paul makes this abundantly clear in:

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 NLT

When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. ¹⁰ But I wasn't talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. ¹¹ I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people.

¹² It isn't my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. ¹³ God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you."

The Purpose of the Law

James 2:10-13 NKJV

¹⁰ For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, "***Do not commit adultery,***" also said, "***Do not murder.***" Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

v ¹⁰ **For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all:** We can't just selectively obey some of the commandments and think that God will be pleased with us. Think of it this way. The law is like a chain with ten links. We are hanging over a raging fire with only this chain to keep us safe. It only takes one of those 10 chain links to break for us to fall into the fire. This is what it is like for those who trust in their own goodness. Breaking just one of God's laws is the same as breaking them all in the sense that it has the same consequences — eternal damnation and separation from the love of God in the Lake of Fire.

Jon Courson says, "It's like the space shuttle. The space shuttle is designed to go up into the heavenlies. But if any one part of it is not functioning properly or is flawed in any way, it won't lift off. So, too, you may not have killed anyone or committed adultery. But if you've lied, your shuttle is grounded."

Here are some verses that explain the purposes of the law:

1. The law condemns us:

Romans 3:19 NLT

Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God.

Romans 3:19 NKJV

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

2. The Law shows us what sin is:

Romans 3:20 NLT

For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

1 John 3:4 NLT

Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God.

Romans 7:7 NLT

Well then, am I suggesting that the law of God is sinful? Of course not! In fact, it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "You must not covet."

Paul was saying that he didn't know what sin was until the law told him.

3. The law teaches us that we need a Saviour:

Galatians 3:24 NKJV

Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

The law is like a schoolmaster or teacher (tutor) that leads us to faith in Christ. The law doesn't help us, it just leaves us helpless. The law doesn't justify us, it just leaves us guilty before a just and holy God. We are not saved by the law, we are saved by grace through faith. The law just shows us that we are filthy dirty, and in desperate need of God's cleansing.

The Law of Liberty

v 12 **So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty:** As Christians we are under or judged by the **law of liberty** (in contrast to the law of sin and death that leads to condemnation). Remember from last week that it is called the law of liberty because it is what our new nature *wants* to do. We don't *have to* keep it, but we *want to* keep it. It's not we *got to*, it's we *get to*. When a man is saved or born again, God gives him a new heart with new desires to obey God and seek God. Even more importantly, God also gives us everything we need (Himself) to live a godly life.

2 Peter 1:3-4 NLT

By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvellous glory and excellence. ⁴ And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

So you see that the law Christians are under we are truly free to obey, therefore the law we are under is called the **law of liberty**. *We can never be condemned by this law because Jesus paid the fine for all of our sins when He died on the cross, and we have received His gift of forgiveness, redemption, adoption, and salvation.*

Will I use my freedom to live for Christ, or live for myself

Though our salvation is guaranteed, we must also remember that all believers will stand before the Bema Seat and be judged by Christ. (show chart)

This is not the Great White Throne judgement as spoken of in Revelation 20:11-15. The Great White Throne judgement happens after the end of the 1,000 year rule and reign of Jesus Christ on earth, after the earth and heavens have burned up and disappeared. Also, it is only for those whose names are *not* written in the book of life. That is, they died as unbelievers. Their fate is now sealed. They will be judged according to their deeds and cast into the Lake of Fire (Hell), where they will be in torment for ever and ever, eternally separated from the love of God, forever under and suffering His wrath.

In contrast, the Bema Seat Judgement occurs in heaven, just after the church is raptured and resurrected. All who are at the Bema Seat Judgement have their names written in the Book of Life and the Lambs book of Life — they all died as believers. Their fate is also sealed; they will spend eternity with God, sharing His glory and basking in His love and grace.

The Bema Seat Judgement is a judgement of rewards. The name comes from the ancient Greek Olympic games. The winners would stand on the pedestal and receive their reward. Our reward will depend entirely on how much of our lives we have lived for Christ. Anything a believer has done that isn't motivated by love for Christ will burn up. This is why James is giving us this very stern warning... **So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty** (verse 12). We must remember that what we do now will count for eternity — we will have to give an account of what we do, so we must be careful to honour God in everything we do, say, and think. We read about the Bema Seat Judgement, the judgement of rewards for believers in:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 NLT

Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have— Jesus Christ.

¹² Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. ¹³ But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. ¹⁴ If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

So in summary:

The **law of liberty** has **liberty** or freedom, yet it is still a **law** that must be obeyed and that we will be judged by at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). **Will I use my freedom to serve Christ, or serve myself.** It won't affect my salvation, but it will affect my reward and my role in God's future kingdom on earth. If this is not important to you now, I guarantee you that it will be then. Jesus spoke a lot about future rewards in the gospels.

Show mercy and you will receive mercy

James 2:13 NKJV

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Luke 6:32-38 explains this well. One of the things that we will be rewarded for is showing mercy, because God is merciful — it's a part of His nature. The reward is partly in this life as we reciprocate (give and receive) mercy with others, and in the next, when we are rewarded for showing mercy.

Luke 6:32-38 NKJV

“But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. ³⁶ **Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.**

³⁷ “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. **For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.**”

John Courson: “In other words, if you are merciful to others, if you are forgiving toward others, if you are kind and compassionate with others, then when you need mercy and grace and kindness—and you will—it will be given to you. But if you have been harsh and judgmental, if you have been fault-finding and sin-sniffing, when you need mercy from others, there will be none for you.”

Summary

James 2:8-13 NJKV

If you really fulfil *the royal law* according to the Scripture, “*You shall love your neighbour as yourself,*” you do well; ⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “*Do not commit adultery,*” also said, “*Do not murder.*” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.