

James 2:1-13 – The Sin of Preference– Part 2

1

Introduction

God is impartial and we are to be also.

In 2:1–13, James presents five features of genuine, Godlike impartiality:

- The principle (v. 1),
- The example (vv. 2–4),
- The inconsistency (vv. 5–7),
- The violation (vv. 8–11), and
- The appeal (vv. 12–13).

2

James 2:1-13

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 dishonored 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?

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor 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.

3

The Principle

James 2:1

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

As believers, we must not show partiality.

The gospel is available to everyone with absolute equality. All are equally valuable in the eyes of God. Our work is equally valuable, and all are important. All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are adopted into God's family, and are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

4

The Example

James 2:2

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,

Though most of the believers in the first century were extremely poor, this passage indicates that at least some of the churches had wealthy members, or at least had wealthy visitors.

“**Assembly**” has the basic meaning of gathering together and is commonly rendered “synagogue”. “**With gold rings**” literally means “gold-fingered,” and could indicate the person was wearing more than one ring. It was a common practice among well-to-do people of that day, both Jews and Gentiles, to wear numerous rings on their fingers as marks of wealth and social status. The Roman statesman and philosopher Seneca wrote, “We adorn our fingers with rings and we distribute gems over every joint”.

5

The Example

James 2:2

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,

“**Fine apparel**” literally means “bright,” or “brilliant.” It is used of the “gorgeous robe” that Herod and his soldiers mockingly placed on Jesus before they sent Him to Pilate (Luke 23:11) and of the “shining garments” of the angel who appeared to Cornelius as he was praying (Acts 10:30).

From the context, it seems likely that the imaginary man in James’s illustration is a visitor. The sin was not in the man’s wearing a gold ring and fine clothes or in his being given a good place to sit. Nor was the sin in the poor man, perhaps a visitor, being dressed in dirty clothes.

6

The Example

James 2:2-4

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, ³and 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," ⁴have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

In most synagogues of that day, there were only a few benches to sit on, perhaps one or two in the front—the "chief seats in the synagogues" that the scribes and Pharisees coveted (Matt. 23:6)—and possibly some others placed around the walls. Most of the people either stood or sat cross-legged on the floor. Occasionally, someone would also have a footstool. To ask another person, especially a visitor or guest, to sit down by my footstool was therefore a double show of disrespect. The person on a bench or in a chair not only would not give that seat to the visitor but would not even allow him to sit on his footstool.

7

The Example

James 2:2-4

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, ³and 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," ⁴have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

In both instances, **the sin is partiality**, by showing special favor to the well-dressed man and contempt, for the poor man. James states that such discrimination is much more than poor hospitality - it is **evil**. James uses three different words for evil in his epistle. Of the three the one used here is the strongest, **carrying the idea of vicious intentions that have a destructive and injurious effect.**

8

The Example

Romans 15:5-7

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

God demonstrates His love towards us even while we are yet sinners. We as imperfect Christians are obligated to love one another. The only “favoritism” that the Lord honors is that in which, with humility of mind we regard one another as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3). That sort of unselfish partiality favors the needs of others above our own, their welfare and well-being above ours.

9

So What ...

Today we here that “clothes make the man!” It is true that the usher in this passage was merely looking at the outward appearance. He would have done well to have known “that you cannot judge a book by its cover.”

While men look at the outward appearance, **God looks at the heart** (1 Samuel 16:7). Little thought was given to the true spiritual clothing of these men. Were they clothed in the righteousness of Christ or their own righteousness. Isaiah 64:6 would declare that if this rich man was dressed in his own righteousness, they would be filthy rags in the eyes of God. While if the poor man was clothed in Christ, those garments would be precious and beautiful in the eyes of the Father.

10

So What ...

We must learn to see through the eyes of Christ. I am convinced that heaven will be filled with surprises. Many of those who have been despised here on earth will be elevated to great positions of honor in heaven for their faithful stand and faith in Christ. On the other hand many of those who have been received so much attention here on earth will have received their reward already.

Man also has a habit of looking at the present and the past of a man. God sees us in the future where we are perfected in Christ before the throne. **Let us purpose ourselves to gain a heavenly perspective** of not only our visitors, but all our brothers and sisters in Christ.