

James 2:1-13 – The Sin of Preference– Part 3

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 Inconsistency

James 2:5-7

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?

In this passage James is pointing out the inconsistency between God's character and the attitude of a believer who is disrespectful of poor people.

James again addresses his readers as his "**beloved brethren**" and exhorts them to listen. James is encouraging his readers to think for a moment. James gives two arguments why being partial to the rich and turn their backs on the poor cannot possibly correspond to God's character and will.

4

The Divine Choice of the Poor

James 2:5-6a

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? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man.

James is referring to those who are **economically poor**. The world judges these people to be inferior because of their financial poverty. God, however, has shown that He has special **concern for the poor and downtrodden** of this world. David declares in **Psalm 41:1**, “Blessed *is* he who considers the poor; The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” God states here that if you take care of the poor, God will take care of you. The reason is that you reflect His own heart. Also see Ps. 72:4, 12, Prov. 17:5, 21:13, 31:9, Isa. 3:14–15, Amos 2:6–7.

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In the Old Testament sacrificial system, God made **special provision** for those who were too poor to bring the prescribed offering. They could offer a dove or pigeon (Lev. 1:5, 10, 14). In addition to that, **every seventh year all debts would be canceled**, in order that a person would not go permanently into debt that could never be repaid (Deut. 15:1–2). **Every fifty years, a jubilee was celebrated**, in which slaves could choose to be set free from their masters (Lev. 25:8–13).

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Crops in the field were not to be completely harvested and vineyards were not to be completely picked, in order that the poor could glean food for themselves (19:9–10). The poor were **never to be charged interest** on a loan (25:35–37); if they had to sell all of their property, a **kinsman was to redeem** it for them (25:25); and if they had to sell themselves to a fellow countryman, they were **not to be treated as slaves** (25:39). God established His people Israel in ways that carefully protected and helped the poor.

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In His gracious love, James tells us, **God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.** Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 that God has chosen the weak and foolish to confound the strong. True wealth and power are found in God alone. The rich and strong tend to trust in themselves and/or in their possessions, but the poor can only trust in God. Ephesians 1:3 reminds us that we who are in Christ have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.

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God has also chosen the poor of this world to be heirs of the kingdom that He promised. “**Kingdom**” here represents the entire concept of salvation and all that it implies. God does not base our salvation on what we own or can do. Rather salvation requires that man (regardless of his economic status) humbles himself and rests totally in the completed work of Christ.

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There will be **no poor in heaven** in any sense, no second-class citizens. Everyone will be rich in the things that matter eternally. Every believer will receive the same eternal life, the same heavenly citizenship in the kingdom of God, and the same perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to him by the Father. Every one of His children will live in His house and enjoy His presence and love (John 14:1–3).

James goes on to say, some of you, totally unlike God, have dishonored the poor man, despising and rejecting those whom the Lord has specially chosen. How can you claim to be God’s child and yet think and act so differently from Him?

10

The Blasphemy of the Rich

James 2:6b-7

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?.

James continues by asking, “**Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?**” The word “**oppress**” means “**to tyrannize, to exercise inordinate power over others**”. Those who seek to find their value in riches are never satisfied. They live a life that is driven by accumulating more and often any way they can. Many of the rich in our country have made their fortunes at the expense of the poor.

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James goes on to state that it is the rich who “blaspheme that noble name by which you are been called.” The “**noble name**” refers to the name of Jesus, which was slandered and blasphemed by enemies of the church. “Don’t you realize that the rich profane the name of your Lord, promote civil and religious hostility, and cause you unbelievable hardship and misery?”

James may have been referring to the Sadducees. The Sadducees were wealthy, aristocratic, secularized, and actively persecuted the early church. Like the Pharisees, the Sadducees fiercely opposed Jesus when He was alive, slandered His name (see Matt. 16:1–12; 22:23–32), and strongly slandered and persecuted the early church (see Acts 4:1–3; 5:17–18).

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“By which ye are called” emphasizes the believer’s personal relationship to and identity with Jesus Christ. The very name Christian means “Christ’s ones,” those who belong to and identify themselves with Christ and have the great privilege of expressing His love and impartiality.

The word James uses for **“called”** is the same as when a wife takes her husband’s name in marriage, or for a child being called after his father. As Christians we take the name of Christ. It is as if we were married to Christ or born into the family of Christ.

13

So What ...

Where do you find your worth and value? Is it in the things you own or is it in your relationship with Jesus? How do you judge the value of others? Is it in the externals or internals? Let us dedicate ourselves to a life of dependence on Christ and allow Him to use us to reach those whom the world has rejected!

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