

STUDIES IN JAMES (10)

Without Partiality

James 2:1-13

Tonight, we continue our study through the book of James. Written to Jewish Christians who had been scattered, James gives practical lessons that apply to each of us as we live our lives. He has addressed dealing with trials and temptations, controlling our tongue, being doers of the word and not hearers only, and how pure and undefiled religion includes concern for others.

In our text today, we find another concern – partiality. If the audience of James is scattered Jewish Christians, they would have been very familiar with partiality considering the divide that existed between Jews and Gentiles (and Samaritans). But in our text, James applies the principles against partiality to a different area – one’s social status.

Even today, we still struggle with partiality – nationally, racially, economically, education, political, one’s peculiarities and even religiously. Let us notice how James calls for us to deal with this.

I. Do Not Show Partiality

- a. What is partiality? The Greek word for partiality is, προσωποληψία (prosōpolēmpsia). It is a compound word meaning, “face” and “to receive” or admire. Simply stated, it means to consider someone/something based upon appearance. And while there are times for partiality (e.g., you show partiality toward your spouse, we prefer one another – Romans 12:10, etc.), often it means to show favoritism without all the facts, or on appearance ALONE. It is in this sense it is used in our text.
- b. **Do not hold the faith of our Lord... with partiality**
 - i. James speaks of our faith as Christians, considering our glorious Lord. He is saying we must not discriminate when it comes to sharing our faith, based upon outward appearance. This is the premise of Jesus in Matthew 7:1-5 warning against judging.
 - ii. Speaking our Lord and of God: He is no respecter of persons when it comes to offering salvation – Acts 10:34-35, Romans 2:11, Galatians 2:6, 1 Peter 1:17, without partiality He judges, Cf. Deuteronomy 10:17-18 *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. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.* Even under the LOM it was His declaration.
 - iii. “The faith” is available to all – Galatians 3:26-28, Titus 2:11, etc.
- c. Vs. 2-3 – James illustrates this by contrasting 2 men that come into the assembly – the rich vs poor man coming into the assembly (συναγωγή, synagōgē - The word could be a reference to when we assemble together, or ANY time we are gathered. Sources say this word and the word for church (ekklēsia) portray the same/very similar idea). They were showing partiality based upon one’s material appearance (and supposed success). In so doing they placed greater emphasis on materialism than on spirituality.
- d. *Have you not... become judges with evil thoughts?* - This partiality is evil. NOTE – it is not just a weakness, but EVIL! You are thinking wickedly.
- e. *Has God not chosen the poor...?* While God shows no partiality, the “poor” (e.g., marginalized) are more likely to turn to Him.
 - i. Those driven by worldly pursuits and success think less about God. James 4:4 warns about this. 1 John 2:15-16. Recall the warning of Jesus – Matthew 6:24. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 is also a warning to the rich. The rich, young ruler walked away sorrowful – Matthew 19:22.
 - ii. But the poor have less to lose AND less to stand in their way. God cares for, and has always, the poor – Job 36:11, Elihu noted, *He delivers the poor in their affliction, And opens their ears in oppression.* Matthew 11:5, as Jesus sends back the disciples of John He notes, *The*

blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Luke 6:20, Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:26 notes, For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

II. **Misplaced judgments**

- a. *You have dishonored the poor man* – why was it evil. They had insulted (disrespected, shamed) the poor man without cause. Such conduct reveals the character of one (or a whole assembly) that needs to change. Proverbs 17:5, *He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.* 1 Corinthians 11:22, addressing abuse with the Lord's Supper - *What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.*
- b. *Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?* (6)
 - i. NOTE: There is no virtue in wealth or poverty. Money is morally neutral. While often contrasted in scripture and the stern warnings are against the rich, anyone can be saved. Matthew 19:23-26 finds Jesus warning how difficult it is for the rich to enter heaven, BUT it is not impossible. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 describes HOW the rich can enter heaven.
 - ii. It is HOW you act and what you do with it that gives it identity before God. As noted, it is typically the wealthy (those with means) that exploit those without. Many of the wicked causes being advocated today are supported by very wealthy individuals willing to use their resources to reject God and His standards. They will use their power and resources to silence those who challenge them AND to exploit the gullible (NOTE: 2 Peter 2:3 speaks of false teachers exploiting with deceptive words. Romans 16:18 describes those who serve "their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple."). They can hire the powerful (and godless) lawyers to manipulate the law to their advantage. And the poor cannot afford an equal defense. BUT know that God takes note - cf. James 5:1-6.
- c. *Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?* (7)
 - i. 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23 – the message of the cross to unbelievers is foolishness and a stumbling block.
 - ii. The worldly despise the godly because they expose their wickedness (John 3:19-21). Often, when one cannot answer an accusation against them, they attack the character of the accuser. The wicked of this world, often WITH deep resources, will blaspheme God and His sheep. They will not stand idle. The radical atheist is not content to let you believe in God, they want to remove any thought of Him from society. How did the Jews treat Jesus as He performed miracles? Matthew 12:24 – He casts out demons by Beelzebub. How did the Jews respond when Paul and Barnabas preached to Gentiles at Antioch? Acts 13:45 - *But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.* Why is today any different?
 - iii. Are you honoring the one more likely to reject your faith and you? Why do people show honor to the rich and powerful? Is it fear? Is it awe? Is it materialistic? (Hoping to receive something) Is it selfish, not wanting to be inconvenienced by the needy and different? Etc.
- d. Partiality dishonors one unjustly

III. **Fulfilling the Royal law (2:8-13)**

- a. The answer to this problem: *But if really fulfill the royal law according to scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself', you do well.*
- b. What is the royal law? "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"

- i. The idea of being *royal* implies it is related to the king. As such it was to be respected and obeyed. Consider the power kings have had throughout history – often what they said could not be questioned.
 - ii. WHY is the command of our text *royal*?
 - 1. It is commanded and demonstrated by our sovereign God.
 - 2. It was the foundation of all that our King did for us. Jesus demonstrated what it means to love our neighbor. Consider Matthew 22:16 where Pharisees plotted against Jesus. Their intent was deceptive but they declared a truth about what they observed in Him, *you do not regard the person of man*. And He didn't. Recall Mark 12:37, *...And the common people heard Him gladly*.
 - 3. It is the foundation of "all the law and the prophets" concerning mankind.
 - iii. It is: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." From Leviticus 19:18, this is mentioned 7 times in the New Testament and alluded to at other times. Matthew 22:37-40 lays our foundation.
 - iv. IF we love our neighbors as ourself, we will NOT show partiality.
- c. *BUT if you show partiality you are sinning!* Vs. 9. And you are convicted (guilty before God) as a transgressor
- d. Vs. 10-11 - To break ANY command of God's law is to be a lawbreaker. James gives a powerful illustration noting that when you stumble in one point, you are guilty of breaking the law!
 - i. We categorize sins (and crimes) by varying levels. And there is something to be said about that in this world. BUT understand that before God, SIN IS SIN! All Adam and Eve did was eat a piece of fruit (Genesis 3). But it was rebellion and rejecting God's will. Whether you murder, commit adultery or show partiality, to God it is all the same and needs to be repented of.
 - ii. The problem is the heart! Many will obey MOST laws because they agree with them. But where your faithfulness is tested is when the law says to do something you don't want to do. This is true civilly AND spiritually.
 - iii. We struggle with this in our society, because we fail to respect the law as a whole. We are living in times where people, INCLUDING many of our leaders, pick and choose which laws to enforce or ignore. And then they wonder why our society is so lawless.
 - iv. In the Lord's church, there are elders, preachers and brethren that play "fast and loose" with God's laws. They obey most of His commands, but are willing to set aside those they disagree with. The problem is NOT the specific law – but their ATTITUDE toward God's law. RARELY does one who sets aside a specific law of God stop there. IT is just a matter of time!
- e. *Speak and do as one who will be judged by the law of liberty* (12) - (God's law – James 1:25). We will give an accounting for all that we do. 2 Corinthians 5:10-11, Revelation 20:11-15, etc.
- f. Finally, *For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment*. You will be judged in the manner you judge others (Matthew 7:1-5). You will be forgiven by the way you forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). Be merciful, and God will show you mercy (Matthew 5:7). Show no mercy, receive no mercy.
- g. *Mercy triumphs over judgment*. This is not a passage that dismisses obedience, but a call of the heart. It is with mercy that we must NOT show partiality. Recall Matthew 23:23 – we must obey, but it must come from a good and honest heart!

One of the points we have made in our studies, including James, is how we need each other. We are living in dark times. We cannot afford to dismiss others just because they have physical differences. In God's eyes, all men are created in His image (Acts 17:26, Genesis 1:26-27). Let us look to each other without partiality. Think about it!