

Not Showing Personal Favoritism

James 2:1-13

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.

Background Notes

In the first half of James 2 we are exhorted not to show personal favoritism towards people of wealth or position. This sin is very easy to commit. Wouldn't you agree that showing favoritism a very easy sin to commit?

The epistle of James is a very practical book. In fact, the theme of James is “Practical Christian Living.” Just about every area of Christian life is covered in the epistle, and James shows us how our Christian faith and love should be expressed in a variety of life situations.

In chapter 1 we looked at what the proper Christian response should be when we face tests of our faith or temptations to sin. I'd had a “testing of my faith” experience this past week. Many times I find that soon after I preach a sermon, the Lord tests me on the very words I spoke to see if I “practice what I preach”! James 1 teaches us that the tests of our Christian faith may be big tests or small tests, and the Lord gave me a small test a few days ago. I was getting out of my car in a crowded parking lot and put a “ding” in the door of the car parked next to me. No one saw it happen. This was not a beat-up car with a lot of other dents and dings -- it was a brand new van, and I figured that ding was at least \$400 worth of damage. Now, let me ask you....what would you have done? Would you have just driven away? No one would know.

Would you reason that, “Well, this makes up for the dents in my car that no one ever reported to me!” Or would you possibly excuse yourself because your ministry of serving the Lord is far more important than spending your time and energy and money on this problem? After all, your insurance rates will go up, and it’s “the Lord’s money” that goes into those insurance rates. Well, I did what I knew was the right thing to do. I wrote my name and number on a paper napkin and put it underneath the windshield wiper -- hoping, of course, that somehow the owner wouldn’t call. But he did call, and of all things he was a lawyer! Just my luck! Well, I told him to get an estimate and I would pay him out of my own pocket or run it through my insurance company. The good news is that the estimate was only \$100, and the car is already fixed. I met the man and personally paid him the \$100, and he and his wife thanked me for my honesty. And of course this kind of situation becomes an opportunity to share about your Christian faith, doesn’t it? Did you have any tests of your faith this week?

In the first half of James 2, another area of Christian living is discussed - the importance of not showing personal favoritism because of someone’s wealth or position.

Doctrinal Points

1. Showing favoritism reverses God’s normal way.

Showing favoritism reverses God’s normal way. God does not practice partiality! Verse 1 is another way of saying that showing favoritism because of a person’s wealth or status or position or connections is **wrong**. Snobbery and prejudice involve showing favoritism -- and it’s **wrong**. In verses 2-4 the example is given of two people coming into your church. One is obviously rich and well dressed, and the other is obviously poor and dressed in shabby clothes. To whom are you going to show favoritism -- toward the rich person by ignoring the poor person? To whom will you try to talk during the fellowship time? Which person will you invite over to your home? This is convicting, isn’t it?

We’ve all practiced favoritism to one degree or another, but it’s wrong! In fact, verse 4 tells us that it’s **evil**. Verse 4 tells us not become judges with **evil** thoughts!

In verses 5-7 we see that showing favoritism is wrong because it reverses God’s normal way. Verse 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?”* God doesn’t show partiality! God doesn’t favor the rich over the poor! God doesn’t favor people of high social or political position over the “nobodies”! In fact, God was willing to choose a shepherd boy like David and a poor peasant girl like Mary for leading roles in His program of redemption.

Not only that – in general, the rich and famous tend to **oppose** Christianity, as we see here in verses 6-7. *“Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?”* So don’t show favoritism. Be extremely careful not to show more favor to successful people with money rather than to less wealthy and less popular people. Showing favoritism reverses God’s normal way.

2. Showing favoritism breaks God's moral Law.

Verses 8-11: *"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."*

"Love your neighbor as yourself" is called the "royal law" here -- not only because it was given by the King, but (as Romans 13:8 says) it sums up many of God's commands. If we show favoritism we are not fulfilling God's royal law. A "neighbor," by the way, is not just the person who lives next door to you. Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? A "neighbor" is **anyone** around you who is in need. We all have plenty of neighbors in this sense, don't we? Unfortunately, when we're busy climbing the social or business ladder by cultivating friendships with prominent or wealthy people, we tend to forget that people in need are all around us. Not fulfilling the royal law is sin, and a transgression of God's Law. Verse 9: *"But if you show partiality you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors."*

Now you might think that showing partiality is not a very important part of God's moral law. But, you see, God's Law is a **unity** – if you break one point, you break the whole law! That's what verse 10 is saying: *"For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumbles at one point, he is guilty of all."* It's like the links in a chain. If you're holding onto the end of a chain while dangling over a cliff, which link in that chain is more important? **Every** link is important! Break one link and the chain is broken. So, too, if we break just one of God's Laws, **we** are broken! So whether it is "Do not commit adultery" or "Do not murder" or "Do not show favoritism" -- these are all parts of God's moral law, and transgressors are accountable to God. That's the point.

Showing favoritism is a serious sin. Showing favoritism breaks God's moral Law. Question: Do you spend more time cultivating friendships with those people who have money and connections and power, or with those folks who are poor and can't give you anything in return? The convicting statement is: Remember, showing favoritism breaks God's moral Law!

Practical Application

Let mercy triumph over judgment.

Verses 12-13: *"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."* These verses are addressed to believers, so we

believe that the “Judgment Seat of Christ” is in view here. Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 (also addressed to believers) say that we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is a time of review for believers. It's not to decide whether we're saved or not -- that has all been taken care of! That's all settled. We'll be with the Lord forever. But the Lord will review our lives, as to how faithful we've been and how we've served Him. That's what the judgment seat of Christ is all about.

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, believers who practice partiality and show favoritism here on earth will lose out on reward in heaven. To be “judged by God's law of liberty” (v12) emphasizes that we have no excuse for showing favoritism as Christians. We have the ability to fulfill God's moral law, and there really is freedom and liberty in keeping God's moral law.

Furthermore, if we show mercy to the poor and needy and hurting people around us, it will go a long way in our favor when the Lord reviews our lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ. **“Mercy triumphs over judgment”** is always God's rule of thumb -- but if we show favoritism to the more prominent people and to the “in-crowd” because of what they can do for us, we will lose out at the judgment seat of Christ. We'll be losers -- not our salvation, but our reward. So let's not lose out at the judgment seat of Christ because we practiced favoritism or partiality. Let mercy triumph over judgment.