

James 2:1-13 "Faith and Impartiality"

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Thesis: God's people should be at the forefront of any social phenomenon to model a culture without partiality. Yet, the problem of prejudice continues, in and out of the Church. What is God's perspective on prejudice, and how can we overcome prejudice? Let's discover together.

Subject: The problem of prejudice

Object: Love without partiality

A. Man's problem with prejudice [1-4]

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?

Prejudice in a society generally, based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation or any other factor is, suffice it to say, a tremendous problem. Yet, James is focused on

the problem among God's people whom he refers to as *brethren* [1], and the *assembly* [2]. The church was the only place in the ancient world without social distinctions. There was no distinction between Jew and Gentile, male or female, rich or poor [Gal. 3:28]. Thus, prejudice needs to be confronted...

Prejudice is contrary to faith in Christ. Jesus' followers should not live their faith with partiality [1]. James's observation that the Lord Jesus is *of glory* [1] is a subtle reminder that only Jesus is glorious. Since His followers are not glorious (apart from Him), we have no reason for bias nor prejudice. James contrasts the preferential treatment of the wealthy against the poor in the assembly [2-3]. The preferential treatment is based on outward appearance such as jewelry or apparel without any regard for their character or their heart for God.

Prejudice focuses on external matters, but God focuses on the heart. When God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the next king of Israel, Samuel assumed the choice would be based on age and physical appearance, but the youngest, David, was selected, because man looks on the outward, but the Lord looks at the heart [1Sam. 16:7]. Don't dishonor a poor man who is open to God, nor honor a rich man who isn't. The poor are neglected, just like many marginalized, because they are not perceived as adding value.

Prejudice is evil. Partiality or prejudice flows from our *judgment with evil thoughts* [4]. We pre-judge others without knowing the whole story, circumstances, or motives.

B. God's perspective of prejudice [5-11]

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.

God loves without prejudice [5-7]: James implores us to *listen* or pay attention, and then refers to his listeners as *beloved brethren* reminding us that this is a gentle correction of believers. *God chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him* [5]. The rich tend to trust in their riches for security and contentment, but the poor have no earthly treasure to place their hopes upon. Thus, it can be easier for the poor to come to faith in Christ and inherit the greatest treasure of God, His Kingdom, and unimaginable blessings. God honors

those who love Him regardless of their resources. “There is no partiality with God” [Rom. 2:11, see also: Deut. 10:17, Ac.10:34]. Jesus treated all people the same [Matt. 22:16]. In contrast, people tend to honor the wealthy even though the wealthy are often dishonorable and oppressive [6-7].

God has called us to love without prejudice [8] *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well. The royal law is law of love, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” [Gal. 5:14, Lev. 19:18].* The rabbis recognized that some of God’s commandment were of great importance, such as Sabbath observance. Thus, James’ discussion of the sin of prejudice along with murder and adultery [10-11] should get our attention about the weight of God’s command to love others who are different than us.

C. How to overcome prejudice [12-13]

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.

The *law of liberty* [12] refers to the gospel [1:25] and the Great Commandments to love God supremely, and to love your neighbors as you love yourself [Matt. 22:37-40]. You cannot legislate the elimination of prejudice. Consider Civil Rights laws in the United States, and Anti-Apartheid laws in South Africa as examples of this principle. God’s people should be at the forefront of any social phenomenon to model a culture without partiality.

Realize we are all recipients of God's mercy and grace through faith in Christ (the gospel).

The cross is the great equalizer - all are equal at the foot of the cross. This is our position in Christ, and should be our perspective and practice with one another.

Realize the importance of showing mercy. *For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment [13].* Showing mercy to others, rather than pre-judging them, is evidence of faith in Christ and spiritual life. Jesus' followers recognize that prejudice and partiality are wrong attitudes that produce wrong behaviors; and that as recipients of God's mercy they show progressively more mercy to others. On the other hand, if we don't show mercy to others we may not be saved and should not expect mercy from God. Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy."

The gospel message of God's mercy, grace, and love, when appropriated and appreciated, is the way to overcome prejudice and love without partiality.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. Prejudice is a universal problem. The specific dynamics of the experience are impacted by place, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, government, age, physical appearance, etc. What are some of the likely issues in the greater culture around you?

Q2. What are some ways that partiality and prejudice can be present in the typical local church?

Q3. What are some reasons why prejudice and partiality are contrary to love and mercy?

Q4. How would you like to apply this lesson in your life?

Digging Deeper:

1. Here is an interesting article on the law of liberty: <https://www.gotquestions.org/law-of-liberty.html>

2. Here is an interesting article on prejudice and discrimination by Ed Stetzer published in Christianity Today: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/may/prejudice-and-discrimination-why-we-cant-keep-covering-them.html>

As you engage neighbors where you live, work, study and play, try to share your story. If you're struggling ask them to pray with or for you, and if able ask for help.