

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 dishonoured 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 fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour 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.

Questions On The Text

What sort of faith are we supposed to have?

Verse 1: We are supposed to have impartial faith. By linking what he has to say about impartiality to the faith and name of the Lord Jesus Christ our glory, James is merely reminding his readers that impartiality is firmly embedded in the nature of God. (See Deuteronomy 10:17-18 which makes this clear.)

Since God is impartial by nature, He expects us to be impartial too. This is also mentioned in Leviticus 19:15: You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbour. This verse also precludes favouritism based on a person's being disadvantaged.

Literally, the phrase "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" could also be translated "the Lord Jesus Christ our glory." If the truly amazing Lord Jesus Christ is truly our glory, we should be the last people in the world to be impressed by the false glory of wealth, status, or anything else that the world idolises.

What example of partiality does James give?

Verses 2-4: James illustrates his point by talking about a rich man who enters the church assembly and is given a place of honour. The reference to "a man with gold rings" is literally "a gold-ringed man", and refers to the practice of the wealthy in those days to show off their wealth by wearing a number of rings on each finger. "Fine apparel" is literally "shining clothing" which brings out the contrast with the shabby clothing of the poor person.

In contrast with the favoured treatment of the wealthy man, a poor man also enters the assembly and is disrespected by being told to stand or sit on the floor. A person who shows partiality is a judge with evil thoughts; the phrase "judges with evil thoughts" can also be translated "evilly motivated judges."

What special calling have the poor of this world received from God?

Verse 5: God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. The Lord uses a different currency from what is used in this world system. He wants us to be "rich in faith."

What is James' opinion of how the poor are generally treated?

Verses 6-7: James says that it is dishonouring to the poor to treat them shabbily because of their poverty. The church is meant to be a classless society. Read Ephesians 2:14 and Galatians 3:28 to see that God, through the cross, has broken down the barriers based on religious background, gender and status. To discriminate against someone based on their circumstances in life is to dishonour them. In fact, the majority of those whom God calls into the Kingdom are unimpressive. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.)

The rich are the ones who oppress others. It's very often true that those who are blessed with much in this life, whether money, talent, looks, etc., often use their blessing for selfish purposes. They are the ones who drag people into court and blaspheme the holy name of Jesus by which the believers are called. The word "called" is the same word used for a wife who takes her husband's name in marriage. (See Ephesians 5:22-32 for more on this analogy.)

How does God want us to live?

Verses 8-12: God wants us to live according to the royal law of love, which always has the interests of others at heart.

What triumphs over judgment?

Verse 13: Mercy triumphs over judgment, because the merciful person will receive mercy. Jesus also said this in Matthew 5:7.

Further Questions For Discussion:

How can you become more aware of how you might treat others with partiality?

In 1 Sam 16:7, God said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." How does this fit in with our discussion on impartiality?

What sorts of things cause you to treat people partially, or to discriminate against people?

Keeping in mind that God's Word tells us to honour certain people, do you think that partiality is shown in your church?

If a partial person is a judge with evil thoughts, what sorts of evil thoughts do you think James is talking about?

How can you become rich in faith?

In what ways can you honour the poor in your church?