

JAMES Lesson 7: No Favoritism Allowed!

Conviction in Equality James 2: 1-13

11.30.08

OUR TEXT: JAMES 2: 1-13 (N.A.S.V.)

- 1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism.
- 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,
- 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"
- 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?
- 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose 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. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?
- 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?
- 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.
- 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.
- 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.
- 11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.
- 12 So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty.
- 13 For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

INTRO

Call it favoritism, call it pandering, call it prejudice, call it personal preference, call it respect of persons – the point is, if as Christians treat people with different respect just because they are different – James calls it sin.

Biblical faith and personal favoritism are mutually exclusive. James makes it clear in verse 1 that it's not just the ACTION of favoritism that is sin, but even the ATTITUDE.

James, Chapter 2: 1-12 (My paraphrase)

Conviction in Equality

1. Don't you dare call yourself a believer in our amazing Lord and Chosen One, Jesus, if you treat people differently based on their appearance or background.

2-4. Here's a test. If one person walks into to your church service looking like "a million" and another comes in looking like a "bum," will you treat them the same? Or will you give special attention or seating to the one looking great and ignore the other, even making him or her sit in a place where they might not so easily draw attention. If you'd honestly treat them differently, you fail the test. You would be making an ungodly judgment based on unfair distinctions.

5-7. As my brothers in the Lord, I really do love you. So, listen up. Don't we read that God so often has chosen the poor in wealth to be rich in faith and receive His kingdom inheritance? This is exactly what God promises to all who love Him. It doesn't make sense to dishonor the poor person. More often than not, it's the rich one who will give you a hard time, even pulling you into court or using your precious Lord's name in vain.

8-9. The highest law of God's kingdom is this: "Love others as you would want to be loved." If you do this, you're right on. But if you love people differently based on externals, you're practicing sin and guilty of breaking God's #1 law.

10-11. Here's the hard fact. Even if you were to keep all of God's law perfectly, one sin (like favoritism) makes you guilty of all in God's eyes. God forbids adultery, just like he forbids murder. But if you are clean regarding adultery, yet commit murder – you're guilty of adultery, and all the other laws as well. Ouch!

12-13. Now don't be frozen with fear in your words and actions toward others – God's royal law of love is meant to motivate and free you, not condemn you. If you show no mercy, then mercy won't come your way. But if you learn to show mercy in your assessment of others, that demonstration of mercy will trump any judgment that is due you.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY

As in the book of James, it comes down to spiritual maturity, which we have defined as seeing things from God's perspective.

1. Even the enemies of **Jesus** knew he was not partial in the way he treated people.
Matt. 22:16 Pharisees: "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any"
2. Peter learned about how **God the Father** looks at people in Acts 10:34: *"I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him."*
3. We are prone to judge by outward appearance, rather than by the inner attitude of the heart. God looks at the **HEART**.

1 Samuel 16:7 regarding Samuel's choice of king: "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

4. We are prone to judge people by the past, rather than by their future. God looks at the **POTENTIAL** in people. *2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore is any man in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come."*

It is clear, then, that God sees people with EQUALITY and without PARTIALITY. Thus, my spiritual maturity demands the same from me.

So ... you could preach the rest of this sermon:

1. Treat people the same who might come into your church
2. Show them the "royal law" of love – treating them as you would want to be treated

HOWEVER – I believe the passage has more to do with MERCY (v. 13) than treatment in church.

THOSE WHO COME INTO OUR LIFE (v. 1-4)

We have dozens of relatives, hundreds of friends and acquaintances and thousand who will intersect our lives in some way. Each "come into your assembly" which is the arena of our life and we discover the good and not so good about each. In all we create a "history" – either of minutes or a lifetime. And each we are prone to "judge" as worthy of our time and respect, or worthy of just the time of day, or not very worthy at all. We often tend to give each what they are "worth" to us – giving them either a measure of love, or a measure of indifference, or even a "piece of our mind." All (hopefully) in Christian love, of course.

THE USUAL CHRISTIAN APPROACH (v. 5-9)

We know that God wants us to be impartial in our attitude toward people and to practice the "Golden Rule" of loving others. And we do, best we can, keeping our opinions (and favoritism) as much as possible to ourselves.

THE "NIGHTMARE" (v. 10-11)

Then James "shakes up" the picture with a "nightmare" scenario. Imagine going to heaven and lined up to stand before the Great Judge. Others before you have been judged as liars, cheaters, adulterers, murderers. When you are judged (rightly) as having shown favoritism to some, you bow your head in shame, but are secretly glad to have been guilty of worse. The nightmare has the Judge reminding you that one sin makes you guilty of all. You are pronounced guilty of adultery. "Not fair!" you say. Then you are found guilty of murder as well. "Not fair!" you say again. And again, and again as you are found guilty of all.

THE REALITY (v. 12-13)

You wake to remember that you are a Christian – that Jesus died for your sins and you are a recipient of His great MERCY = not getting what you deserve.

And just like a “trump” in a game of cards wins even over the highest card of any other suit, MERCY TRUMPS JUDGMENT – it always wins!

James 1:13 reminds us – “judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy.”

MERCY = not getting what you deserve.

THE PRINCIPLE is clearly stated in James 2:1:

“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.”

Note: 1. James is speaking to “brothers” = followers of Christ. This is for US.

2. James says essentially, “don’t even call yourself a Christian if you treat people differently because of their looks, beliefs or backgrounds.

3. James calls Jesus “our glorious Lord and Christ.” He as close brother is especially qualified to have seen the Deity in Jesus

JAMES’ EXPLANATION OF THE PRINCIPLE is given in 2: 2-13

1. Example of 2 kinds of people coming to church, and our potential reactions (v. 2-4)

2. Reminder of God’s preference for the poor in His ministry (v. 5-7)

3. Remember the “Royal Law” = Love others as you would want to be loved (v. 8-9)

4. One sin (even favoritism) makes us guilty of all (v. 10-11)

5. The Royal Law should motivate us to MERCY (no partiality) – it’s a law of freedom, not condemnation. MERCY trumps JUDGMENT every time!

REMEMBER: *The ground is level at the foot of the cross!*

JAMES, Chapter 1 (My Paraphrase)

1. To my Jewish brothers of all twelve tribes, wherever you might be after having been forced out of your homeland – this letter is from James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, by calling and by choice. Dear brothers:

Confidence in Trials

2-4. Take a different perspective at the many trials you face, seeing the positive in them, rather than the negative. One, your faith is being proven and strengthened. And two, you are developing endurance for the long haul of life. Don’t balk at being tested, but hang in there, letting the tests accomplish their Godly purpose: your maturity, that you may be spiritually “buff” without flabbiness or weakness of character.

5. Remember, if you need wisdom (and who doesn't?), just ask God, who gives it abundantly and without making you feel bad for asking. Just ask, and Godly wisdom will indeed be given to you.

6-8. But you have to ask really believing the answer will come. No doubting allowed! Because if you doubt, you are acting just like the waves of the sea blown around by the wind – up one minute with your belief and down the next with your doubts. This kind of supposed “faith” won’t get you anything from God. He doesn’t accept on-again, off-again faith, which by the way, indicates instability in other areas of life.

Confidence in Status

9-10. Hey, believing brother - how about this for God’s “upside down” perspective on wisdom? If your earthly status is on the “humble” side, be proud that you are standing rich and tall in God’s spiritual kingdom. And if your earthly status is on the “well off” side, be proud that in God’s kingdom you are just a spiritual beggar. After all, your earthly status is about as secure as flowering grass in the heat of the sun.

11. See the picture? Just like the sun rises, so does your status. Then comes the “Santa Annas” of life – and just like the grass withers and the flower falls, so does your status wither and fall. What once appeared beautiful is no more. Our status, and the futile pursuits of achieving it, will soon fade away.

12. So what’s worth achieving? - persevering through the trials of life and proving your Godly character through it all. This is how you will receive the true “crown of life” – God’s heavenly reward – which He promises to each one of His lovers.

Confidence in Temptation

13-16. I don’t ever want to hear you saying, “I am being tempted by God.” One, evil can never tempt a perfect God. And two, a perfect God could never lower Himself to tempt any one. Rather, it’s really you that brings on temptation by your own luring lustfulness. Sin comes when you give in to temptation by acting on your lust. And when that sin gets full sway in your life it kills your relationship with God. My dear, believing friends whom I love - don’t be sucked in by temptation!

17. Everything that is good is a perfect gift, especially given to you from God. “Good” is never by accident. The Giver is always our Heavenly Father, and like a bright light he never wavers or compromises in His delivery of good.

18. God exercised His Divine prerogative when He chose to pull us into truth by the power of His Word. This was so that we Jewish believers could be considered as the first ones to receive His special blessing of spiritual victory.