

James 2:1-13

One attribute of God that seldom is mentioned is the attribute of impartiality. Yet, this attribute is ascribed to God several times in the Scripture.

Deuteronomy 10:17, “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.” *Acts 10:34*, “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that **God shows no partiality**.’” *Romans 2:11*, “For there is **no partiality with God**.” *Leviticus 19:15*, “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall **not be partial** to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.” *Proverbs 28:21a*, “To show **partiality is not good**...” *Psalms 82:2*, “How long will you judge unjustly, and show **partiality** to the wicked?” *1 Timothy 5:21*, “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, **doing nothing with partiality**.”

James makes clear that professing disciples of Jesus Christ evidence the truth of our profession by a pattern of obedience to God’s commands, (i.e. doers of the Word). “Every Bible ought to be bound in shoe leather.” [Dwight L. Moody]

I. The Command Concerning Partiality (Vs. 1)

The word translated “*partiality*” in the Greek literally means to “*to accept one’s face or to lift up someone’s face*.” It carries the idea of giving special favor and respect based on external appearance.

The command to not discriminate goes all the way back to the Old Testament, *Leviticus 19:15*, “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty.”

Our standard, our model when it comes to showing partiality is the Lord Jesus Christ. He showed no partiality based on outward appearance or standing in society.

Jesus related with people on the basis of what they could become instead of what they were. He was called “*a friend of sinners*.” (*Luke 7:34*)

Even Jesus’ enemies said of Him in *Matthew 22:16b*, “You defer to no one, for You don’t show partiality.” The impartiality of Jesus is commanded of those who say that they are His disciples.

II. The Case Study of Partiality (Vs. 2-4)

The early church was under persecution. Notice verse 1 of chapter 1 “*To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*...” Even though the early church was struggling that did not make it immune to partiality. Bias, prejudice, preference, predispositions, and so forth, can be strong motivators that influence behavior and lead us to make inappropriate and flawed decisions.

If the early church was comprised mostly of Jews, who would know the Old Testament, and should have known *Leviticus 19:15*, why would they discriminate as we see here in verses 2-4? That is why the theme of James’ letter is centered on “... be doers of the Word and not hearers only!” It is easy to become a “hearer only” of God’s Word and not make the transition to being a “doer” in our behaviors and life style practices.

III. The Contradiction of Partiality (Vs. 5-7)

While it is just as sinful to show partiality toward the poor over the rich and vice-versa, the vast majority of partiality is against the poor. Christ reverses our status in the world. *Luke 1:53*, “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.”

God often reverses behaviors and values, *1 Corinthians 1:26-29*, “²⁶For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

James 2:1-13

In **James 2:6-7** James states a fact about his time that all too often is true of our time. As our nation has become wealthier, we have increasingly dishonored the poor.

Today we have dishonored the poor by creating a wicked system that keeps them poor and dependent on the rich by giving them what they have not worked for and making them dependent on government as a substitute god. There is honor in work!

IV. The Consequences of Partiality (Vs. 8-11)

Partiality is in conflict with being a disciple of Jesus Christ; it is also in conflict with God's royal law. The "*the royal law*" is what Jesus called the second greatest commandment just under the greatest commandment: to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The royal law is to love your neighbor as yourself.

James in verse 10 presents an "all or nothing" approach to the moral law of God. For those who are trusting in their own obedience of God's law to be right with Him, are mistaken because one would have to be perfect from birth to death to be righteous before God in that case.

James is saying that if the only sin you ever committed was the sin of partiality, you would be justly condemned as a law breaker. The sin of partiality breaks at least two of the 10 commandments:

- Partiality breaks the 1st Commandment – placing faith in what the rich can provide for the church is having another god before God
- Partiality breaks the 10th Commandment, because it prefers the rich person and covets the riches that they can bestow
- It breaks the 8th commandment because it robs the poor of the dignity they deserve (8 – shall not steal)

Dwight L. Moody compared God's law (**James 2:10**) to a chain of 10 links suspending a man over a cliff. "*If all 10 links break, the man falls to his doom. If 5 of the links break, the man falls to his doom. If only one link breaks, the man falls to his doom.*" Verse 11 gives us an example of verse 10.

Deuteronomy 27:26, "*Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them.*" **Galatians 3:10**, "*...Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*"

V. The Coming Judgment of Partiality (Vs. 12-13)

Two key concepts – "the Law of Liberty" and being judged:

- The "the law of liberty" is the Gospel. It is the Gospel that frees those who put their trust in Christ and His taking our deserved wrath on the cross as the satisfactory payment for our sins. **Romans 8:1a**, "*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...*"
- Being judged – the one who shows no mercy is obviously an unbeliever and thereby under the judgment of God for their sin including the sin of partiality

"The admonition to speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty is tantamount to saying, 'Live and act as a true believer who has been saved by God's grace and who will be judged on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness.' That righteousness frees the believer from the law of bondage and judges him under the redeeming law of liberty, God's Word of the gospel, the New Testament in Jesus Christ, which frees the repentant sinner from the bondage of sin." [John MacArthur]

Verse 12 relates to the main theme of the book of James – "*be doers of the word and not hearers only.*" Verse 12 is connected to chapter 1 verse 25, "*But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer...*" James says that those who, "*So speak and so do*" are the doers of the Word and will be justified by the law of liberty.