

# Coach or First Class?

James 2:1-13

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Baby Dedication: Daniel and Rebecca Stephenson: Ginny, Liam, and Oren. Story of Oren's diagnosis.

## Application

There are those who avoid the book of James because James gets very practical. James doesn't allow for mere profession of faith; he wants to see a possession of faith! If I don't put my feet and my hands where my mouth is, then my expressions are empty and they don't do any good for anyone. Saving faith is not a sideline faith, but a faith that lives out the very things it professes. And this is all part of the gospel. The gospel doesn't just change our eternity; it has practical, everyday implications.

## Quote

— AW Tozer

"Christianity has been watered down until the solution is so weak that if it were poison it would not hurt anyone, and if it were medicine it would not cure anyone."

James doesn't broaden the gospel's appeal by dumbing down its commands. He shoots straight and pulls no punches. He pretty much opens fire and sinks the "Country club" church mentality.

## Illustration

It's a common illustration used in churches because it is an accurate one. If we are honest, we enjoy talking about it more than letting it become our reality. If your church was a ship, would it be a cruise ship or a battleship? A cruise ship represents a place people go for entertainment, ease, comfort, and mirth. There's nothing specifically wrong with a cruise ship... unless you were to send it into battle in a war zone. Could you imagine the Disney cruise ship rolling up the beaches of Normandy? A battleship, on the other hand, is filled with people trained for victory. There can certainly be moments of fun and joy on a battleship, but the people there understand that they have a purpose for which they have been trained. They approach with discipline and resolve. They aren't there for vacation but for battle... and when the battle comes, you're glad they are ready! I know nothing about the actual church, so this isn't a judgment, but I remember finding it slightly amusing when I moved here, driving down Ward Parkway in KC and passing Country Club Church. The church should never be like a country club where people go to flaunt their status, rub shoulders with those who can get them ahead, and snub their noses at those who are inferior to them. It should be a hospital where the wounded find healing, forgiveness, and strengthening.

In this chapter, James brings out a couple more ways that faith displays itself, and this particular chapter is really pivotal because of verse 8: Jam 2:8 NKJV - If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well;" What does that remind you of? Remember when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was? He answered:

### Scripture

Mar 12:30 NKJV - "He said, 'And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

### Illustration

### Scripture

James 2:1 (NKJV) [1] My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

### Illustration

Or, as I might paraphrase, "No playing favorites in the kingdom of God!" Hold the faith: The faith, or the gospel, is something that we are carrying. It's something that we display through our actions. **EXAMPLE:** It's always a high honor for an athlete to carry their country's flag at the opening ceremonies. As that person holds the flag, they are being an example and representative of their nation. They are showing their national pride. Could you imagine an athlete walking into the stadium with a scowl on his face while he drags the flag through the mud, stepping all over it?

Christian, we carry the banner of Christ. And if we carry it with an attitude of partiality, we are misrepresenting the heart of God and the nature of the kingdom of God to all.

## Application

Partiality - *Prosopon* - to look upon the appearance *Lambano* - To lay hold of any person or thing in order to use it. The first Greek definition of this word literally implies a righteous judgment. To hold judgment to make an opinion, whether good or bad, concerning someone. So the contrast is clear. We as people like to take God's place when it comes to judging things. We have the tendency to show partiality; that is, make a judgment based on what we see, then act on that judgment according to what's in our own selfish best interest.

The Lord of Glory has two implications:

It expresses that Jesus is not just any person, but the glorious God. He possesses glory. Glory - *Doxa* (used of the glory of God). What about the Lord of glory? He is no respecter of persons - Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 3:25. He looks at the heart, not the outward appearance - 1 Samuel 16:7. Do you see what God sees? Can you judge what God judges?

## Application

We sometimes miss this idea of partiality because it was far more pronounced culturally in the ancient East and still in many eastern countries today. There were classes that designated your value to society. In India today, there are an estimated 200 million people who are part of the Dalits, or the untouchable class. These are people who would not be recognized by higher classes, invited into gatherings above their class, and would be relegated to the most menial and grotesque tasks within society. This is why it shocked Jesus' disciples when he went from his rabbinic class (the highest in Jewish culture) to placing on the towel and doing the work of a footwashing slave (the lowest of the low) at the last supper. Jesus broke all class rules for the sake of loving and serving others.

## Main Point

JESUS: Then Jesus showed up, and associated with the poor, humble, and sick. The Pharisees could never stand how Jesus never showed them preference or favoritism because in their own minds, they were greater, cleaner, better, and they were entitled to some honor and respect! The blood of Jesus erases the lines that once divided us. For the first time, a congregation of believers would see themselves not as rich and poor, slave and free, Jewish or gentile, but as brothers and sisters in Christ and equal heirs of God through faith.

## Scripture

[Pro 22:2 NKJV] 2 The rich and the poor have this in common, The LORD is the maker of them all.

The entire idea of Christians pandering to prominence and positions is an idea that disgusted James and misrepresents the heart of the gospel. Verses 2-4: A practical example

## Scripture

Jam 2:2 NKJV - 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, Jam 2:3 NKJV - 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," Jam 2:4 NKJV - have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

## Quote

The ancient center of worship was the synagogue. "A synagogue is the social, intellectual and spiritual centre of its community's life." -Jewish source (Rabbi)

JEWISH TRADITION: In the Jewish tradition, people would often be seated in corporate gatherings according to their trade and audience. The more prominent in front, the less prominent toward the back, and the lowest and the poorest would be on the outskirts or sometimes not even welcomed.

## Illustration

Have you ever felt uncomfortable or out of place, perhaps even out of your league? This was me most of my life growing up. I was never at the top of the societal food chain. Never the coolest among the musicians, never in with the popular crowd, my hair would never do the rad things that other kids' hair would do. I've never been a diehard sports fan or a football enthusiast, but then I moved to the KC area! Over the years, I've sat in circles where I was outkicking my coverage. I've been in rooms where I was the poorest in the room, and rooms where I was the richest. One of the most beautiful things about the church is that it's the place where all are not only equalized by the cross, but greater honor goes to those who often have less in this world.

## Application

If all of us, wretched and spiritually impoverished sinners, can freely enter into the glorious presence of God, accepted and loved, then shouldn't we extend the same grace to each other, receiving all not based on our external perception, but based on the intrinsic worth that God Himself has attributed to them?

## Application

What a tragedy if someone comes into a church of Jesus Christ and feels like a second-class citizen based on what they possess or don't possess in this world. The flight to heaven is not divided into first class and coach! The concept being conveyed here is powerful: We often don't recognize how much we are affected and how much our treatment how we physically perceive them.

Gold rings, fine apparel - symbols of worldly wealth and influence.

Filthy clothes - the opposite.

OUR REACTION - Reveals that our own standards of judgment can be shallow, superficial, and self-serving. We think that the wealthy person could have more to opportunities that might open to me if I gain favor with this person. Imagine the popularity and status I might gain in certain circles if I can get into the "in crowd."

Verse 4 offers us a wake-up call. When we show partiality based on our carnal perceptions, we take on the role of a judge over people with wicked thoughts in our hearts.

## Application

When have you been more prone to pursue someone based on how they look, what they drive into church, or what clothes they wear? When have you avoided a fellow believer because, based on what you see, they are not really in the same social class or financial order as you, and you're not interested in lowering yourself? What if we looked at people with this mentality: God is the ultimate and only rightful judge. His job is to know the heart; my job is to love the person equally as I would love any person, regardless of whether or not they are like me or completely different.

Verses 5-7: We need to learn how to make choices like God makes choices.

## Scripture

Jam 2:5 NKJV - 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?

Paul is not saying that if you're poor, you get a free ticket into heaven, or if you're rich, you are an evil enemy of the church.

Verse 5 tells us that it still only applies to those who "Love God." Among those who "love God," the people who tend to have more faith are the people who have less in this world to hold onto.

The world has placed an upside-down value system on wealth and achievement. In the kingdom of God, the more valuable thing to possess is faith. Jesus just taught in Matthew that the poor have an easier time receiving the kingdom than the rich. It's usually not the poor man who is oû ended by the gospel; it's the rich who have made themselves id wealth. It is harder for them to see the value in the gospel because they tend to trust in their riches.

It is the poor man who has to trust God day to day to meet their most basic needs. They have nothing in this world to lose and therefore follow Christ with reckless abandon. PHRASE: God has chosen - man often chooses based on what someone has to oû but God chooses to bestow great faith upon those who have less to hold on to in this world.

## Scripture

James 2:6-7 (NKJV) [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?

## Illustration

Put a small coin to your eye, and it can block out your view of a huge mountain. This is the effect money can have on our faith in God. It gets in the way. God targets the poor, for it's easier for a poor man to trust in Jesus than it.

Drag you into courts - This became a problem in the very carnal Corinthian church. Christians suing other Christians in public courts, embarrassing the name of Christ in order to make a few bucks off a fellow believer. Paul's solution?

## Scripture

1 Corinthians 6:7-8 (NKJV) [7] Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? [8] No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!

James was a little confused: You cater to the people who rob you, sue you, and treat you poorly solely because they have money and status, and you dishonor the faithful brother or sister who serves, shares the gospel, comes to church every week, all because they don't have worldly wealth.

## Application

You can't be a saint and a snob at the same time. Partiality is ultimately rooted in the lust of our flesh, the lust of our eyes, and the pride of life. To love everyone equally as the family of God requires humility, a servant's attitude, and no selfish ambition or ulterior motives. This plays out not only when we engage each other at church, but in our business Christmas party, at our kids' soccer games, at political or ministry fundraising events, or any other environment.

## Scripture

Verses 8-13: Jam 2:8 NKJV - If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; Jam 2:9 NKJV - but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. Jam 2:10 NKJV - For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. Jam 2:11 NKJV - 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. Jam 2:12 NKJV - So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.

## Application

There might be some who would say, "Well, I keep the law. I haven't murdered or committed adultery, you know, the big sins." But James makes it clear that showing partiality is just as significant a transgression against God's perfect law as murder or adultery is. In fact, the reality that Jesus put even more emphasis on loving your neighbor brings it to an entirely new level. James here guards us against a selective obedience, the sort that will pick and choose which commands of God should be obeyed and which could be safely disregarded based on personal preference. Speak and do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty: 2 Corinthians 5 tells us about the judgment seat of Christ, where Christians will receive their rewards or discover that they never invested in anything eternally valuable. We must not forget that even though we will not be judged according to the law regarding our salvation, we will be judged by how we lived our lives according to the perfect law of liberty: love for God and others.

## Scripture

James 2:13 (NKJV) [13] For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Here is one of those proverb-like principles.

How would you like God to judge you? According to His mercy or according to His judgment? Best keep that in mind when you have an opportunity to show mercy to someone who needs it, desires it, and humbles themselves to receive it.

A little mercy can be far more potent in transforming a life than a whole heap of judgment. Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." It's almost as if James is telling us the inverse of the beatitude: un-blessed are the unmerciful for they shall not receive mercy.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 4:32, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." Believe me, when we stand before God, we will be glad that He is a merciful God! As Lamentations 3:22-23 assures us, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."