

FAITH IN ACTION SEEKS TO LOVE OTHERS

Greetings: One of the most quoted verses in the last couple of decades from western society is found in the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 7:1** stating, *Do not judge or you too will be judged*. {Decades prior the most quoted scripture was John 3:16.} In today's lesson, the younger brother of Jesus will stress this verse to show how brothers and sisters in the church can rightly apply seeking to show love to others—without partiality!

James 2:1-13: My brothers *and sisters*, 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 is dressed* in bright clothes, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright 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 brothers *and sisters*: did God not 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 good 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 violators. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one *point*, has become 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 do murder, you have become a violator of the Law. ¹² So speak, and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of freedom. ¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

From a chiasmic structuring of this letter, James 2:1-13 would be the very heart.

The *Faith in Action Seeks to Love Others* lesson challenges the people of God in having the right motives toward one another without prejudice. In this context, James presents a test to the congregation in their attitude and treatment toward the rich and the poor. In a modern day setting, this may also be the case, but the sin of partiality can reach far beyond economics.

In the conclusion of this passage, the idea of judging is brought up once again but this time from the seat of the Righteous Judge and Lawgiver Himself. Bottom line is we will be judged if we judge with partiality. Sandwiched between the judgements can be found God's will for His beloved to *love your neighbor as yourself*.

DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER... 2:1-4

- We have all made decisions based on the things we see.
 - We all must learn to balance *Do not judge or you too will be judged* in **Matthew 7:1**, but *judge with righteous judgment* in **John 7:24**.

- We need to seek to be more like God and discern the heart of an individual, not just the surface of an individual. This is harder and requires an effort on our part.
- Most of us don't want to invest the time and energy required to "judge with righteous judgment."
- Scriptures from the Old Testament on partiality.
 - *You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great...* **Leviticus 19:15**
 - *Do not look at his appearance..., for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.* **1 Samuel 16:7**
 - *The rich and the poor have a common bond, The LORD is the maker of them all.* **Proverbs 22:2**
- Scriptures from the New Testament on partiality.
 - *Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth... for You are not partial to any.* **Matthew 22:16**
 - *...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.* **Acts 10:34-35**
 - *For there is no partiality with God.* **Romans 2:11**

FAVORITISM IS FOOLISH... 2:5-8

- God chose the poor to be rich in faith. **2:5**
 - James is showing the comparison of physical riches to spiritual riches.
 - God's economy is different than man's. James has already pointed out the value of the poor who *glory in his high position and the rich man in his humiliation.* **1:9-10** {cf **1 Corinthians 7:22**}
 - James identifies the church as beloved. How then should God's beloved seek to love others with our riches? With our faith?
- The rich oppress you and blaspheme the name you wear. **2:6-7**
 - This seems to be a reference to events taking place at the time of this writing. At the same time, this teaching is a general principle for the modern reader.
 - What lessons should we learn about how to treat others?
 - James asks why we display dishonor to one class of people and yet honor another—especially when the latter may very well be an enemy of the cross.
 - And yet, how can we as Christians *seek to love others* who are blaspheming Christ? Christ tells us to *love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.* **Matthew 5:44**



- Favoritism violates the Royal Law. **2:8**
 - Jesus Himself established the royal law in **Matthew 22:36-40**. Jesus was calling to mind a much older instruction from God in **Leviticus 19:15-18**, which very specifically talks about favoritism between the rich and poor in the context of justice and loving your neighbor as yourself.
 - Why do so many people struggle with showing favoritism between the poor and rich? In what other areas do people struggle with favoritism?
 - Remember that this is NOT teaching that the poor are always in the right. Leviticus 19 challenges us to be righteous in our judgments.
 - Discuss how *Faith in Action Seeks to Love Others* relates to being righteous in our judgments.

WHY FAVORITISM IS SIN — JUST DON'T DO IT!... **2:9-11**

- Favoritism (partiality) is sinning. **2:9**
 - Most of the book of James is JUST DO IT! This section, however, is JUST DON'T DO IT!
 - (Teachers – Use this verse as an opportunity to get a show of hands of everyone in the class willing to confess to others that we have committed the sin of partiality. This will prepare us for the final point!)
 - This verse brings us back to verse 1. The command is to show no partiality, but the reality is that we do—and this is sin.
 - The perspective that we receive in this verse is preparing us for the climax of this section in the next point. Most people are willing to confess what we consider minor sins, while at the same time we try to conceal or justify what may be considered “major” sins.

- Favoritism is not a "small" or "minor" sin. **2:10-11**
 - If we were to ask for a show of hands from everyone in the room who has committed murder or adultery (please do not do this), we would get a very different quantity of positive responses.
 - We consider these to be “worse sins” than favoritism, but God does not.
 - We all are comfortable with the idea of different degrees of sin, but is man’s conception, or God’s?
 - When you try to justify your own sin as minor, what are you actually saying to God?
 - Remember from James 1 that God’s perfect law is like a mirror: If you break one part of the mirror—the whole mirror is broken. That is how it is with the commandments.



SPEAK AND ACT AS THOSE JUDGED UNDER THE LAW OF LIBERTY... 2:12-13

- James concludes this section by inserting the concept of mercy.
 - What role does mercy play in seeking to love others?
 - In verse 4, one spoke and acted in a way that did not align with righteousness, but with evil. Verse 12 reminds us to be merciful with what we say and do to others because we too will be judged.
 - Compare James 2:13 with Matthew 6:14. What do you think is being emphasized in these texts?
 - When we live out our faith as those who are to be judged rather than as those who are to judge, how does that affect our judgments? The way we love others?

Discussion Questions:

- ❖ Is today's passage teaching that physical wealth is bad? Why or why not?
- ❖ Is there a difference between blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and blaspheming the name of Christ? See **Matthew 12:31-32**.
- ❖ What actions does a church intentionally do if they want to love both the poor and the rich? And what safeguards do they need to put in place to protect them from showing partiality to one group over another?
- ❖ Besides partiality between rich and poor, what other areas in the church do we need to be aware of in order not to make prejudicial distinctions?
- ❖ Are there areas in righteous judgment with biblical imperatives that we should judge within the church?
- ❖ How do we as individuals practice these principles? Can we think of scenarios where we need to grow in this area?

Prayer

