

Theme: Loving Your Neighbor

James 2:1–13

¹ 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 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?

⁸ If you really fulfill *the royal law* according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor 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.

Consider

2:1. According to verse 1, who continues to be the audience for this letter?

What dangerous sin does James warn believers about in this verse? (Notice that the context for this sin is in our worship: “hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .”)

How would you define “partiality”?

2:2–3. Here, James gives a picture (or illustration) of partiality at work.

- Notice the church “pays attention” to the wealthy man. What do they do to honor him?
- Where does the church seat the two individuals? How does this reflect their attitude towards these two men?

Why do you think they treated these individuals this way? What does this behavior demonstrate about the hearts of the people in this church assembly?

Note: In Bible times, material wealth was understood not only as a blessing from God but also a sign of divine approval. Many important Old Testament characters were known for their wealth. Can you think of a few? Can you imagine how they might have excused this sin of partiality because of this assumption?

2:4. What judgments or “evil thoughts” fuel the sin of partiality?

2:5–6a. What does God think of the poor? Can you think of some poor people in the Bible who God chose to bless? Why do you think God works this way?

2:6b–7. How is the reality of their world like the reality of our world (as it relates to the rich and poor and their openness to the things of God)?

2:8. What is the “royal law”¹⁰ according to Scripture? How does obeying this law ensure we do not engage in the sin of partiality?

2:9. What does the Bible tell those who might think that partiality is not a big deal?

2:10–11. Why is someone guilty of all if he only “stumbles” (breaks) one part of the law? How does the phrase “For He who said” (2:11) point us to the distinction between breaking a rule and sinning against a person?

2:12. What principles should guide our speech and actions? How will our actions and speech be judged? What is the “law of liberty”?¹¹

2:13. How will we be judged? How does Matthew 7:1–5 give us insight into this verse?

Ask Yourself

Why do people struggle with showing partiality? Why does categorizing people by how they might benefit me displease the Lord

¹⁰ This probably means the “supreme law” in the same sense that Jesus used the “first commandment” or “great commandment” in Mark 12:28–33 and Matthew 22:34–40.

¹¹ See James 1:25 for the other use of the “Law of Liberty.”

so much? If showing partiality to the rich is wrong, is showing partiality to the poor also wrong?

How does the sin of partiality show itself in the church?

How can I truly love someone as I love myself?

How can I correct the wrong thinking that sees transgression as merely breaking a rule instead of sinning directly against God?

Do I excuse certain sins because they are not as bad (in my eyes) as other sins other people commit? How does this passage correct this wrong thinking?

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:26–31

²⁶ For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. ²⁷ But 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; ²⁸ and 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, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence. ³⁰ But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—³¹ that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”

1 Corinthians 2:7–8

⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Exodus 23:2–3

² You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert *justice*. ³ You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.

Leviticus 19:18

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD.

1 Peter 1:17

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear;

Matthew 22:34–40

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, ³⁶ “Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?” ³⁷ Jesus said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all our soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is *the* first and great commandment. ³⁹ And *the* second *is* like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Galatians 5:13

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Ephesians 5:28–29

²⁸ So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church.

Matthew 7:1–5

¹ “Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?