

James 2:1-13

Commentary: Show No Partiality (James 2:1-13)

Throughout this epistle James deals with inconsistencies in Christian behaviour. In chapter one the focus was on the inconsistencies regarding the response of the early Jewish believers towards trials and temptations. In chapter two the focus turns to the inconsistent treatment of people in the Church. James reveals in verses 1-13 the prejudices and preferential treatment occurring among the early Christians that was seriously undermining the Church's ministry and witness. The issue was so widespread that James dedicated this entire section of his letter to it. His particular focus is discrimination based on wealth. Simply put, the rich were being given preferential treatment in churches while the poor were being pushed aside and ignored. The roots of this discrimination ran deep in the culture of the first century. Today we do not experience the same cultural conditions, however, partiality still affects the Church with devastating results. James' words challenge us to examine our hearts to see if we are harbouring any prejudice of our own.

Instructions:

Carefully read through James 2:1-13 and then attempt to answer the questions which follow.

The phrase "hold the faith" refers to a public posture of identifying oneself as a follower of Christ.

1) What kind of attitude is incompatible with holding the faith (v1)?

James offers a hypothetical situation of a rich man and a poor man entering a congregation, both receiving different treatment based on their societal position (v2-3).

2) What happens when God's people allow appearances to dictate the way they treat visitors to the church (v4)?

Poverty and piety are closely linked in the Old Testament and in ancient Jewish literature, perhaps because the poor are more likely to recognise their need for God.

3) How does James say their heavenly position contrasts with their earthly position (v5)?

4) Why did the believers dishonouring of the poor displease God (v5)?

5) Why were the believers working against their own interests by honouring the wealthy (v6-7)?

6) What does your answer above tell you about how deserving the rich were of honour or special treatment?

The “royal law” to which James refers (v8) is found in Leviticus 19:18 – “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”. This law is royal because it is the king of laws, being emphasised by Jesus several times throughout His earthly ministry (Matt 5:43-48, 7:12, 22:36-40, etc.) This royal law represents the way that people are to love one another under the rule of our King. As believers, we are doing well if we fulfilling this command.

7) What happens when we do not follow this law (v9)?

Many of us have a tendency to consider some sins to be greater than others. While it is true that the consequences of some sins are greater than others, James stresses there is no part of God’s law that we can treat lightly. If we stumble on what we consider to be a minor point, we are still guilty of breaking God’s law and sinning.

8) What examples does James use to emphasise this truth (v10-11)?

James notes that following God’s law involves being merciful to others in both our speech and actions. As Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt 5:7).

9) What is the warning if we fail to show God’s mercy to others (v12-13)?

The judgement spoken by James in verses 12-13 **does not** refer to the judgement upon sin, that judgement had been paid for in full at Calvary’s cross by Jesus. The judgement James speaks of refers to the judgement all believers will face at the Bema seat (judgement seat) of Christ (II Cor 5:10). It is here that believers will receive rewards (crowns) for faithful service, while worthless works will be burnt up.

10) For believers that show no mercy to others, what will the result be for them at the Bema seat (I Corinthians 3:13-15 and II Corinthians 5:10)?