

Dec. 8, 2013

The Christians Attitude Towards the Rich and Poor

James 2:1-13

We are continuing in a new sermon series from the book of James. It is written by James the half-brother of Jesus to the scattered and persecuted Jews as a practical guide on how to live our Christian life.

All Stand and Read Scripture

James 2:1-13

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

² My brethren, 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 dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine 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 brethren: did not God 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 fair 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 transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

James was writing to Jews who were going through serious persecution, primarily by the Jews, but, also, on occasion, by the Romans as well. Some of these Jews had, no doubt, gone from wealth to poverty because of their belief in Christ.

The Jews in that day related wealth to obedience. In the old testament times God did bless obedience with wealth and personal gain. The Jews were not always blessed with good times for obedience, but in many instances were. There were also occasions where the Jews profited from disobedience, such as the Pharisees and the money changers, who were using their religious position to take advantage of other Jews and profit from it.. Now James is saying that the association of wealth and spiritual blessings are now out the window. Our **blessing** in the new testament is **becoming like Christ**. If we profit financially from that experience, all glory to God. If you do not become wealthy from a worldly perspective, then all glory to God. It is important that you understand that background. The rich, or wealthy, and the poor are mentioned several times in the book of James.

God brought us forth by His Word and His Spirit working in us. He also reminds us that God **only and always** does good for His children. He may do things to discipline us; he may put us through trials; but He will **only** do things that are good for His children.

James warns us that even though we exhibit faith and fruit from our works resulting from our faith, we must also consider other aspects of our lives to ensure that our faith is complete. Last week he asked us to consider our tongue. If our attitude is wrong and we do not control what comes out of our mouth, we deceive ourselves and our “religion” is worthless.

BODY:

I. A Proper Attitude.

Another test of our attitude comes in the first verse.

James is saying in verse 1 that showing partiality is wrong. In verse 4 that partiality is a result of evil thoughts or motives. What kind of evil thoughts might be going on in our minds when we are showing partiality to the one who **appears** wealthy?

I say “**appears**”, because not everyone who puts on fine clothes will actually be wealthy. They may actually be deep in debt. They may have their credit cards maxed out and way behind on payments.

Many people have been **scammed** by people who put on nice clothes and **appear to be rich**. The scam artist will offer to show them how to become rich and actually just take their money and then walk away rich. Appearances can be deceiving. Then there are people who dress in plain clothes and drive an old car who are very wealthy by worldly standards.

We must be careful of appearances to start with, but we also must be careful not to show partiality. You will notice in verse 1 it says “**My, brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism**”. This is talking about the church.

We must check our **attitude** to determine if we are here to take **advantage** of people or to **love** people.

Is our attitude, “What can we **get from them**” or “What can we **do for them**”?

We must be careful that we don’t look at a new couple and think “they look like a **power** couple. They could add new strengths to the church and maybe even show me how to be more successful in my life”. It is all in the attitude. We should want to increase talents in the church, but if we spend a lot of time with them and ignore others at their expense then the attitude is wrong. When someone else walks in and we just say “Welcome to Greenwood Christian Church. Sit anywhere you want. Thanks for coming” and don’t give them equal time, we are showing partiality. James says in verse 4 that, if we do that, we “**become judges with evil motives**”. It is important that we understand how we are to treat people.

James 2:5-7

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God 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 fair name by which you have been called?

Often times God endows the poor of the world with richness in faith. It is the individual commitment of a person in Christ. When we show partiality, we misunderstand God's role of salvation in the church. It is God who calls people into His church. God brings people to salvation based upon His own eternal plans and purposes. None of us deserve to be redeemed.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that none of us deserve to be redeemed by God? **None of us!** In fact, the Bible tells us that all of us have had a revelation from nature. We all had God's creation to look at. We should have seen creation and **worshiped** God, and **thanked** God, and **obeyed** God. But instead, we **rejected** Him. Based on the evidence that we had, we should have chosen God, but instead we rejected Him. We are all due God's **punishment**. We are all due God's **wrath**. Yet through His word and his Spirit, he will take someone like you and someone like me and change our hearts and spirit so we will **believe** in Him, try to **live our lives** for Him, and **accept** Jesus for our salvation. He is telling us this so we can swallow our pride. We must understand that God is trying to tell us that we do not owe any of our salvation to ourselves. We owe it all to God. It is a gift from God through His son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins.

If we understand that our salvation is 100% a gift from God, then we should realize that we are not anything. We **must not evaluate** someone based on how they are dressed, what we perceive they are worth, and how they could benefit the church.

The bottom line is:

- This is Christ's church.
- God brings in who he calls.
- We should receive and accept them on that fact alone.
- We should never believe we are better than anyone.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

This verse does **not** say that **no** wise, mighty, or noble people of this earth are called, but it states that **not many** are called.

²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus,

Who is the “**His doing**” in this verse? We want to think that we are in Christ Jesus because of **me** and my faithfulness. Who is the “**His doing**”? It is God. Paul is saying that by **God’s doing we are in Him**.

- Either somebody or the reading of God’s word led us to Christ.
- We believed and repented of our sins.
- But God softened our hearts and forgave us of our sins.

It is through Him that we are in Christ Jesus. Not ME.

who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

What are we glorying?

Rich person what are you glorying?

Poor person what are you glorying?

If you are a believer, I hope you are glorying in the Lord, because you owe it all to Him.

That should reflect on how you see others.

Remember in verse 1, James says: *My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.*

Do you understand now, as we reflect, how important this is that we not show partiality? James is **hammering** into us, “**Whose church is this? It is God’s church.** Greenwood Christian church is part of God’s church.

Who are we to hold it with partiality? Who are we to determine that God can use one person, but not another? We are supposed to treat people equally.

James 2:6-7

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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 fair name by which you have been called?

People with a lot of resources are more likely to think that they are the ones that worked hard for those resources and deserve them. They think they are the ones who accumulated these resources with their skills and abilities and they need to be protected. If someone messes with their “stuff”, they will drag them off to court.

Isn't it interesting that many people without much take a different attitude concerning their possessions. The poor do not have as much and are generally more thankful for what they do have. They might be bitter that they do not have much, but they are more dependent for their needs. Many poor people have the attitude that the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. If you try to take it, they say it is God's stuff and they do not drag you to court.

Which would be the better asset to have in the church:

A person who is successful, has a lot of wealth and worldly success and believes that he is a self-made man or woman,

or

The person who has very little and understands that it belongs to God and is trusting God?

- Money is optional in the church.
- Faith is **necessary**.
- It is far better to have faith than money.
- God can always get us money, if we have faith.
- If you have money, but no faith, you have nothing.

The rich person might say, I will be a part of this church, if you will get on my agenda. Isn't that a method that a person can use to think they can throw their weight and money around to get what they want, whether it is biblically correct or not? It can cause serious problems in the church.

The attitude must be first, is what we are doing according to God's word? Not that I want to be in control of what happens here. The worst thing that can happen to the church is have someone come in and have the attitude that they have the resources and things will happen in the church as they see fit, especially, if it is not biblically correct.

The bottom line is rich or poor we all need the Lord. Our first concern should be **“Do they need the Lord”?**

Wouldn't it be terrible if we looked at the rich person and only considered what he could do for the church instead of considering if they **needed the Lord**?

James 2:8-9

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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 transgressors.

When we show partiality, we are not keeping the “royal law” to love your neighbor as yourself”.

What exactly is the sin referred to?

- Using the rich to try to accomplish my goals or the churches goals would be a sin.
- Seeing the poor person as being of no importance to the church or useless to me would be a sin.
- Showing disdain to the poor is pride. That is probably the main lesson here. It is our attitude. It must be right with God.

Paul makes a good point.

1 Corinthians 4:7

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁷ For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

Paul is telling us if we have it, God gave it to us. If anything good happens to us, it is by God’s grace. It was by His mercy. Pride is a very destructive attitude.

ILLUSTRATION:

I am not a big fan of many Government programs. I would caution you though not to take the attitude that I worked hard to keep my head above water and the people on these programs should suck it up and do the same. We all have different skill sets and circumstances. It is pride that gives us that attitude. We should be careful that that pride does not cause us to show partially toward them.

James 2:10-12

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

We would tend to think that partiality is not a **big** sin. James is telling us the sin of partially is causing us to be prideful. We are making judgments. We are guilty of breaking the Law. We may think it is a small thing, but James continues

¹¹ For He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty.

We tend to think that if we have shown a little partiality or have made a rash judgment on someone, that it couldn't be all that bad. James is telling us that we just as well have committed adultery or murder. We all sin. We must try to stay clean from sin and have a repentant heart.

James 2:13

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Verse 13 is pretty scary. We make judgments on people. James is saying if we are not merciful, we will not get any mercy.

If you are not a follower of God, this verse will not bother you, but if you are a follower of God, this should bother you a lot.

How would you like to stand before God at judgment and receive no mercy? For the unbeliever, they would think, I did a lot of good things, they should outweigh the bad.

For the believer who understands, standing before God on our own merit would be terrifying.

This is sounding like the merciful will be saved by their mercy. But, just like verse 23 in chapter 1 that says to **prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves**, it is telling us that **we are not saved by works, but being saved results in works.**

We are not saved by mercy, but we are merciful because we are saved. The fact that we sin separates us from God and we can never do enough works to make up for it. James is telling us that if we study the word of God, embed it in our hearts, and live by it by putting the Word into action, we will be blessed.

CONCLUSION:

We are all due God's **punishment**. We are all due God's **wrath**. Yet through His word and his Spirit, he will take someone like you and someone like me and change our hearts and spirit so we will **believe** in Him, try to **live our lives** for Him, and **accept** Jesus for our salvation. He is telling us this so we can swallow our pride. We must understand that God is trying to tell us that we do not owe any of our salvation to ourselves. We owe it all to God. It is a gift from God through His son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins.

God is just. He must keep each of us accountable to the law, just like a good judge of the world would keep us accountable for some law that we broke. Each of us will all stand at judgment before God. God is going to bring judgment on all people based on what they have done, what they shouldn't have done, what they didn't do that they should have done. Some will be judged by their works and we spend an eternity separated from God for those sins. That is one possibility... or we will stand before God one day. He will ask us to give an account of our lives. Our sins will have been cleaned and forgotten by the blood of Christ on the cross. God's **mercy will triumph over judgment**. God will say **righteous!** There will be no punishment to pay. It has already been placed on Jesus. Jesus paid the price for our sins. This is the only way God's mercy can **triumph over judgment**.

Rich or poor, we all need the Lord.

When the new person walks in to our church, will we think "What can we **get from them**" or will we think "What can we **do for them**"?

Will we look at them and consider, "Do they need the Lord"?

Is Christ Lord of your life?

The Family of God

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family, the family of God.