

James 2:1-13 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James is now really beginning to pry into the hearts of his readers. He just finished first attempt to season his readers by calling these Christian Jews out on their speech, then he show them a practical example of what a *real* Christianity is and now he begins to reach right into their chest, pull out their hearts so they can see the areas of sin they are struggling with.

James is talking about discrimination. This is a very practical examples for the Jews, because they began to believe that God's love rested on those who were blessed. The Jews believe, if you obeyed God, worshiped God with all your heart, mind and strength – He would bless you, and what better way to bless you than bless you via money? James speaks about someone coming to the "synagogue" [assembly] (notices James doesn't use the word "ekklēsia" [In Greek] – keep that in your peanut butter locker for Chapter 5), and immediately the people of the assembly "pay attention" and tell him "You sit here", which implies the *leading of someone* or *taking someone*, to a nearby seat. Almost as if this rich person was being escorted to a "good place" to sit. While the poor man, who has shabby clothes (i.e. not being blessed by God; therefore probably a *wicked sinner!*) is *told* to "stand over there", which implies they are pointing that person into the direction the assembly gatherers want them to stand. The assembly gatherers also give the option to either stand or sit down next to a foot stool – which speaks to the point, these poor people in shabby clothing aren't worthy to sit where feet should go.

This is something we do every day. We do this when we open doors for someone or don't open doors for others. We do this when two cars meet at a stop sign at the same time, we let the person in the Infinity go first but are quick to push the pedal to jump off the line when we come to a Saturn. We pay special attention to those who have higher economic status than us. This begs the question, "Why do we do that?"

There are a few reasons why I believe we do that. One, we do it because we love money – not that money is inherently evil but it is the love for money that is evil [1 Timothy 6:10]. We are covetous. We covet, lust for, strongly impatiently desire that which we do not have. We see a nice car and we know they are limited; therefore, we take every moment our eyes can savor so we can turn to someone who never sees such cars and say “I saw this” (knowing in the back of our minds – they did not see what you just saw).

That leads me to the second reason why we are covetous, pride. We covet things and seek to gather things to look better than others. We have this inherent desire to want to suck up all that is around us so we can tell others “look what I have and you don’t”. This is fairly simple to see; for example, why does a single person with *maybe* one kids *need* to have a 3200 square foot house? Even if it is not living beyond their means, why do we need to live beyond our *needs*. Now, don’t get me wrong – most of us want a surplus of *whatever* we have and that is Biblical. However, how is having so much surplus that all it does is sit there and collect dust and moths? What does *that* do for the kingdom of Jesus Christ?

Lastly, the reason we are covetous, sin. We are just sinners. We covered this in an earlier chapter; however, James 1:14-15 **“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death”**. We covet, because we are sinful and when we desire something so much, it manifests into wasteful spending that if not killed, will finally give birth to death.

This type of discriminating behavior toward others is evil. This basis of favoritism comes for selfishness. We seek to see how we can gain *ground*, or *insite* or *standing* or *pull* with others by our gathering and crowd we “roll with”. When we do so, we are telling others “You are not worth my time and efforts”, we are telling people that there are a certain class of people that is not worth the sacrifice. James hits this home when he tells these Jewish Christians that pure and undefiled religion is this, to look after orphans and widows – then James tells them not to discriminate against those who less means of living than them. When they do this they are making eternal judgments against other people and they have no place for that.

One of the most ironic observations of this text, those who are “rich” are horrible influences. James tells the readers that the “rich people” are the ones who oppress, sue and blaspheme the name of Jesus. The very people these Jewish Christians wanted to relate to, in the name of Jesus, are the very same people who swear/curse and mar the name of Jesus Christ, in their works. This also tells us a lot about those individuals who seek the favor of the oppressive, back-biting, blasphemous “rich”.

First, it tells us these people have no clue about respect. They are willing to dishonor/discredit/shame other people – and they are okay with it. They have no problem, putting down other people because of their economic status. These people, have no clue what Jesus had to go through to save us [Philippians 1:1-11].

Secondly, it tells us they were not leaders; rather, weak followers who want to be dominated and pushed down. They are willing, not only to dishonor individuals made in God’s image, but also to be oppressed. They are willing to be held back from their true abilities. They could stand for Jesus, but they find more security in their demonic, pompous, covetous, prideful rich man “wearing a gold ring and find clothing”.

Third, this text tells us they do not love Jesus. They are complete fine with allowing someone to blaspheme/curse and swear against the name of Jesus Christ. The type of person who discriminates against others because of earthly purposes, would rather spit in the face of Jesus than lay down his/her life for Jesus – and that is demonic.

I know that sometimes it is better to speak in bullet points so here is a quick bulleted outline and then I will jump back to the text:

Something funny to mention about those “popular” (richy) people James is speaking about.

- They have their followers so wrapped around their finger that those following, are will do anything to gain acceptance.
 - Accept Oppression: 2:6 “Dishonored the poor man”
 - Accept Accusations: 2:6 “Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court”?
 - Accept Faithlessness: 2:7 “Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called”
- All because people want to be accepted by others they will hang up their Freedom in Christ and become enslaved to popularity/acceptance/friendship with those who are wicked.
- They seem to grow calloused of those being Dishonored (v6a), they will give up Innocence and become Guilty (v6b) and give up a Faithful walk for a Faithless walk (v7) = that is sad.

So, you have to ask yourself; look at your friends, do you lift some up or are you friends with only the “elite”? Look at everyone you know; do you know someone who would rather be “the talk of the town”, be in the “lime light” than tell you their testimony of salvation?

Maybe, it is deeper than that. Do you know someone, who masks their demonic lifestyle with Church activities? These are the people who are involved in everything and everyone knows it; yet, when you see them in Bible study – they never pray, contribute, bring a Bible (whatever) or when you ask them something “spiritual” you get a superficial/surface level answer that jumps around your question and then ends with a funny “one-liner”. Take some time this week and see if you may be or may hang with someone who would rather dishonor, oppress and blaspheme Jesus than help others know Jesus.

When you look at the verse we just covered you can see why James says **“if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors”**. Not only are you just crossing the line, but you are continually walking away from the line, away from Jesus and you do not care. That is why James tells us **“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’, you are doing well”**.

When you ponder this Scripture, think about callousness. Have you or someone you know become calloused or insensitive to someone or something? Do you take rather than give? Do you hold resentment toward someone? How about Bitterness? Ask yourself, why have I not engaged that particular person to work through it as **Matthew 18** commands? Is it because you’d rather oppress their sin, dishonor them and deny that Jesus can do a marvelous work or is it because you are disobeying a

commandment and are in sin? Check your heart right now...and know that it is faithful to wound a friend and deceitful to kiss a friend. Better is an open rebuke than a loved concealed. [Proverbs 27:5-6]

The next part of the text begins to spin the scriptures in a different way than what we are used to. Verse 12 tells us the we need to speak and act as if we are judged by the law of freedom (liberty). One must ask, "*what does that look like?*" This ties back to verse 8, if you fulfill the royal law, given by the King of kings, then you will be judged by His Royal Law the law that frees you. You see, the context here is relationships and if you love your neighbor as yourself then you will be living as if you are judged and under the law of liberty. The law is not restrictive but rather freeing. We were original created to live by only having one God, not using His name in vain, remember Him, honoring our mother and father, not murdering, stealing, lying or committing adultery. This may sound familiar and it should because it is the 10 Commandments [Exodus 10].

Therefore, if we follow the law, and it frees us from sin and assists us to live as we were original created to live, then we will Love God and Love others and we would have mercy on those who cry out for mercy and that mercy will triumph over judgment. Then and only then, will you be judged by the law of liberty, the freedom from judgment because where you establish mercy, mercy will be established with you. [Matthew 5:7]

CONCLUSION

Relationships are one way of defining a Christian's maturity. If a Christian holds a particular group of individuals as more important than another on a level that is not linked to fellowship then that relationship may be for pride and discrimination rather than for drawing near to Jesus. It is good for a Christian man or woman to strive to love neighbors as themselves. This doesn't mean just Christians, but your neighbors – that is your mail man, the grocery store clerk, the guest service representative and the usher at the movies. Your Christian maturity must consist of mercy to those neighbors otherwise your worship is in vain.