

**Seeing Others With The Eyes of Jesus**  
James 2:1-13

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## Seeing Others With The Eyes of Jesus

### James 2:1-13

#### **Introduction:**

- 1) What is God like? When you think about who God is and what God is like what comes to mind? Holiness, righteousness, eternity and immutability? Omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence? Love, mercy, patience, faithfulness, goodness? Certainly all of these attributes are appropriately ascribed to God, and yet the Word of God informs us of another essential aspect of God's character that is often overlooked and missed. It is the attribute of impartiality, the quality of judging no one on the basis of external and superficial criteria; of showing no one favoritism because of status, position or rank; of discriminating against no one based on social, economic, racial or cultural standards.
- 2) Mark Twain said, "prejudice is the ink with which all history is written." And yet, from its inception, from its birth, the Church is to be a place where distinctions and discrimination are vanquished. As Gal. 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." The church of the living God has as its ideal the conviction that the gospel of Jesus Christ brings together men and women of diversity and makes them a community, a family.
- 3) It is difficult to conceive of an area of the Christian life where the church has failed more miserably than here. Sadly and to our shame, we have often been marked by prejudice, bigotry, racism and snobbery, worship of rank and the idol worship of status. This grotesque sin is not symptomatic of just the contemporary church. Its disease has infected and afflicted the church since the 1<sup>st</sup> century. James saw it, and James condemned it.
- 4) James has challenged his brothers and sisters in Christ to do the word (1:22). This will result in controlling one's tongue (1:26), caring for widows and orphans and keeping oneself unspotted (*ESV*, "unstained"; *NIV*, "being polluted") by the world (1:27). The issue of showing favoritism to the wealthy and slighting the poor has a natural connection to these challenges, especially being stained by the world.

**Transition:** James' message is clear. Do not look at others like the world does. See others with the eyes of Jesus. 5 motivations are provided.

#### **I. Partiality is inconsistent with our confession. 2:1**

"My brethren" is a term of tenderness and transition. It softens the tough words that follow and it guides the flow of the letter in a different direction. Why is partiality inconsistent with our confession?

##### **1) It is contrary to Christ's person.**

"Do not hold" (have) is a pre. imp. with a neg. It means to stop an action already in progress. Partiality is inconsistent with a faith in the Lord (deity) Jesus (humanity) Christ (anointed one of God)." Jesus is the Lord, He is God. What does the Bible say about God's perspective on partiality? Track the 3 other

occurrences of the Greek word translated “partiality” in the New Testament and we discover the following:

- Romans 2:11, “There is no partiality with God.”
- Ephesians 6:9, “... knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”
- Colossians 3:25, “But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.”
- The God of heaven and earth is impartial!
  - He sees a genius and a fool the same.
  - He sees a woman of wealth and her maid the same.
  - He sees the president and his janitor the same.
  - He sees a Ph.D./M.D. and the skid-row drunk the same.
  - He sees the lost heterosexual and the lost homosexual the same!
- Do not forget it was:
  - Jesus who praised the poor widow with her mite (not the rich, boastful Pharisee).
  - Jesus who honored the Good Samaritan.
  - Jesus who sought out a despised tax collector named Zacchaeus
  - Jesus who taught us about the rich man and Lazarus.
  - said of Jesus by his enemies in Matt 22:16, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful, and teach the way of God truthfully; You defer to no one, for you don’t show partiality” (*HCSB*).

**Transition:** Partiality is contrary to Christ’s person.

## 2) **Partiality is contrary to Christ’s praise.**

- The word translated “partiality” (*NIV*, “favoritism”) means lit. “receiving the face.” It is in the plural “suggesting that there are various forms and ways in which favoritism may be shown” (Vaughn, 45). James says whatever shape or size prejudice, favoritism, or bigotry shows itself, it is contrary to “the Lord of glory!”
- This is the only time in the New Testament that Jesus is described in this manner (as the “Lord of glory”), and by His brother at that! “Lord” is in italics indicating it is not in the original text, but added to clarify the meaning for us. The title “Lord of glory” is common in the Old Testament. The idea of God as the “Shekinah” (used by the rabbi’s but never found in the Bible), the marvelous manifestation of God’s presence with His people is perhaps in the background. Jesus is the glorious manifestation of God in our midst and now is exalted at God’s right hand. What a pointed reminder to those who are giving inappropriate attention, undeserved glory to mere mortals! There is one and only one to whom we should show favoritism. It is Jesus, the Lord who is glory Himself.

## II. Partiality is inconsistent with a Christian conscience. 2:2-4

James now introduces a hypothetical situation that exemplifies the kind of discrimination that his readers are guilty of. “Verses 2-4 is one conditional sentence in Greek” (Moo, 102) with an “if...then” argument laid before us. It moves from the sinful act to the evil motive behind the act. Indeed “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7).

James understood that “the way we behave toward other people, indicates what we really believe about God” (Wiersbe, 64).

**Transition:** Why is partiality inconsistent with a Christian conscience?

### 1) It decides on external matters. 2:2-3

- Following his conversion Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:16, “from now on we regard no one according to the flesh,” for we are a new creation in Christ (5:17). Tragically, James’ audience is not thinking like new creations in Christ. The evidence is indisputable.
- Contrast the 2 men who arrive in the assembly (Gr. “*synagogue*”)
 

<u>Rich man</u>	<u>Poor man</u>
Distinguished gentleman	Street person/homeless man
Mr. have	Mr. have not
Gold rings (pl.)	No rings
(Some even rented rings to give the appearance of affluence and social status)	
Fine clothes	shabby (stained, smelly) rags
- Contrast the treatment of the 2 men
 

<u>Rich man</u>	<u>Poor man</u>
Preferential treatment	Disdainful treatment
The best seat	No seat (“hit the dirt”)
Great respect (Glad you’re here)	No respect (wish you were somewhere else)
- Why? Looks, stuff, purely external criteria. A mere surface evaluation pure and simple. The heart of the man is ignored, his character not given a second thought. Appearance, achievements, affluence... this is all that mattered.

**Transition:** Partiality decides on external matters.

### 2) It divulges one’s evil motives 2:4

James moves to the heart of the matter which is the heart. In 1:6 James warns us concerning a doubting or divided heart. He uses the same word again here in 2:4. A divided, wavering heart towards God reveals a lack of faith. A divided, wavering heart towards others reveals an evil heart. The latter is a natural outgrowth of the former!

You become an “evil judge”, a judge on the take, one capable of being bribed.

This is what you are in your thinking when you doubt God, when you question His ways and purposes. Snap judgments, surface judgments, jumping to premature conclusions, are the way of evil persons but this is not the way of God. Indeed as 1 Sam. 16:7 so pointedly reminds us, “for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks as the heart.” Our God is a “color blind God.” Our God is a “dollar blind” God.

**Illustration:** My being called “white trash” when I worked as a bus boy/table waiter when I was a Bible College student! This was said by a staff person at a large Baptist Church who had just call my friend a “nigger!”

**Translation:** No, partiality is incompatible with a Christian conscience. It ignores what we have been taught is the most important issue: the condition of a person’s heart.

### **III. Partiality is insensitive to God’s calling. 2:5-7**

“Listen” is the 2<sup>nd</sup> imperative in the paragraph.

“My beloved brethren” (*adelphoi agapetoi*) rings with urgency the seriousness of the situation. What James is about to say is of crucial importance and raises the problem to a whole new level. Look at the theological ignorance of partiality and prejudice.

#### **1) We dishonor those whom God honors. 2:5-6**

- “Chosen” is the same word Paul uses in Eph. 1:4 with respect to the electing and predestinating plan of God. God has a special concern for the poor that is revealed in the fact so many of this social/economic status find their way into His Kingdom. Poor materially, they are rich spiritually. Because they are humble, they are exalted. They are heirs of Christ’s Kingdom, the one they love. Can you believe it? The world says they are worthless and useless. James says they are 1) chosen of God, 2) rich in faith and 3) heirs of the Kingdom.
- God looks on the masses of the world who are poor and says, “from here I will save the most!”
- Do you see our foolishness?!  
God chooses them but we cut them down.  
God receives them but we reject them.  
God values them but we count them worthless.  
God honors them but we dishonor them.
- James would say prejudice mutilates the cross. It makes a sham of the the gospel of God’s grace.
- But we are no just theologically ignorant. We are logically insane.
  - The rich oppress (*NIV*, “exploit”) you, treat you harshly, perhaps immorally and illegally (cf. Amos 4:1; Ezk. 22:7).
  - They drag you into the courts. The tense (pre.) could indicate that the action was presently taking place. And yet here you are kissing up, fawning over them.

**2) We honor those who dishonor God. 2:7**

- James' argument follows a bad to worse pattern. Yes, they treat you badly, but worse yet they blaspheme God, the noble name (lit. "good name") called on you. Wealthy unbelievers who mistreat you and are destined for a "day of slaughter" (5:5) slander the name of Christ and those who follow Him. Yet incredibly, you favor them, you pander to the very people who are causing you so much hurt, pain and suffering. This is insane, and it is insensitive, callous to the way God sees things.
- The church is to be "a discrimination-free" environment!

**IV. Partiality is incongruous with Scriptures' command. 2:8-11**

We should not misunderstand James' argument and God's ways. God does not love the poor and hate the rich, He does not favor the Republican and loathe the Democrat, He does not admit one kind of person into His Kingdom and exclude another based on external criteria. It may be easier for a camel to go thru the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven but it is not impossible! God loves both poor and rich alike, and so should we. Indeed loving any and every neighbor as myself fulfills the royal, kingly law.

**1) We are to love others indiscriminately. 2:8-9**

- James imagines the offended church usher defending himself in his treatment of the rich man. I was just "showing the love man. Cut me some slack!"
- James in essence says O.K. Let's examine your defense. If you really (!) fulfill the royal law, the law given by King Jesus and in a sense identified by Him as the supreme law that governs and informs all others: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Levt. 19:18; Matt 22:37-40), you do well." So far so good.
- But if you show partiality, judge others according to the face, you lit. "work sin" and are convicted, found guilty, by the law as a transgressor, one who directly and knowingly disobeys God's command.
- Moo says, "In obedience to their king, Jesus, Christians are to build among themselves a genuine counterculture, in which the values of the kingdom of God rather than the values of the world are lived out (Moo, 113). This means we love indiscriminately. We put the poor man up close, we care for the single mom and her rambunctious children; as "white folks", we love and reach out to black, brown, red and yellow folks. Period. End of discussion.
- Don't excuse your prejudice by saying, "that's the way I was taught, brought up, that's just the way I am." Rather, ask God to help you look at that person and ask, "Lord, how can I love them and serve them in Jesus' name?"

**2) We are to obey the law completely. 2:10-11**

- The law of God is a unit. It is like a chain. Some in the first century thought like many in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Keep the weightier laws, the more important laws, and my failure to keep the lesser ones will not be such a big deal. God will give me a pass. Not so says James.

- Utilizing, the 10 Commandments found both in Ex. 20 and Deut. 5, James chooses two commandments to illustrate his point. The two he chooses are not haphazard or accidental in my judgment.
- Do not commit adultery. We have not done this they no doubt protested and yet look at James 4:4!
- Do not murder. We have not done this and yet hear the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:21-22, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”
- The fact is you are guilty of both spiritual adultery and spiritual murder in how you have responded to God and your neighbor. Furthermore, if you stumble in just one single solitary instance, just one, you are guilty of all!
- James is not saying every sin is as bad as another. James is saying committing any sin makes you just as guilty as another. It all hangs together. You cannot pick and choose which ones you will obey. In terms of guilt, there is no hierarchy!
- Show deference, favoritism, partiality to one person over another, you are as guilty before God as if you committed adultery, murder, or broke any other commandment of God.

#### V. **Partiality is independent of judgment’s compassion. 2:12-13**

As those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord, we are the recipients of love not condemnation, of mercy not obligation. Therefore what we have received we are to give, what we have been blessed with we are to share. The blessings which will result are greater than you could imagine, greater than we could ever deserve.

##### 1) **Loving impartiality brings liberty.**                   **2:12**

- We live under a new law, the law of Christ. It is a royal law of love that frees us to love others as He has loved us.
- Therefore James says speak (pre. tense) and do (pre. tense) as those who will be judged by this law of liberty (cf. 1:25). God’s love has liberated us from sin’s penalty and perversions. We no longer fear the judgment for “there is no fear in love... perfect love cast out fear” (1 John 4:18). Knowing therefore we will be judged in this wonderful sphere of love and grace, we freely and gladly extend the same to others without discrimination or partiality.

##### 2) **Loving impartiality provides mercy.**                   **2:13**

- Both judgment and mercy occur 3 times in vs. 12-13. Echoing the words of Jesus, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt. 5:7), James applies the words of our Lord in its negative sense.
- Judgment, will be severe, harsh, unrelenting to the one who hasn’t shown mercy. A person who lives a life of partiality, prejudice, and bigotry, demonstrates the wickedness of his heart and the lostness of his soul. He

proves he is lost, unsaved, and does not know the Jesus who is the impartial Lord of glory.

- In contrast, the one who shows mercy reveals the Christ who is mercy in him. He understands plain and clear that God did not accept him because of his status but in spite of his sin. This is the result of a pure act of mercy, a mercy that triumphs over and gives victory over judgment. To know the blessings of such mercy, one cannot help but extend that same mercy to others.

### **Conclusion:**

- 1) Fredrick Nietzsche was an avowed atheist and critic of Christianity who live from 1844-1900. He despised the Christian faith saying it worshiped a “god of the sick, God as a spider... the deification of nothingness...” (*The Antichrist*). Wrongheaded as he was in so many ways, we should not be too quick in dismissing all that he said. On at least one occasion his criticism painfully hit the mark, and we ignore his words at our peril. In *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* Nietzsche throws down the gauntlet with this challenge: “Your faces have always been more injurious to your beliefs than our objections have! If these glad tidings were written on your faces, you would not need to insist so obstinately on the authority of that book... As things are, however, all your apologies for Christianity have their roots in your lack of Christianity...”
- 2) I submit the following: if we will begin to see others with the eyes of Jesus and care for others with the heart of Jesus, gladness and goodness will be written on our faces, and any lack of Christianity will be vanquished by the health and beauty of our Christianity. That is what I pray for. That is why the lost need to see. That is what Jesus deserves.