

JAMES

LIVING FAITH



The Sin of Partiality

James 2:1-13



Introduction

A few years ago I (Stephen) was going through my desk drawer and I found my old Blockbuster Video membership card. I chuckled as I thought back to the days when people actually went to video stores, and I also chuckled as I remembered the excitement that I had when I first got a membership card at Blockbuster Video. This card afforded me choice privileges. I could occasionally get free movie rentals, and I could get discounts on sugary candies and drinks. What more could I ask for? Membership had its privileges! And all of this because I had this little blue card that stated that I belonged.

A little blue card stated that I belonged and had full rights at Blockbuster. What is the proof or evidence that someone belongs in the church? Shared faith in Christ Jesus ought to be the sole driving factor in the life of the church. However, in this section in James, he wrote to address a practice in the life of the churches that indicated that some people belonged more than others when they assembled. The congregations were giving preferential treatment to the rich and mistreating the poor in their midst. James wrote to address this sinful attitude of partiality and to urge his audience to live as ones who have been spiritually humbled and made heirs of the kingdom of Christ.



Study

Context: In James 2:1-13, James began to address specific examples of how the churches that he was writing to were not applying the gospel to their conduct. In this instance, they were denying that the gospel unites the body, this denial of the power of the gospel was evidenced in the fact that they were dividing those who came into the assembly of the church based upon economic class. Before this section James referenced the dangers of being hearers of the word only and not doers. Right after this section James referenced the danger of having faith with no works. Faith requires action—especially in the church family. Partiality in the body was a visible rejection of the faith that the church professed.

Structure:

- I. Show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory (2:1-13)
 - a. Show no partiality in relation to the rich and the poor among you (2:1-7)
 - b. Show no partiality as citizens under the royal law (2:8-13)



Reflect

Show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory (2:1-13)

1. Read 2:1-13. What are your initial impressions of this section of James' letter? What do you think James means to communicate as he begins this section, "show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" in v. 1?

Show no partiality in relation to the rich and the poor among you (2:1-7)

2. Read 2:1-4. Referencing the gathering of the church, why is showing partiality between rich and poor such an offense in James' eyes? What does showing partiality reveal about the church? (Hint: look at v. 4 and see the Gospel Connections section at the back of the study guide)

3. Read 2:5. Why does James reference the poor as being "heirs of the kingdom"? As you consider the kingdom/royalty language that James uses in this section of his letter (vs. 1, 5, 8), what does it appear that James is attempting to communicate about royal citizenship in Christ's kingdom as opposed to being rich or poor in this life?

APPLY → In 2:1-7 James seems to be stating that by showing partiality between the rich and the poor, the church is denying the gospel because Jesus has made all who “hold the faith” in him “heirs of the kingdom.” What are ways in which you may be prone to show partiality towards brothers and sisters in the body, and what does this reveal more deeply about your heart towards them and your understanding of the gospel?

4. In 2:6-7 James highlights the fact that some rich people in the community were actively oppressing the poor in the church and dishonoring the name of Christ. In showing partiality to these rich people over their poor brothers and sisters, what does this reveal about the true allegiances of James’ audience?

Show no partiality as citizens under the royal law (2:8-13)

5. Read 2:8-13. James references three different “laws”: the “royal law” (v. 8), the “law” that convicts us as transgressors (v. 9), and the “law of liberty” (v. 12). In light of 2:1-7, what do you think the “royal law” is? What is our responsibility to one another as “heirs of the kingdom”?
6. In verse 8, James quoted from Leviticus 19 and the instruction in the law that was given to the people of Israel to love their neighbors as themselves. And he then wrote that if the church shows partiality then they are sinning and the law convicts them as transgressors. Do you think that the churches James was writing to were aware that they were committing such an offense? What does this reveal about how easily we can transgress the law in our attitudes towards our brothers and sisters in the church?

APPLY → We all have a responsibility towards one another in the body and this responsibility is grounded in something far greater than economic class—it's grounded in our shared union with Christ. What are ways that you can actively seek to conduct yourself according to the royal law and show compassion, humility, and generosity towards your fellow citizens of the kingdom of Christ?

7. In referencing the seriousness of partiality and how it condemned the churches, James then urged believers to speak and act as ones who are under the law of liberty. The law of liberty referred to the law that gives life and gives freedom—the gospel. How is James instructing his audience to live and how is this different than how they have been conducting themselves?

APPLY → Think about your heart. What are thoughts that your heart has as you see a new or unfamiliar face in worship? Are you more inclined to go introduce yourself to that person depending on the impression that you get of them? What are ways that you can seek to be more engaged with your brothers and sisters in the body regardless of their economic situation?

APPLY → Ultimately, James wants his audience to remember who their King is (“Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory”), who they are (“heirs of the kingdom”), and how they ought to conduct themselves (in accordance with the gospel). How should these realities influence your conduct towards others not only in the church, but also across the full span of your week?



Connect

Gospel Connections. In James 2:4, James wrote that those who discriminate in the body based on economic class are making themselves judges with evil thoughts. Essentially, they were putting themselves in a position of authority that they did not have and giving themselves a sin-tainted inappropriate right to judge those who come to worship with the body. Contrast this with the other time being judged is referenced in this section (James 2:12). James said that instead of judging others on the grounds of economic class that we all ought to speak and act as ones who have been and will be judged under the gospel. Praise God that he judges us not based upon our economic class (or anything else for that matter), but he judges us solely based on the merits of the life and death of Christ. Praise God that we are judged under the law of liberty and not under anything else that we who judge with evil thoughts might concoct as a good means of judgment.

Whole-Bible Connections. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 the Apostle Paul wrote, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor; so that by his poverty you might become rich.” The Bible is full of contrasts between rich and poor. But the solution to these contrasts is in seeing the one who was rich and became poor so that by his poverty we might become rich. The language of the Bible speaks of poor, rebellious sinners who have been adopted into the family of God and have become heirs of the King of the Universe and who will enter into our reward and our inheritance when we enter into his presence.

Theological Connections. The law is dealt with throughout the Old Testament and the law is featured prominently in the theology and teachings of Jesus as well as a number of New Testament writers. The law was a gift from God to his people in order that they may live rightly and glorify his name as his people. However, the law also reveals the sinfulness of the human heart and convicts us of our inability to keep the law. Therefore, the law is a gift to us even if it only reveals our sin and shows us our need for Christ.

Praise Connections.

MY WORTH IS NOT IN WHAT I OWN

“My worth is not in what I own
Not in the strength of flesh and bone
But in the costly wounds of love
At the cross

As summer flowers we fade and die
Fame, youth and beauty hurry by
But life eternal calls to us
At the cross

My worth is not in skill or name
In win or lose, in pride or shame
But in the blood of Christ that flowed
At the cross

I will not boast in wealth or might
Or human wisdom’s fleeting light
But I will boast in knowing Christ
At the cross

Refrain:

I rejoice in my Redeemer
Greatest Treasure,
Wellspring of my soul
I will trust in Him, no other.
My soul is satisfied in Him alone.

Two wonders here that I confess
My worth and my unworthiness
My value fixed - my ransom paid
At the cross”

Words and music by Keith Getty, Kristyn Getty, and Graham Kendrick (2014)