

November 29, 2020

“Impartial Love”
Lesson 5 of Unit

James 2:1-13

Intro

A view held by many today, and accepted by many in Jesus’ time, was that God’s blessing on a person was evident by their material wealth and physical health. In contrast, God’s disfavor was obvious if a person was poor or suffered health problems.

This line of thinking (and belief that becomes action) is at the heart of James’ concerns in today’s study passage. He asks his readers (and by extension, those of us who read his words today) to examine what they believe as regards wealth or poverty. Does God love the wealthy more and the poor less? If He doesn’t, why not? How are we supposed to treat people in these two economic positions?

Read James 2:1-13

1. James says in vs. 1 that believers must not show favoritism. How do the passages from Rom. 2:11, Eph. 6:9, and Col. 3:25 support this view? What do they add to the idea? Who does James subtly hint that we should use as our example in this matter?
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2. Summarize the hypothetical situation James describes in vs. 2-3. In vs. 4, the word James uses to describe this action is translated “distinctions” in the NASB and ESV, but as “discriminated” in the NIV and “partiality” in the NKJV. What are the differences in the meanings of these words? Is one set less harsh or more harsh than the other? Based on what James describes in vs. 2-3, which translation choice seems closest to James’ intended point?
3. From vs. 5, why would God choose for the poor to be “rich in faith”? Given their poor status, why must they “inherit the kingdom”? How can one have joy and faith without having economic security?

4. In vs. 6, if the people James is writing to are “dishonor(ing) the poor”, what does that imply they are doing to the rich? What is God’s view concerning how the rich treated the poor in the OT? (See Ez. 18:12-13) How would honoring those who did these actions be seen by God? How should members of the church view them?

5. The word translated “blaspheming” (NIV) in vs. 7, is translated as “hurled insults” in Matt. 27:39 and “slandered” in I Cor. 4:13. How would you describe the attitude of one whose speech is described in these ways? In what way are these actions an attack on “the noble name of him to whom you belong”?

6. In what two ways could the phrase “royal law” in vs. 8 be understood? Consider both who is giving the law and what the law says. Why is keeping this law the best measure of “doing right”?

7. How is showing favoritism (vs. 9) a violation of the royal law in vs. 8?

8. What is the point being made about breaking the law in vs. 10-11? What is the application James expects his readers to make about this point, and by extension, we are also to make?

9. What exactly is “the law that gives freedom” (vs.12)? See James 1:25 and 2:8. In what ways do you see this law providing freedom in your relationship in and outside the church, and in how you view yourself and your connection to others, in and outside the church?

10. What is the purpose of James' admonition in vs. 12-13? How does that connect to what he says in vs. 8-11?

Application: The book of James has been described as one of the most practical of the epistles. What could be more practical, more applicable to our lives, than how we treat each other? James asks us to "lead with love" in all we do.

We all know how hard it is to be loving and kind to someone that is rude and antagonistic. And even as we realize how difficult that loving is going to be, we hear/feel the echo of the Spirit in our hearts calling us to act like Jesus. As we act in love as our primary means of interacting with everyone (whether rich or poor, Christian or unbeliever, similar to us or very different from us), we will find that those loving responses are becoming habit instead of having to think about them before we do them.

Prayer: Father God, we know that You made all people, and that many are different from us in many ways. We admit to you today that we have sometimes had a hard time showing love to those we see as "other". But You loved us without partiality, and You call for us to love others the same way. Help us this week to "lead with love" in all we do, and continue that so that it become our habit. In Jesus' name, Amen.