

James 2:1-13

Introduction

1. As we learned in our introduction, and then again two weeks ago, James gives us a high-level outline of his letter in 1:19: **“Take note of this, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger...”**
2. James addresses these three areas—being quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger—in the rest of the letter
3. We started James discussion of being quick to listen/obey last week and it can be broken down into three sub-sections (if you will):
 - a. In 1:21-27: be doers of God’s Word and not hearers only
 - b. In 2:1-13: be impartial doers of God’s Word
 - c. In 2:14-26: prove to be doers of God’s Word by our works
4. One of the apparent issues among James’ readers was their favoritism so in our verses today he shows how:
 - a. Favoritism leads to discrimination
 - b. Favoritism puts us at odds with God
 - c. Favoritism puts us at odds with God’s Word

A. Favoritism leads to discrimination (READ 2:1-4)

1. James commands his readers to stop showing personal favoritism: the present imperative implies stopping something they were currently doing
2. James gives an example of their favoritism (2-3):
 - a. Two men come into their assembly which is likely a reference to their gatherings/worship service:
 - 1) One man is apparently prominent and wealthy because he has **“a gold ring and is wearing fine clothes”**:
 - a) Fine refers to shiny, brilliant, splendid, or even white
 - b) Some believe these might have been pharisees because it matches what we know about many 1st century pharisees, and Jewish Christians often met in synagogues

- 2) The other man is a **“poor man”** who is dressed in **“dirty clothes”** (refers to filthy or dirty rather than shabby)

- b. When they saw these men enter, they would treat them differently:
 - 1) They would **“pay special attention”** to (lit. look upon with favor) the rich man and give him a seat in **“a good place”** (3a): The best seats in the synagogue were typically in the front of the hall
 - 2) However, when they saw the poor man, they told him to **“stand over there”** or to **“sit down by my footstool”**:
 - a) **“stand over there”**: back of the room or along the sides
 - b) **“by my footstool”** is more accurately **“under my footstool”**; meant sitting on the floor (NIV: **“Sit on the floor by my feet”**)
3. James says that by doing this they were making **“distinctions”** (judging, discriminating) **“with evil motives”** (4; lit. evil reasoning):
 4. Takeaway: as the body of Christ, we aren’t to make distinctions or discriminate against one another:
 - a. We are all made in image of God
 - b. Galatians 3:22-29 says, **“For you are all sons of God through faith Christ Jesus”** and **“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”**
 - c. This principle is repeated throughout the NT (1 Corinthians 12, Colossians 3, Romans 10 and 12)

B. Favoritism puts us at odds with God (READ 2:5-7):

1. God has a heart for the poor (5)
 - a. He chose them to be **“rich in faith”** and **“heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him”**:
 - b. Matthew 5:3: **“Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”**
 - c. Luke 6:20: **“And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.’”**

- d. Luke 14:13: **“But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.”**
- 2. However, James’ readers had **“dishonored the poor man”** (dishonor, insult, mistreat) (6):
 - a. This was absurd because they were honoring those who were **“oppressing”** them (to exercise harsh control over someone, to use one’s power against someone) by dragging them into court (quite possibly suing them over debt??)—something Paul warned against in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8.
 - b. It was even more absurd because they were honoring those who were **“blaspheming”** Jesus (7)—by words or actions?
- 3. Takeaway: when we act with favoritism toward some and discriminate against others, it puts us at odds with God because He is impartial:
 - a. This is repeated throughout the OT and NT
 - b. Peter experienced this firsthand when God started to save Gentiles in the book of Acts, declaring in Acts 10:34-25: **“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him”**
 - c. Likewise, Paul wrote in Galatians 2:5 that it made no difference to him if someone was of **“high reputation”** because **“God shows no partiality”**
 - d. God is impartial so we should be as well

<p>C. Favoritism put us at odds with God’s Word (READ 2:8-13):</p>
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- 1. James refers to the **“royal law of the Scriptures”** as loving our neighbor as ourselves (8):
 - a. A royal law is one that encapsulates and summarizes other laws
 - b. If you go back to Leviticus 19 where this command is found, it comes on the tail end of a list of commands on how the Hebrews were to treat others; it encapsulates the other laws
 - c. Jesus did something similar when asked what the greatest commandment was (READ Matthew 22:37-40)
- 2. James says that if they were **“fulfilling”** (fully performing or carrying out) this command they were **“doing well”** (8):
 - a. But, if instead they were showing partiality, they were committing sin and convicted by the law as transgressors
 - b. They could not pick and choose which parts of God’s law they obeyed and which they didn’t because disobeying even one still made them guilty of breaking God’s law and made them a transgressor
 - c. James is not advocating for strict legalistic obedience to the Old Testament Law as a form of salvation (something rejected in both Acts and Galatians)
 - d. Rather, in 1:25 and 2:12 he refers to God’s Word as the **“law of liberty”** meaning that when obeyed it brings liberty or freedom, and this is true
- 3. Because of this, James calls on his readers to **“speak”** and **“act”** as those who will be judged by this **“law of liberty”** (God’s Word; 12-13):
 - a. The word **“so”** is repeated twice in the Greek for emphasis and also gives equal emphasis to both **“speak”** and **“act”**
 - b. Both **“speak”** and **“act”** are present tense imperatives referring to ongoing action (i.e. continue to speak and act...)
 - c. He reminds them that God’s judgment will be without mercy for the one who shows no mercy (13a)
 - d. But he also reminds them that God’s mercy will overcome His judgment for the one who extend mercy (13b)
- 4. Takeaway: we cannot say we obey God’s Word if we discriminate or treat people differently:
 - a. Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love others
 - b. The Bible makes it clear that when it comes to God and His people, there are no distinctions between male and female, Jew or gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, black/white/brown or purple
 - c. If partiality and favoritism determine how we treat people, then we are not doers of the Word, but transgressors of God’s Word