

Lesson 5
James 2:1-13
Impartiality or Favouritism

Memory verse: ‘Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.’ (Leviticus 19:15 NIV)

Not only is the mature Christian patient in testing (James 1), but he also practices the truth. This is the theme of James 2. Immature people talk about their beliefs, but the mature person lives his faith. Hearing God’s Word (James 1:22–25) and talking about God’s Word can never substitute for doing God’s Word.

Every believer has some statement of faith or personal expression of what he believes. Most churches have such statements and members are asked to subscribe to the statement and practice it. Most churches also have a “covenant” that they read publicly, often when they observe the Lord’s Supper. Statements of faith and church covenants are good and useful, but they are not substitutes for doing God’s will. At times, we have heard believers read the church covenant and then come to a business meeting and act in ways completely contrary to the covenant.

James wanted to help us practice God’s Word, so he gave us a simple test. He sent two visitors to a church service, a rich man and a poor man, and he watched to see how they were treated. The way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God! We cannot - and dare not - separate human relationships from divine fellowship. “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”(1 John 4:20 NIV).

Sometimes, when we think of the attributes of God, we think of what God is like, His characteristics, the elements of His nature, what makes up His person, we think of holiness and we think of justice and we think of wisdom and omnipotence and omniscience and omnipresence. We might think of immutability that is that God does not change. We might think of eternity. We might say sovereignty. We might list His love, His grace, His mercy, His faithfulness, His goodness. And you could probably think of more than just those.

But there is another attribute of God that we don't very often talk about and yet is very often spoken of in Scripture and that is God's impartiality. That is that God is absolutely and totally impartial in dealing with people. And in that way He is utterly unlike us. We are very partial. We tend to put everyone in some kind of stratified category, higher or lower than other people. It has to do with their looks. It has to do with their wardrobe. It has to do with the kind of car they drive, the kind of house they live in; sometimes it has to do with their race, sometimes with their social status, sometimes outward characteristics of personality. All of those things with God are non-issues. They are of no significance at all. They mean absolutely nothing to Him.

A person's education, a person's economic status, a person's looks, a person's wardrobe, a person's social relationships, a person's job, a person's fame, prestige, a person's earthly honour, all of those collectively and individually mean absolutely nothing to God. They are non-issues. In this section, James speaks to the same issue. James focuses on the impartiality of God with reference to a person's social and economic status. He examines basic Christian doctrines in the light of the way we treat other people. One of the tests of the reality of our faith is how we treat other people. Can we pass the test?

Things to learn: 1) the Deity of Jesus Christ 2) The Grace of God 3) The Word and Judgement of God

Discussion Questions:

1) In verse 1, James started with the deity of Jesus Christ – the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. How do we practice the deity of Christ in our human relationships in the context of the first four verses of the text?

2) God’s plan of salvation involves His grace and is also amplified in verses 5 to 7. Why do you think the doctrine of grace can be magnified by the church in the way people are treated?

3) Why is it that the Word of God and His Judgement will help Christians have a healthy perspective in handling human relational issues in the church?