

## A Study of the Book of James

### Sermon # 4

#### “Are You A Christian Snob?”

James 2:1-13

Let me open this morning’s message by asking you a question, *“Are you a Christian snob? Before you answer that question too quickly ask yourself, “Who, outside of your present circle of friends, have you attempted to include in your life recently?”*

Almost all of us walk around with a unpublished list in our minds of desirable and undesirable people. Some prefer to be around educated folks and look down at those who are not academic enough. Some of us would rather spend with young people and do not have time for the aged. Some have race or ethnic groups that we would rather not associate with. Most of us want to be around people just like we are, or want to be.

But, how can we refuse to accept and associate with one whom God has received? How can we exclude from our lives, and with- hold our friendship and our fellowship from someone God has welcomed into fellowship with Himself?

This is not a new problem, however, it is as old as Christianity. James writing to the first century church, very clearly brought this problem to light.

*First, There Is A Principle to Remember* (2:1) “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with partiality.”

James addresses the readers as “my brothers,” reminding us that the problem he is about to discuss is a family concern. When

-ever he uses that term he is ready to point out something that needs to be changed in their lives.

The issue is “partiality.” The literal meaning of this word is *“to receive one’s face.”* “Partiality” or as it is translated in some versions, *“respect of persons”* is mentioned several times in the New Testament. But in every other case the subject of the verse is God and it is expressed negatively. *“God does not show partiality.”*(Acts 10:34) *“God is not a respecter of persons.”* *“God does not receive people by face.”* *“God does not judge by externals, he judges the heart.”* (1 Pet. 1:17)

Interestingly we find the phrase “no difference” occurs twice in the book of Romans. It is used first with reference to our human sinfulness. “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22-23 NIV). Second, it is used with reference to God’s grace extended to all who will call on Him. “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (10:12-13 NIV). [Darrell W. Robinson, *“People Sharing Jesus,”* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 128 - [www.bible.org/illus./prejudice](http://www.bible.org/illus./prejudice)]

There are a number of ways in which favoritism shows up in the church today.

We can favor people based on their gifts and abilities. Who is the most important, the preacher or the sound man? The deacon or the Sunday School teacher? The nursery worker or the greeter in the Welcome Ministry? The truth is that one is not better than the other, they are just utilizing different gifts.

We can show favoritism on the basis of personality, or looks or economic standing. But none of that has any place in the church of Jesus Christ.

The basis of Christian action and attitude according to verse one is faith in the "Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory.*" Notice in your Bibles the phrase "the lord of glory," that the words "the Lord" in the NKJV are in italics indicating that it is added by the translators for clarity. It is perhaps more striking in this case, however, to omit them because the verse then reads, "Christ *is* the glory." Just as the Shekinah was the visible glory of God dwelling with man in the Old Testament (Ezek. 13:21-22), Jesus Christ *was and is* God's glory dwelling among men in the New Testament!

What James is telling us here is not to profess faith in Christ and at the same time be a spiritual snob. Don't join some little clique in the church. Every believer in the church are a part of the body of Christ. Those whom he has deemed worthy to receive we should be careful about avoiding.

*Not Only is there a Principle to Remember there is*

Secondly, There Is A Problem to Remedy (2: 2-4) "For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, (3) and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool."

The first guest identified as "a man with gold rings" is literally "*gold fingered*" or having many gold rings. By the abundance and prominence of his jewelry and "his fine apparel" it is evident that he is dressed to be seen and noticed.

The second man is identified as a "poor man in filthy raiment." "Filthy" as it is used here need not be understood in the sense of a homeless person might be but as a man dressed in work clothes soiled and stained from work. Although it is hard to see in the modern English translations the "you" in verse three is plural as was denoted by the use of the plural "ye" in the King James Version. This use of the plural suggests that what was happening here was a general attitude of the whole group. There is nothing wrong with extending a warm welcome to the rich visitor. The sin was in treating the poor visitor differently. There is a distinction in the way that the two visitors are received, the rich man is received cordially and the poor man is received carelessly if not crudely.

Although the characters in this story exist only as an illustration, scenes like this no doubt took place every day. A modern version of this story "... actually did happen one Sunday in the Bel Aire Presbyterian Church: When in attendance, then Governor Ronald Reagan and Nancy usually sat in the same seats just off the center about two-thirds of the way into the sanctuary. On this particular morning the governor and his wife were late and by the time they got there, two college students had occupied those seats. An usher came down the aisle and asked the students if they would take different seats off

to the side. They moved, and Ron and Nancy Reagan were brought in and seated. To his credit the pastor got up from his place on the platform, walked down and over to the college students and said, *'As long as I am pastor of this church, that will never happen again.'* [As quoted in David Jeremiah. *Turning Toward Integrity.*(Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1993). p. 64.]

In verse four we find the Lord's appraisal of this situation, "have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

James' question to those showing favoritism is rhetorical and anticipates an affirmative answer. "Have you not shown distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" If a judge in a court of law were to allow himself to be affected by the clothing of the defendant, would he not be violating justice? Just so, for a Christian to accept or reject someone on the basis of his outward appearance is no less wrong.

Not Only is there Is A Problem to Remedy ...

Third, There is A Perspective to Adopt (2:5-11)

Beginning in verse five, James invites believers to adopt a new perspective. He does so by presenting three reasons why favoritism is wrong.

First, he says it is wrong because it is inconsistent with God's method's. (v. 5) "Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"

In his letter to the church at Corinth Paul wrote (1 Cor. 1:25-29) "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (26) For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. (27) But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; (28) and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, (29) that no flesh should glory in His presence."

God's method of choosing has always been grace, and not on anything we are, have or ever will have.

Secondly, he says favoritism is wrong because it is inappropriate given the conduct of the rich. (vv.6-7)

But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? (7) Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?"

James establishes his point by asking a series of three questions; Who is Oppressing You?, Who is dragging You in to Court? And Who is Blaspheming the name by which you are called? The answer to all three questions is the same, it is the unbelieving rich.

Third, he says it is wrong because it is indifferent to the truth revealed in

Scripture. (vv. 8-11)

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; (9) but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (10) For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (11) For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”

Christians are called upon to live by the “royal law” which is the law of love for our neighbor. Jesus outlines this royal law in Matt 22 when a young lawyer asked, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” (37) Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ (38) This is the first and great commandment. (39) And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ (40) On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt 22:36-40)

It is called the royal law because it is the supreme law of human relationships and because it was given by the King of Kings.

James quotes Jesus as saying “you shall love” - “you” is singular and points out the personal responsibility of every believer to do this. But the use of the phrase “but if you show partiality” recognizes that it they may chose not to do so. And if you do so you are committing sin.

*Not Only is there A Perspective to Adopt but ...*

Fourth, There Is A Practice to Implement (2: 12-13)

“So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

One of the tests of the reality of our faith is how we treat other people. Could you pass the test?

There is a three-fold reason given for our need to live consistently; we are reminded that we will be judged.

First he tells us that we will be judged by our words. “so speak” is a present tense imperative suggesting that it is to be a habitual way of life. We have the potential to have a profound effect on those around us by what we say. Even the simplest statements can convey powerful messages. Statements like, “*You’re doing a good job.*” “*Nice going.*” “*I am proud of you.*” Those kinds of phrases can be life changing words of encouragement.

Secondly he tells us that we will be judged by our Deeds - “so do” is also a present tense imperative suggesting a habitual practice. James has clearly shown that it is a sin to show favoritism.

So here is what I want you to do. I want to think about who you are closest to in this church family. Where are the people you hang out with, the people you fellowship with. Now think, “*How long has it been since you reached out to include someone new in your circle?*” “*What have you done to make new people who visit and those who join feel apart?*”

Now let me explain something to you. I have read more than a few books on what it takes to build a successful growing church. Strong leadership can help. Good preaching is always a plus. A strong music program can be an asset. But in the end, relationships drive successful growing churches. Church that are open, welcoming and caring grow, those that are not die. It is just that simple.

Third and finally, he tells us that we will be judged by our Attitudes. For we either have shown mercy or we have not.

Things and people are not always as they appear. "The following story appeared in the newsletter "Our America":

"Dodie Gadiant, a schoolteacher for thirteen years, decided to travel across America and see the sights she had taught about. Traveling alone in a truck with camper in tow, she launched out. One afternoon rounding a curve on I-5 near Sacramento in rush-hour traffic, a water pump blew on her truck. She was tired, exasperated, scared, and alone. In spite of the traffic jam she caused, no one seemed interested in helping.

"Leaning up against the trailer, she prayed, *'Please God, send me an angel ... preferably one with mechanical experience.'* Within four minutes, a huge Harley drove up, ridden by an enormous man sporting long, black hair, a beard and tattooed arms. With an incredible air of confidence, he jumped off and, without even glancing at Dodie, went to work on the truck. Within another few minutes, he flagged down a larger truck, attached a tow chain to the frame of the disabled Chevy, and whisked the whole 56-foot rig off the freeway onto a side street, where he calmly continued to work on the water pump.

"The intimidated schoolteacher was too dumbfounded to talk. Especially when she read the paralyzing words on the back of his leather jacket: 'Hell's Angels—California.' As he finished the task, she finally got up the courage to say, *'Thanks so much,'* and carry on a brief conversation. Noticing her surprise at the whole ordeal, he looked her straight in the eye and mumbled, *'Don't judge a book by its cover. You may not know who you're talking to.'* With that, he smiled, closed the hood of the truck, and straddled his Harley. With a wave, he was gone as fast as he had appeared." Given half a chance, people often crawl out of the boxes into which we've relegated them." [Larry D. Wright, "Our America" Newsletter -[www.bible.org/illus./prejudice](http://www.bible.org/illus./prejudice)]

## Conclusion

If we want to live in a close relationship of intimate fellowship with God, we must not only deal with the issues of sin in our actions but also deal with sin in our attitudes. Often, we excuse the sins of attitude. We typically judge the sins of action with a harsh judgment and let the sins of attitude off easy. But the sins of attitude are the fountainhead for the sins of action. This is why repentance deals with a change of mind.

Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. While breaking baseball's "color barrier," he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. His own fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then shortstop "Pee Wee" Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

Wouldn't you like to be someone that makes that kind of difference in someone else's life? You see, the choice is really yours. You do not have to be a product of your environment or experiences. You have the power to make a choice to reject the negative and harmful practice of showing favoritism. You can choose rather to be an encourager. You can be someone who puts an arm over someone else's shoulder and makes a lasting difference in their lives.