

TEMPTATION 1: SHOWING PARTIALITY AND FAVOURITISM

JAMES 02:01–13

Introduction

This passage begins a new section in James, a discussion of various temptations and trials that are common to all believers. There are certain temptations and trials that are constantly confronting us. One of the strongest is that of showing partiality or favouritism, of discriminating against people.

- I. The charge against showing partiality (v. 1).
- II. The picture of partiality: two unbelieving church visitors (v. 2-3).
- III. The wrong of partiality (v. 4-7).
- IV. The warning against partiality (v. 8-11).
- V. The motivations against partiality (v. 12-13).

I. *James 02:01 Partiality and Favouritism*

The charge against showing partiality. What does it mean to show partiality? It means to favour some people over others or to pay special attention to a person because of his wealth, social standing, position, authority, popularity, looks or influence. Note that this charge is given to believers...

- to brothers
- to those who have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Lord of glory

Of all people upon earth, the very people who should not show partiality are believers. The reason is clearly stated in inverse one.

1. Everyone who is in the church is a brother — everyone stands on an equal footing before the Lord Jesus Christ. Wealth, status, social standing, position, appearance — nothing matters except all men coming to the Lord Jesus Christ and worshipping Him.
2. Everyone who has faith in our Lord Jesus Christ bows before Him as Lord. This means that the person bows before Christ as a servant or slave. We all come to Him on an equal footing; no one is higher or more acceptable than anyone else. All are His servants or slaves. Note exactly who Jesus Christ is; He is *our glorious Lord*.

⇒ Jesus Christ is the Lord who rules and reigns in glory, in the majesty and perfection, dominion and power of God Himself. His glory is so majestic that the appearance of man fades into total oblivion — just utter nothingness — before Him. Therefore, any person who stands before Him is not thinking of his own worth and preference, but of the Lord's glory. The person who believes and worships our glorious Lord, no matter his status, realizes that he is as all men, as nothing. Therefore, he does not elevate himself nor anyone else above other people, no matter how poor and humble they may be.

=> Jesus Christ is the Lord who left the glory of heaven and came to this corruptible world to save all men. He humbled Himself — laid aside the highest position of exaltation and the supreme honour of God Himself. He laid aside all the glory, majesty, brilliance and splendour of heaven itself and came in utter poverty and humiliation to this earth in order to save us. If the Lord of glory loved us that much, then all who believe and follow Him must humble themselves and love the poor and lowly of this earth just as much. All believers must do just what the Lord of glory did: humble themselves and reach out to bring all men to the Lord Jesus Christ so that they might be saved — reach out to the poor and lowly as well as to the rich and high.

The charge is clear: believers — those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, our glorious Lord — are not to show partiality or favouritism. It is strictly forbidden.

Lev 19:15 “Do not prevent justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great but judge your neighbour fairly.”

Job 13:10 “He would surely call you to account if you secretly showed partiality.”

1 Tim 5:21 “I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favouritism.”

James 2:4 Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Prov 24:23 These also are sayings of the wise: To show partiality in judging is not good:

II. *James 02:02–03 A Picture of Partiality*

The picture of partiality is clearly painted. There must be no misunderstanding about what is meant by partiality. Two unbelievers visit the church. One man is sharply dressed, so much so that it is immediately noticed that he is somewhat wealthy. He has on the finest of clothes and an expensive gold ring. The other man is shabbily dressed, and it is immediately noticed that he is very poor. The Greek word for the kind of clothing he is wearing means filthy and dirty. The man is so poor that he is actually a dirty, smelly beggar or derelict from off the streets.

The point is this: What happens when these two men visit the church? The picture painted by Scripture is that of showing partiality to the rich man. The rich man is escorted to a good seat. But the poor man is told to stand or be seated over there away from everyone else. He is treated as being less important than the rest of us. He is treated no better than a servant who sits at the footstool of our feet.

Thought 1. Note that the two men represent the extreme ends of wealth and poverty. If partiality is not to be shown in this case, then it is never to be shown. There are to be absolutely no distinctions within the church, no distinctions of social class, standing, position, wealth, prestige or recognition.

Thought 2. How often has a poor person visited a church and was not welcomed with open arms? How many of us...

- have felt uncomfortable and uneasy around him?
- have ignored, neglected and shunned him?
- have failed to greet and welcome him?

This is not of Christ. It is wrong.

Psa 82:3 Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.

III. **James 02:04–07 The Wrong of Partiality**

There are five things wrong with showing partiality and favouritism.

1. Showing partiality sets one up as the judge of men (v. 4). It makes one as God; it says who can worship God and who cannot, who is acceptable to God and who is not. Only God Himself can determine whom He will accept or not accept.

Rom 14:4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Mat 7:1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged."

Rom 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

1 Cor 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

James 4:12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbour?

2. Showing partiality reveals evil thoughts (v. 4). The person who shows partiality focuses upon mundane and changeable things, things such as clothes, cars, houses and all the other outward things that change, waste away, rot and decay ever so rapidly. Such thoughts are corrupt because they focus upon corruptible things and neglect the person entirely. It says that material things such as clothes and cars are more important than the person himself. This, of course, is foolishness. Yet it is exactly how most people behave, for most people in the world show partiality.

Believers are never to show partiality, not to a single soul. We are to look at the person himself. What matters is his life, his health and soul, his body and spirit. What matters is that he be saved and come to know the love, joy and peace that only Christ can bring him. Then and only then can he become a dynamic personality who can serve God and man to his fullest ability. Then and only then can he fulfil his purpose for being on earth and make the fullest possible contribution to society and Christ.

But the only way he can do this is for believers to stop discriminating against him and begin to love him and win him to Christ.

Mat 19:21-22 Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

1 Cor 10:24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Phil 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

3. Showing partiality discriminates against the poor and humble, a people who are loved by God (v. 5). This verse is not saying that God does not love and care for the rich and high. He does, but He also cares and loves the poor and humble. And history shows that God has chosen the poor and humble to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom. In fact, they have been the very ones who have found so much hope in the gospel and have turned to it in great numbers. Therefore, they are not to be discriminated against. Believers are not to shun them nor shut them out of the church.

Psa 12:5 “Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise,” says the Lord. “I will protect them from those who malign them.”

Psa 14:6 You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge.

Psa 140:12 I know that the Lord secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy.

Isa 25:4 You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall.

4. Showing partiality shows a disgraceful attitude (v. 6a). It dishonours, humiliates, shames, disgraces and insults the poor and lowly person. Just think of the hurt and pain within the heart of the person who is publicly discriminated against — the pain and hurt when he sees us shun, bypass, ignore and withdraw from him. No believer is to ever make a person feel unwelcomed or of little value and worth.

Thought 1. Believers are to have open hearts and arms, welcoming everyone into their lives, homes and churches. Believers — all believers — are to live as Christ lived: to love and care for all and to reach out for all.

Mat 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Mat 11:5 “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.”

Luke 4:18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.”

James 2:6 *But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?*

Prov 19:7 *A poor man is shunned by all his relatives — how much more do his friends avoid him! Though he pursues them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found.*

Prov 14:20 *The poor are shunned even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends.*

Eccl 9:16 *So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.*

5. Showing partiality shows foolish behaviour (v. 6b-7). Two things are said about the rich that need to be heeded.

⇒ The rich and high usually oppress the poor and they readily grab what they can, using the very laws of the land to do it. The idea is that they use the law unjustly in order to protect and increase their wealth and power.

⇒ The rich and high usually slander the name of Christ. They slander His name by denying, mocking, ridiculing, persecuting, neglecting, ignoring and rejecting Him as the Saviour of the world.

Simply stated, the rich and high usually feel self-sufficient. There is a reason: they have everything they need upon earth — food, clothing, shelter, pleasure, possessions, position, recognition and varying degrees of authority. Therefore, they think little about needing anything. They forget two things:

⇒ that everything they have fades away ever so quickly, including their health, body and life; that they are subject to accident, disease and death and that it is at most just around the corner.

⇒ that they must face whatever lies right beyond this world and life: God Himself.

The point is this: Why would the church and its believers show partiality to such people over the poor of the earth? There is no question, a list of sins could be drawn up and discussed about the poor as well. But why show partiality to the rich who are the very ones who oppress the needy of the world by their banking and hoarding and often by their finagling and scheming, ignoring and neglecting. The church and its believers are not to discriminate and show partiality and favouritism to anyone.

Deu 15:7 *If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother.*

Psa 11:4 *The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them.*

Psa 41:1 *Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble.*

Psa 109:31 *For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him.*

Prov 19:17 *He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.*

IV. James 02:08–11 Warning against Partiality

The warning against partiality is strong. There are three warnings.

1. Showing partiality is sin; it violates the royal law of love (v. 8-9). The great law of God is the law of love:

Lev 19:18 *“Love your neighbour as yourself.” (cp. Lk. 10:29-37)*

Note how important this law is: it is said to be the great “royal law according to the Scripture.” It is royal for at least three reasons.

- a. It is the royal law of God’s kingdom. It was given by God Himself and reinforced by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He came to earth.

Mat 22:39 *“And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”*

- b. It is the great law that embraces or includes all other laws. That is, if a person loves God and loves his neighbour as himself, he will automatically be obeying all the other laws.

Mark 12:31 *“The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”*

Rom 13:8-10 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.*

Gal 5:14 *The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”*

- c. It is the very commandment that leads to eternal life.

Luke 10:27-28 *He answered: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”*

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

1 John 4:7-12 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us:*

He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:16 *And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.*

The point is this: believers are to love people, not show partiality, discriminating against some. Showing partiality is sin and it makes us a transgressor of the law.

2. Showing partiality makes a person guilty of the whole law of God (v. 10). How is this possible? How can a person be guilty of all the law if he breaks only one law? Men follow God or else they do not follow God. There is no such thing as subtracting the laws that one does not like and keeping the laws that one does like. Every law has been given by God. They all form a whole pattern, a complete style of life. They are all necessary to point one in the right direction and toward the right goal.

Thus, to offend in one point or to slip from one law makes one short of the goal. One side-steps from the right direction. One goes astray from the whole law of God and one becomes guilty of the whole law.

Simply stated, if a person breaks one law, he has violated the law of God, the whole package of God's law. Although he broke only one law, he is still guilty; he is still a transgressor. He has still broken God's law. He is no less guilty than if he had broken every law. He stands as a transgressor before God and he must be forgiven by God just as much as any other transgressor.

This is significant for us to notice and heed, for it means...

- that we cannot pick and choose what laws we will keep and what laws we will violate.
- that we cannot build up a merit system with God by keeping most of the laws and be allowed to break a few of the laws.
- that we cannot become more acceptable to God because we keep most of the laws and break only a few.
- that we are not more righteous than other people because we keep more laws than they do and break fewer of what men call the more meaningful laws.

The point is this: showing partiality makes a person a terrible law-breaker, the most serious offender imaginable.

- => We are guilty of breaking all the laws of God. We stand as guilty as the most base transgressor of God's holy law, and we are just as liable and subject to punishment as any other transgressor.

=> We are guilty of breaking the great royal law of God, the law of love, the very basic law of God's kingdom.

Prov 14:21 He who despises his neighbour sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

Prov 24:9 The schemes of folly are sin, and men detest a mocker.

James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

1 John 3:4 Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

1 John 5:17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

3. Showing partiality is just as serious a sin as adultery and murder (v. 11). This is just giving an example of what has been said. But note: the verse may also be saying that partiality is *equal to murder*. Partiality is a sin that selects and favours one person over another. It ignores and neglects a person. It casts one into oblivion, wipes one out; treats one as though he is nothing, absent or non-existent. Thus, it is comparable to murder. It is the same root, the same cause, the same selfishness, the same lust, the same sin as murder.

This stresses the seriousness of showing partiality. Scripture is clear in its warning: the church and believers are not to show partiality or favouritism to anyone. We are to love all people no matter their social standing or wealth.

Rom 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Rom 13:10 Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Rom 15:1-2 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.

Gal 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right.

V. James 02:12–13 Motivations Against Showing Partiality

The motivations against showing partiality. There are two things that should stir us to love and care for all people, showing no favouritism whatsoever.

1. We shall face the judgment of God (v. 12). Therefore, we should *speak and act* like people who will stand before God and give account for what we have done.

=> We should speak love and kindness to all people.

=> We should do or show love and kindness to all people.

Who a person — his social standing and wealth, clothing and appearance — is to have no effect upon us whatsoever. We are to receive people, actually reach out to them

through our speech and behaviour, no matter who they are. God is going to judge us on the basis of how we have loved and reached out to people, regardless of who they are.

2 Th 1:7-10 And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

Deu 11:28 The curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.

1 Sam. 12:15 “But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.”

Eph 5:6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

2 Th 1:8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Heb 2:20 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

2. We shall receive a reciprocal reward for our behaviour. God is going to treat us exactly as we have treated others. If we have shown mercy, then He will show mercy to us; if we have not shown mercy, then He will not show mercy to us. And note: there is only one thing that will rejoice victoriously over judgment and that is mercy. The judgment of God is going to swoop down and consume a person who has not shown mercy. Our only hope against the burning fire of God’s judgment is mercy. Therefore, we must be merciful in order to escape the terrible judgment of God.

Mat 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Mat 6:14-15 “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Mat 7:1-2 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Mat 18:35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” ■