

## **Intro:**

From recent news stories coming out of Baltimore, Ferguson Missouri, and many other places, we are aware of the continuing problem of prejudice and its effects. And if you've ever read any online discussion, you have probably noticed that people's preconceived notions powerfully drive their thoughts and reactions (for better or worse). While each of these situations is extremely complex, and Christians need much wisdom and prayer in working toward solutions, one thing is clear: Christians should avoid being part of the problem! And when we look at the Biblical teaching on prejudice, it goes far beyond (yet applies to) racial discrimination and the unthinking airing of opinions. James 2:1-13 talks about prejudice/favoritism and uses wealth as his example. But the principles given to us by James apply to many areas and teach us to think and judge rightly.

## **Topic verse: - v. 1**

Faith in Jesus - the Lord of Glory- is incompatible with favoritism/prejudice (which is injustice/unrighteousness). From this truth, James develops 3 principles of application:

### **1. Judge by God's standards, not our own selfish standards<sup>1</sup>.**

James criticizes his readers for giving preferential treatment to the rich over the poor. (vv. 2-3) He says in effect “you give more attention to the one who rates higher in your own standard of values. You judge the two based solely on their clothes and the assumed underlying economic status.” The implication is that they did so with selfish motives, hoping to receive something from the rich man. James was written to a culture characterized by reciprocity – ‘trading favors’ – as a standard of social conduct. It was normal to give benefit to someone in the expectation that they would benefit you in return. And to not return benefit was socially unacceptable. Therefore, James seems to be saying “You calculate that the rich man may benefit you with his money, so you pay more attention to him than to the poor man, who shows no sign of being able to benefit you.” To show such favoritism most clearly demonstrates our own selfishness. And James pointed out that their selfish valuing of the rich over the poor is the opposite of God’s evaluation and contradicts the reality of the situation (“The poor are chosen by God to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom, but the poor are oppressing you and blaspheming God.” vv. 5-7). James points out that their conclusion is exactly opposite to God’s because their standards of judgment are wrong.

And when our criteria of judgment are wrong, the result is that we (like James’ readers) discriminate and become judges with corrupt/worthless reasonings (v. 4). First, James says that they are discriminating – considering one person more valuable than the other. Second, they are becoming judges with evil/corrupt/worthless thoughts. The emphasis here is probably not just the fact that they are making a distinction (though that is important), but the way that they are judging – with corrupt reasonings. As highlighted above, these corrupt reasonings are usually driven by selfish motives, and justice is skewed toward the conclusion that we think will most benefit ourselves.

The temptation to selfishly favor the rich over the poor is still with us. And we are also in danger of discriminating based on physical attractiveness, ethnic origin, popularity, fashion sense, inclusion in our social clique, and many other outward and surface factors. And the church as a whole is grievously damaged by our acceptance or rejection of people based on these factors. And even more damaging is the selection of leadership based on family relations or ‘the good old boy network.’ How many churches select leadership based on popularity or business

---

<sup>1</sup> cf. Lev 19:15, Matt 7:1-5, Luke 12:57, John 7:24, 8:15

success, rather than godly lifestyle and Biblical qualifications? Why are we more excited when a celebrity makes a profession of faith than we are if the local drug dealer is radically converted? Are we opening ourselves to the same rebuke that God gave Samuel: “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”<sup>2</sup> Are we using God’s standards of what is best, or have we bought into the worlds standards? It should not be so.

## **2. Avoid hypocrisy by judging ourselves by the same standards.<sup>3</sup>**

Whenever we show partiality, we sin and are rebuked by God’s law (v. 8). Prohibition of favoritism in judging is part of God’s revealed law (e.g. Lev. 19:15) and is to be avoided as much as murder and adultery. The very act of favoritism shows that we are lawbreakers, and therefore shows that we are hypocrites when we judge others with prejudice. Rather, God commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). Unless we are perfect in our obedience to God (which excludes everyone but Jesus) we have no grounds to look down on others in self-righteous condemnation (vv. 9-11).

When we look in the mirror and see that our deeds don’t match our profession,<sup>4</sup> it gives a good dose of humility and reality. The prevailing illness of our culture is that we rightly see that no one perfectly measures up to the standard, and therefore conclude that we should lower the standard of right and wrong or claim that there is no such thing. This conclusion is not only arrogant and evil, but also silly and stupid. The reality is that we are guilty, just as those we judge are guilty. The first step to finding healing is to admit our sickness.<sup>5</sup> We all have the same high standard to meet. We are all guilty. But the good news is that we all have the same need and opportunity to repent and change. We all have the same access to mercy and forgiveness and power to change. We are on the exact same level as those we judge, and this realization is at the core of true our faith in Christ<sup>6</sup> and should help us to be less likely to be unjust in our judgments.<sup>7</sup>

## **3. Let the application of our judgment be tempered by mercy.<sup>8</sup>**

We should speak and act as those who are about to be judged by the law of freedom (vv. 12-13). The “royal law” of v. 8 is also a “law of freedom”(cf. 1:25) because the King of the law is both just and merciful. Those who have faith in Christ will not be judged strictly based on full compliance to the standards of God. If that were the case, there is no hope for any of us. Rather, God made a way to perfectly fulfill justice and yet still be merciful to us who deserve no mercy. God is just AND gracious toward us, and this realization should make a difference in the way that we speak and act toward others. We are told to take the log out of our own eye before we attempt to take the speck out of our neighbor’s eye.

James gives a twofold reason for this command. First, judgment without mercy will be given to the one who does not exercise mercy.<sup>9</sup> There is an important distinction between making right judgments (good evaluations and decisions – even involving whether other people are to be liked and trusted) on the one hand and standing in judgment (self-righteously condemning or writing off a person as valueless) on the other hand. All Christians are called to be discerning judges in

---

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 16:7, see John 7:24

<sup>3</sup> cf. Rom 2:1-3, 1 Pet 1:17

<sup>4</sup> James 1:22-25 and 2:14-26

<sup>5</sup> Mark 2:17

<sup>6</sup> Eph 2:8-10

<sup>7</sup> See the entire book of Romans, especially 11:30-32.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Rom 14:4, Matt 5:7, 7:1-2, 18:15-35

<sup>9</sup> cf. Matt. 5:7; 6:12; 7:1-2, 18:15-35

many contexts in our daily lives. However, only those with the given responsibility, proper authority, and demonstrated ability (not blinded by logs or bribes) should act as jury (pronouncing verdict) and executioner (carrying out the sentence). Even if you are in a position where you need to exercise judgment in the second sense, a Christian will always do so with the goal of doing what is best for all people involved, and not just a slavish application of rules.

Second, James gives the principle that mercy is more powerful than judgment.<sup>10</sup> We should always strive to make discerning judgments. But what we do with our conclusions is equally important. We can honestly and correctly conclude that a person has a speck in their eye. But instead of condemning them for their speck, we can help them remove it. We should imitate the character of Christ, who did not come to condemn the world, but to save it. Yes, God is just and will always remain so. But He also made a way so that His grace has the last word. He loved His enemies, and He has commanded us to do likewise. He has also enabled us to do so, by transforming us by His Spirit because of His love shown to us when we did not deserve it. In light of the cross, favoritism and prejudice is unthinkable.

---

<sup>10</sup> cf. Matt 12:7; Rom 3:25-26; 2 Sam 14:14