

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Rich Man, Poor Man James 2:1-13 Part One**

When we think of the attributes of God we usually think of such things as His holiness and righteousness and His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. We think of His immutability (changelessness), His eternity, His sovereignty, His justice, His perfect grace, love, mercy, faithfulness, and goodness. But another attribute of God that is not thought or spoken of so often is His impartiality. Yet that is a serious and recurring theme throughout Scripture. God is absolutely impartial in His dealings with people. And in that way, as with His other attributes, He is unlike us.

What does it mean to be impartial? To be impartial means that our judgments and actions in respect to people are free from fleshly biases and appetites.

Human beings, even Christians, are not naturally inclined to be impartial. We tend to put people in pigeonholes; in predetermined, stratified categories, ranking them by their looks, their clothes, their race or ethnicity, their social status, their personality, their intelligence, their wealth and power, by the kind of car they drive, and by the type of house and neighborhood they live in.

I remember watching a particular news program where they were attempting to determine whether good looks affected how people would respond to someone who was in need. So they selected a very attractive young woman to stand by a car on a busy street with its hood up giving the impression that the car was disabled. Then on the next day they put another woman not nearly so attractive next to the same car on the same street at the same time and then watched what happened at a distance. Can anyone here guess what they discovered? They discovered that men in general responded to the need of the attractive woman much more often and enthusiastically than the less attractive woman. Or in other words these men were partial. They had allowed their fleshly biases and appetites to dictate how they behaved, which led them to treat the less attractive woman differently than the more attractive woman.

Some might be tempted to think that this kind of favoritism related to physical attractiveness might be limited to men only. But in a similar study they sent out certain very attractive men and less attractive men for job interviews with prospective women employers and guess what? Though the men from both groups were deemed to be equally qualified for the jobs, the more attractive men were far more favorably received. Just as with the men, this experiment demonstrated that the women were partial. They had allowed their fleshly biases and appetites to dictate how they behaved, which led them to treat the less attractive men differently than the more attractive men.

This is certainly not unusual and it is not isolated to only the thinking of worldly men and women. We find it also among the community of the righteous. I am sure you remember the story of Samuel when, after the rejection of Saul as King he was deeply grieved.

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And it was at that time that the Lord said to Samuel in **1 Sam. 16:1**, “... **how long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons.**” So Samuel did as the Lord asked him and he had the opportunity to view each of Jesse’s sons one at a time without any knowledge on their part of what he was up to. The very first son that he met was named Eliab and do you remember what Samuel thought when he first saw this young man? **1 Sam. 16:6** says, “**Then it came about when they entered, that he looked at Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him.”** Eliab was a hunk. Obviously his physical presence was very impressive. Samuel had a fleshly bias. He was not looking at Eliab as the Lord was looking at Eliab. Certainly if this was the response of Samuel it could very well be our response as well.

Why? Because it is very human for us to look at appearances. Look at **V. 7** “... **Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.**” People in general look at the outside, at the things which have no lasting or eternal value, but God looks at the heart. And what is God looking for? He is looking for those who are truly seeking Him. Listen to the words of **Jer. 29:13** “**And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.**” Do you believe this? If you do then this truth will produce great comfort in your lives. It is a wonderful thing to know that if we come to the Lord and humble ourselves to Him that He will embrace us. It doesn’t matter at all whether we are smart or dumb, educated or illiterate, vivacious or shy. It doesn’t matter whether or not we are struggling. It does not matter if we have made mistakes or feel as if we have acted foolishly. If we will simply seek him with all our heart we will find him.

And isn’t this a wonderful truth? The Lord does not deal with us according to the superficial externals of our lives which we may not have any or very little control over. They are all non- issues with God, of no significance or meaning to Him whatsoever. He will manifest His love to each person that comes to Him equally.

God is impartial. Moses declared in **Deut. 10:17** the following, “**For the Lord your God is the God of Gods and the Lord of Lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality, nor take a bribe.**” He expects His people to reflect that same impartiality. He warns Israel in **Deut. 1:17** and says to them, “**You shall not show partiality of judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God’s, and the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.**” God wants us to treat people as He treats people, impartially.

The New Testament is equally clear about the sin of partiality. To the newly converted Gentile Cornelius and his believing household Peter confessed in **Acts 10:35** that he finally had shed Jewish animosity toward Gentiles and now understood that “**in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.**” And if that is not a clear enough statement of God’s displeasure with impartiality I would like us to read **James 2:1-13** as we continue our study in this great epistle.

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(1) “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. (2) For if a man comes into our assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, (3) and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” (4) have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives. (5) Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (6) But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? (7) Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? (8) If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. (9) But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (10) For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (11) For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (12) So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” There is not a more pointed Scripture in all of the Bible concerning the sin of personal favoritism than what we have just read. And we must not miss the significance of what James is telling us.

You will of course remember the theme of this epistle which is tests of “living faith.” This epistle was written so that we might be able to know whether we are saved or not saved. Whether we are a part of the family of God or not a part of the family of God. The first test that we considered in this epistle was the “Response to trials test.” This test is found in **James 1:2-18**. The second test that we considered in this epistle was the “Response to the Word test.” This test is found in **James 1:19-27**. We are now considering the third test. We will call this the “PARTIALITY TEST” which is found in the passage that we have just read, **James 2:1-13**. Just as our response to trials can tell us a great deal about our true spiritual condition; just as our response to the Word can tell us a great deal about our true spiritual condition so also the way we respond to people in various given situations can tell us a great deal about our spiritual condition. If we treat one person one way and another person a different way based upon our fleshly biases and fleshly appetites then we are in trouble. How are we treating people? Are we treating people impartially? To help us in answering this question, James presents to us five features of genuine, Godlike impartiality in this section of Scripture. The first feature he presents is the principle in **V. 1**.

### THE PRINCIPLE

Let us read **James 2:1** “**My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.**” What is James telling us? What is the principle, which in this verse is so succinctly stated? For us to profess faith in the gospel of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ while holding an attitude of personal favoritism is contradictory and incompatible.

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We therefore need to make every possible effort to make sure that we are not characterized by “an attitude of personal favoritism.” In order to do this we need to know what this means. **“An attitude of personal favoritism” translates a single Greek word, PROSOPOLEMPHIA, which has the literal meaning of lifting up someone’s face, with the idea of judging by appearance and on that basis giving special favor and respect. It pertains to judging purely on a superficial level, without consideration of a person’s true merits, abilities, or character.**

We have been called by Christ to make disciples, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” It doesn’t say, “Go make disciples of the attractive, rich, powerful and those who are fun to be with.”

Certainly this was true of Christ. It made no difference to Jesus whether the one to whom He spoke or ministered to was a wealthy Jewish leader or a common beggar, a virtuous woman or a prostitute, a high priest or a common worshiper, handsome or ugly, educated or ignorant, religious or irreligious, law-abiding citizen or criminal. His overriding concern was the condition of the soul. And if Christ Himself lives in us, if His Spirit is indeed filling us, shouldn’t this be our concern as well?

We need not be concerned with the externals of man. If this were the case we would have had difficulty even reaching out to Christ Himself. Consider His family tree. It was at best a mixed bag. Consider the genealogies of Christ given us in **Matt. 1:1-7** and **Luke 3:31-34**. In both Matthew and Luke, Jesus’ descendants are shown to include such notable and godly believers as Abraham, David, Solomon, and Hezekiah. But also included are many otherwise obscure and common people, including the incestuous Tamar, the former prostitute Rahab, and Ruth, from the outcast Moabites. Consider Christ’s social standing. His father was a simple carpenter with very little material wealth and certainly no power. We would very likely consider Jesus coming from a poor family. And beyond this Jesus would have been considered to have come from an inferior people group. Jesus grew up in the Galilean town of Nazareth, whose poor reputation among most Jews is reflected in Nathaniel’s comment to Philip in **John 1:46** **“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”** On another occasion some people commented about Jesus in **John 7:41** and said, **“Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?”** If we say that we have embraced Jesus, who was despised and rejected by the world, then certainly we will be able to embrace others who may also have been despised and rejected by the world.

We are not here to look at the outside. We are here to look at the inside of man and respond accordingly. We are here to seek and save that which is lost and to treat each person in this group the same regardless of what we may see. We are here to love the brethren and we are to treat each person in this group the same regardless of what we may see.

The only times that we would treat people differently based on externals is where the Scriptures themselves call us to make those distinctions for the good of society as a whole.

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There are a few groups of people that God has called us to show special respect and honor to, in the church, and in society in general. For instance, through Moses, the Lord commanded, in **Lev. 19:32**, **“You shall rise up before the gray headed and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord.”** Would it be wrong for us to give up our seat to an elderly person on a bus while not offering it to someone else? No! It is the right thing to do, Why? Because God has told us to do this. Through Paul we have been told to be in subjection to governing authorities in **Rom. 13:1-5**. We are quickly approaching tax time. To give our money to the State of California or to the Federal Government to meet what they perceive to be real need while not giving it to someone else is not wrong for us. Why? Because God has told us to do this. Seeking to be obedient to the specific precepts and principles of God’s Word in the treatment of certain specific groups of people such as the elderly and those in authority certainly would not fall into the category of showing personal favoritism.

Is God partial to those who the world has chosen to value? And the answer is clearly, NO! We are not here to elevate by our actions those who the world has chosen to elevate. We are here to do the very thing Christ came to do. And this is to seek and save that which is lost and then to teach them to do all that Christ has commanded regardless of any external superficial nonmoral criteria that the world might be hung up on. When we look at men we are not to be looking at the externals but at their heart and respond accordingly and impartially.

### CONCLUSION

The epistle of James was written so that we might know whether or not we are truly born again. This epistle was written so that we might know whether or not we possess true genuine saving faith.

The first test that James gives to us is the response to trials test. The second test is the response to the Word test and now we are considering the third test we have called the “Partiality test.” In applying this test to our lives we must first understand the principle which is at the heart of this section of Scripture and what is that principle? It is simply this: To profess faith in the gospel of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ while holding an attitude of personal favoritism is contradictory and incompatible.

I am sure many of you are aware of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Contained in that speech was this statement, “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.”

The world apart from the return of Christ will never see the glory of the Lord revealed. But this is not true of the church. We can, because Christ lives within us and can live through us. If this world is truly going to see impartiality demonstrated it will be through us.