

## Impartial Love

Those seats are for the council and planning commission members,” Jeanette said adamantly to Sister Michelle. The 10 white-linen-covered folding chairs were carefully placed at the head of the long table on either side.

Bethel Peace Church was having its dedication service for its daycare and Christian ed center. The church had worked for the last five years in the planning and building of the center. The city and planning commission had presented more than one roadblock, but the church had overcome them all.

Jeanette, chair of the church’s hospitality committee, had worked hard to put on a “perfect lunch” for the guests today. The smell of chicken and soul food dishes drifted from the kitchen, as well as the smell of steak.

“Sister Jeanette said steak is only for the special guests and the pastor,” one of the cooks said.

The lunch began when the guests spilled into the fellowship hall. Only three people from the city attended. During the mingling, Sister Michelle spotted four of the city’s interns, who helped work on the center.

Michelle greeted the young people and escorted them to the linen-covered chairs. Jeanette took Michelle by the elbow and directed her to a spot away from the table.

“You know those are special seats for the council and planning commission members,” she said again.

“The interns helped us in the building of the center,” countered Michelle. “Why not show love to everyone?”

**1.** *What would cause people to respond differently to a rich person compared to a poor person?*

**2.** *Consider Jesus’ demonstration of love on the Cross—is there any difference for the rich versus the poor? Explain.*

**3.** *Why do people need to experience impartial love despite their positions, especially from Christians?*

## Do Not Favor the Rich

*James 2:1-4, KJV*

1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

*James 2:1-4, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. <sup>2</sup>Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup>If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," <sup>4</sup>have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Even at this early time in the life of the church, believers fell into the trap of favoring people based on position and wealth. Their partiality to the rich failed to measure up with their profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, who endured poverty so they might possess eternal life (2 Cor. 8:9).

James presented a hypothetical example of the type of bias based on outward appearance that existed among his readers. Two people with much different positions in life visit their church and receive diverse receptions, to say the least.

The one speaking, presumably the leader of the group, offers the rich visitor a choice seat due to his obvious high status. The gold ring immediately marks him as someone with both high social status and wealth. Those wishing to impress others in the first century A.D. could rent rings to wear at special occasions so they could also appear to be people of great importance.

The shabby and filthy appearance of the poor person

points to that of a beggar. The speaker tells this one to either stand in the back or sit on the floor. Because the church met in the homes of its members, it's likely some needed to stand or sit on the floor. By demonstrating favoritism to the rich over the poor, James said they had "become judges with evil thoughts" (vs. 4). He thus exposed their motives as cruel and without just cause, as he explained in the following verses.

**4.** *How does the reception of the rich man differ from that of the poor person?*

**5.** *Why did James condemn such partiality on the part of his readers?*

## Partiality Lacks Common Sense

*James 2:5-7, KJV*

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

*James 2:5-7, NIV*

<sup>5</sup>Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? <sup>6</sup>But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? <sup>7</sup>Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

In response to such favoritism, James passionately appealed for them to reconsider their actions. The poor visitor was much more likely to place his or her faith in the Lord. The church at this time consisted largely of people from the poorer class as they had responded much more readily to the Gospel. James reminded his readers of the Lord's choice in the matter: He had chosen the poor to be rich in faith and partake in His coming glorious kingdom.

The rich visitor represented those who oppressed early believers with a variety of lawsuits (vs. 6). The word for “exploiting” depicts intense harassment and ruthless force to deprive these early Christians of their rights as well as their money. In spite of this oppression, James’s readers still favored the wealthy when they appeared in their meetings.

In verse 7, James further demonstrated the inconsistency of favoring those of high social rank. Not only did the rich harass them, but they even blasphemed the name of Jesus. James was not suggesting they treat the rich with cruelty, but that they treat the rich and the poor alike.

**6.** *Why did their favoritism toward the rich lack common sense?*

## Favoritism Breaks God’s Law

*James 2:8-11, KJV*

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

*James 2:8-11, NIV*

<sup>8</sup>If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. <sup>9</sup>But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup>For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

James anticipated that some of his readers might justify their preferential treatment of the rich on the basis of the command to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (vs. 8). The issue, however, was not that of treating the wealthy man with respect, which was a good thing. Their sin was treating

the poor with contempt thus revealing their favoritism. Such behavior also breaks God's law since the poor visitor is just as much a neighbor as the man of high position.

We also cannot pick and choose which law we want to keep while ignoring the others we might deem as less important. If we break just one of God's commands, it makes us a lawbreaker in God's eyes. The One who commands us not to commit adultery also commands us not to murder.

These verses demonstrate the absolute necessity of a Savior who died in our place taking upon Himself the penalty due for our sins. If possession of eternal life depended on keeping the law, no one would ever receive it.

**7. How do these verses demonstrate our need for Jesus' righteousness versus that of our own?**

## Mercy Triumphs over Judgment

*James 2:12-13, KJV*

12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

*James 2:12-13, NIV*

<sup>12</sup>Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, <sup>13</sup>because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Rather than a law that enslaves people as did the Old Testament laws in the hands of the Pharisees, the Holy Spirit empowers us to obey its moral demand. It's thus a "law that gives freedom" since in Christ there is no condemnation (vs. 12; Rom. 8:1). Although we can no longer be condemned, there is another judgment when the Lord will examine our lives and service to Him. James said that our show of mercy to all regardless of outward appearance or social standing will result in Christ extending mercy to us.

**8. What is our motivation for treating everyone with mercy regardless of their social standing?**

## Exhibiting Impartial Love

The four elders of the church sat at the front, waiting for the Christmas celebration to begin. But it couldn't start until the fifth elder made it to his chair on the podium, though he had nothing else to do with the service. It seemed like the Christmas celebration was less about Jesus' birth, but rather centered on those in power.

The food bank burst with vegetables, meats, fruit, and other necessary items needed to feed the hundreds that lined the street to receive food to survive. Most of the people woke up early in order to make sure they received food before it ran out. Everything ran orderly and was given as needed, but no one knew the manager's secret. Every morning the manager would put aside at least 10 huge bags of food for those in his family and close friends. He didn't care that many of those outside slept on mats in the cold just to get the much-needed food, while his family members slept in warm beds and received food that they could purchase themselves. Giving to and loving the least of them was replaced with favoritism for those closest to him.

What if the Christmas service started without all five elders? What would happen if the manager distributed the food to those who patiently waited in line for the food because they needed it? James 2:9 clearly states that showing favoritism is a sin. Therefore, real, impartial love would be the service starting on time regardless of who is present—or giving out *all* the food to those who wait in line to receive it. Exhibiting impartial love means remembering that at the Cross of Jesus we are all equal and loved.

**9.** *Why do you think that showing love to someone because of their position or something else is sin?*

**10.** *As a leader, how could you demonstrate impartial love to those you lead?*

**11.** *Share a time in Jesus' ministry when He demonstrated impartial love.*

## Loving Impartially

Showing Jesus' love impartially has been my goal over the last 30 years in leadership as an educator. Recently, I received a confirmation from one of my teachers, who is now in leadership, that she learned the importance of showing impartial love through my example: "Thank you so much. In no small way, you inspired me when I worked with you. It was how you treated *all* of us with dignity. You showed us by example; by being fair, consistent and considerate."

► *Examine your actions toward people and ask God to show you if there is someone you are showing favoritism to at work or church because of their position. Ask the Spirit to teach you how to show impartial love to everyone you encounter.*

### KEY VERSE

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? —James 2:5, KJV

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? —James 2:5, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

November 30 through December 6

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 2—God's Anointed Ruler of All Nations.
- Tues.** Ephesians 1:1-14—Blessed and Chosen in Christ.
- Wed.** Ephesians 1:15-23—Christ, Head over All People/Things.
- Thurs.** Matthew 1:6-15—In the Family Line of David.
- Fri.** Hebrews 1:6-9—God Anoints Jesus King.
- Sat.** Hebrews 1:10-14—Jesus: Creator and Eternal Ruler.
- Sun.** Hebrews 1:1-5; Matthew 1:1-6, 16-17—Expectations of Jesus before His Birth.