



JAMES—A STUDY (PART FOUR)  
CHAPTER 2 VERSES 1 TO 9

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This is the fourth in a series of messages on the book of James. The previous messages can be found on our “Messages” page at [www.thewellhonduras.org](http://www.thewellhonduras.org)

*My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3and 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," 4have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5Listen, 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? 6But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. 9But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (James 2:1-9 NASB)*

*Do not hold your faith... with an attitude of personal favoritism...* In the first chapter of James we looked at real faith: trust in God based on contact with Him and expressed through obedience. Now James begins to give us instructions on how to correctly walk in that kind of faith; how to express that obedience. Obedience necessarily includes loving others. We are called to be part of the Body of Christ in which we love and are loved; and this means relationship with others. Additionally we are called to bring the gospel to the world around us through our words and example.

Within this relationship-based obedience, there can be no room for *personal favoritism*, otherwise known as prejudice. ‘Prejudice’ means an adverse judgment or opinion about someone, formed without adequate knowledge or examination of the facts. People are prejudiced against others due to their educational or economic level, the color of their skin, their nationality, their physical appearance, or a host of other external factors.

We don’t like it when someone judges us without knowing us, or without taking into consideration our character, and what we have and have not done. We should not treat others that way. James frames our responsibility thus: we should not allow our personal or cultural prejudices to affect our obedience to God in terms of our duty to love others.

As we see in James 2:2-4, one symptom of prejudice is favoritism: favoring one person above another without regard to merit or justice. The example given is prejudice between rich and poor. Obviously there are differences between people. One would have to be an idealist who never left his ivory tower to not recognize and acknowledge this. But to correctly recognize that there are differences between people does not mean we should then move into prejudice and adversely judge them based on those undeniable differences. For example, “That person doesn’t deserve respect because they are poor.” “That person can’t possibly be a servant of God because they are rich.”

To one degree or another, everyone is affected by prejudices, which begin in childhood and are reinforced throughout life, interfering with

DO YOU FEEL  
DISQUALIFIED?

our ability to see others with objectivity and reason. We entertain personal prejudices, based on past experiences (“I would never call a child Annie because at school someone called Annie was always horrible to me...”); and we entertain cultural prejudices (*Nathanael said to him, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* John 1:46 NASB) because every culture has its common prejudices, which sometimes give rise to the exclusion of certain groups from the fullness of social life. The fact that prejudice is an ill that is so deeply ingrained in fallen human culture is illustrated by the fact that Western cultures, in their desperate attempts to include the minority in public life, have in the very process succeeded in alienating and excluding other minorities or even majorities. Equally the massive rise in the popularity of Islam amongst the youth in the West can be somewhat attributed to its apparently “inclusive” nature – it’s open to everyone; but too often once a person has been ‘included’ they are then instructed in new forms of prejudice and hate. “You can’t please all the people all the time...,” hence a true end to prejudice can only be found with the change of heart that embraces God’s perspective on humankind.

THE CULTURE OF  
THE KINGDOM OF  
GOD—THE ONLY  
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James was addressing a culture where, in common with many third-world cultures today, great prejudice existed between rich and poor. Into this situation he brings the culture of the Kingdom of God; the only culture that as Christians we dare promote with abandon. *Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.* (Leviticus 19:15) Way back in the law of Moses, God established clearly His stance on prejudice. The culture of the Kingdom of God is this: His grace is for everyone that will accept it. People are to be judged based on their hearts. Everyone is to be respected.

But in our fallen human culture, any difference between people in terms of the externals of their life becomes willing prey for the formation of prejudice. Here are some examples of the differences on which cultural prejudice is commonly based: Economic situation; education; color or race (even within one nationality, prejudice exists based on the color of skin); nationality; gender; disability; success. I include ‘success’ because it is a very subjective thing, that is measured differently in different cultures, but which can lead to enormous prejudice. To give an example of its subjectivity as a criterion to judge people, how does one measure the success of a pastor? The size of his church? The number of books he has sold? His wealth? His poverty? These are all external things whereas God measures his ‘success’ based on one thing only- his obedience to the call he has received; and this is not measurable in human terms. Or if we want to take it right down to the wire, God doesn’t even measure his success. He measures Jesus’ success because that pastor is in Christ, and Christ is perfect... Do you see the futility of our human perspective when it comes to judging?

**O**f course there are differences between people. Thank God that not all are equal or the same! God is a God of creativity and variety; two of His invisible attributes that are so clearly and visually demonstrated in His creation. In the book of Revelation we are told that before His throne we will be worshipping with people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation... **God loves variety!** This indicates that in heaven we will retain the unique individuality of who God made us to be; and this will not be in any degree at the expense of the unity of the Bride of Christ. In God, and only in God, perfect individuality and perfect unity are possible at the same time. The Trinity is a perfect example: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so completely in unity that they are referred to as One, and yet so uniquely individual that they are routinely referred to as three separate people. They play different roles. One in Three and Three in One.

In a similar way, there are differences between people; God intended it this way, and as such people also have different roles. The wealthy man must answer to God for how he uses his wealth; the poor man must answer to God for how he trusts in God in the midst of his poverty. Those who have received a good education must use their knowledge in God’s service as broken men and women; those who have not received such an education must also use their abilities to serve Him with confidence in what His grace can achieve through them. As believers we must distinguish between the role that God has called a person to play, which varies, and the value that he or she has to God, which is constant from one person to the next.

Various governments have set out in a vigorous attempt to make all men equal. History is littered with the shipwrecks of their attempts, and the history books are filled with accounts of the terrible scars they left on their nations as all they succeeded in doing was to destroy the personality of their people and give birth to a new inequality. In the words of

George Orwell, "Everyone is equal, but some are more equal than others." Yes, terrible inequality existed before the various revolutions; but a new form of terrible inequality came about after, because the symptoms of the problem were attacked and not the root cause. The solution to prejudice is not in artificially imposed equality; it is in a deep recognition that there are and always will be differences between people; but that all have the same value to God, and the same opportunity to become His children and receive His grace. And hence all are to be treated with respect and to be loved. In as much as civil rights movements have corrected the heinous lack of respect shown to certain groups, they have served God's purposes; in as much as they have given rise to new forms of prejudice, they have served to underline the problem of the human condition without God.

**H**ave you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (James 2:4) We must not judge based on cultural norms, all of which focus on externals. If we do that, we place limits on our faith and thus on our obedience to God. Instead we must learn, as did the prophet Samuel, not to look on outward appearance, but rather on the heart (1 Samuel 16:1-13). We must learn, as the Sanhedrin did when faced with the intense courage and wisdom of Peter and John, that the most 'ignorant, unschooled' person can be mightily used by God, simply for having been with Jesus (Acts 4:5-13) And we must learn that when God commanded us to love our neighbor, he meant everybody, with absolutely no exceptions. Think of the prejudice that the Jews and the Samaritans felt towards each other; a deep, abiding distrust and even hatred. And for that very reason Jesus chose a Samaritan to assist the dying Jew in His parable, hence quietly smashing all imaginable cultural taboos of the time (Luke 10:25-37.) Who is your Samaritan? Who is your neighbor? We are called to be imitators of God as dearly beloved children. His grace is open to all; He looks not at the outward appearance but at the heart. We must learn to do the same.

*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?* (James 2:5) Can rich people also be rich in faith? Of course! God's grace is for all who will accept it; He does not favor the poor over the rich. But James is thoroughly dismembering and dismantling the cultural prejudice of his listeners. He's making it clear that God's grace in no way excludes the poor. What personal or cultural prejudices need dismantling in your life?

*But you have dishonored the poor man...* (James 2:6) The KJV reads, *But ye have despised the poor.* James was addressing the rich who had done just that. But some of his listeners were the poor themselves! They had despised themselves!

And this is the other major problem with prejudice. It is quite likely that at times you judge yourself wrongly! You judge yourself based on cultural expectations and external appearances, and this makes it hard for you to accept what God says about you in His word. You hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus with personal favoritism- in other words, your faith in God's love for you is damaged by your prejudice against yourself. "I'm so unattractive; I need someone to remodel my body..." "It's so hard for me to make friends, I'll have to do what the others want me to so they'll accept me, even if it goes against my principles..." "I'm not worthy of God's love because I'm poor/rich/black/white etc, etc..." "God could never really use me because..." You may never voice these things, but if they are in your heart, then you are despising yourself on one level or another, not accepting and certainly not valuing who God has made you to be. Like Moses, who argued with God about his supposed inability as a speaker. God did not take kindly to that. *Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11The LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12"Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.*" (Exodus 4:10-12 NASB) In other words, "Moses, I made you the way you are. I am proud of my creation and I don't appreciate you telling me I messed up. Now trust me and go; I will use you to do wonders!"

*Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?* (James 2:6-7) There are many poor who also blaspheme the fair name of Jesus Christ. James is not making the issue one of rich or poor. He's showing that none of these cultural norms and prejudices are acceptable for God. Rich or poor, it doesn't matter. What matters is a life surrendered to God.

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If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. <sup>9</sup>But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (James 2:8-9) James speaks of "the royal law." Earlier he spoke of "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ." This kind of language underlines that Jesus is the richest of all, and He does not despise the poor. We must see things His way.

*Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8,10 NASB) For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." (Gal 5:14 NASB) **There is only one law for believers: the law of love.** And the key to the law of love is this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. We love because He first loved us. You can only give what you have received. You must accept and receive God's love for you; thus you will be able to love yourself and others.*

Don't be prejudiced against yourself! "I have no hope... I'm poor... I haven't received a good education... I've failed too much... No-one appreciates me... I'm unattractive... I'm stupid..." No. You are a son or daughter of God, forgiven, accepted and loved. You must believe that in order to be able to love yourself. And you can't love your neighbor as you love yourself, until you love yourself.

Do you feel for some reasons disqualified from being able to enjoy all of God's grace and blessing? If so you are wrong. You must learn and choose to see yourself from God's perspective. His promises do apply to you, no matter your financial situation, your education or lack of it, your race, color, nationality, whether others think you're attractive or not, the mistakes of your past. And by God's blessing I'm not talking about getting rich. I'm referring to forgiveness peace and purpose both in this world and the world to come. That's what you really want. That's what you really need. **Take note, in spite of any mistakes you may have made**, God can do marvels in and through your life if you have a repentant heart.

**B**ut the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. <sup>16</sup>For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? but we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:14-16 KJV) We have to judge situations and at times people. As we have just read, God expects us to do this. But we must judge from God's perspective. *Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* (2 Corinthians 5:16-17) We mustn't judge people after the flesh, that is, from a worldly point of view. We have to see them as God sees them. We have to see Jesus Christ for who He really is, and we have to see ourselves as He sees us. We are new creations, forgiven, accepted, loved and free. Whether we feel like it or not. In this regard we must walk by faith and not by sight. We must love ourselves- and love is not primarily a feeling. It's a choice. If we do this, we will not walk in prejudice against ourselves or against others, and we will therefore not treat them wrongly.

God's grace is for all who want to accept it. He looks at the heart. Learn to judge by the Spirit. Look at others, and at yourself, from God's perspective. Acknowledge the reality of the person's external situation but also the reality of what God's grace has done in their life, or what God's grace can do in their life. Remember, faith means to hear God, trust Him, and obey: and we must walk in that kind of faith without allowing obstacles such as prejudice to hinder us.

Let me close with a couple of questions. Please answer them honestly before God. Have you been prejudiced against someone else or some other group? If so, you need to repent and start to see them from God's perspective. Have you personally felt disqualified from the abundant life in Christ due to your failures, something about how God made you or the situation he has permitted you to be in? Have you therefore judged yourself according to the flesh, from a human point of view? If so it's time to shake that off. If you will walk with God with an open heart, the best is yet to come. Amen.



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"IF ANYONE THIRST, LET THEM COME TO ME AND DRINK"- JESUS  
(JOHN 7:37)