JAMES 2:1-13

Sin of Partiality

Background: Constant Internecine Struggles
- Between Romans, Pharisees and Sadducees who all persecuted the Christians.

2:1-4 Inconsistency

“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 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. 3 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,” 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil though”

James starts with a prohibition not a question.
- The use of the word glorious referring to Jesus is unusual. The terms is probably being used by James to show that the human Jesus in now the Glorious One of God who has been shamed and is now exalted. Another wards he is the only one worthy of Glory not those to whom they are partial, the rich. He is the manifestation of God’s presence.
  - The title is used throughout the OT and NT.
  - 1 Samuel 4:22 God’s presence leaves Israel
    - “She named the boy Ichabod, saying, “The Glory has departed from Israel”—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. 22 She said, “The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”
  - 1 Peter 1:17 God honors the Son
    - “He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”
  - 1Cor 2:8 Christ destined for glory
    - “No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”
o The word synagogue and “comes into your meeting” probably describes a messianic worship services or a judicial court which is a Christian assembly gathered to pass justice on a dispute between two members. Most likely is a worship service.

Douglas Moo

“If we, as we think, the Christians to whom James is writes have been forced to leave Jerusalem and establish new homes in Syria and Northern Palestine, most of them would be facing tough financial situations as well as social dislocation and even ostracism.

But James wants them to look beyond their “worldly” situation and take pride in their high position. “Take pride” is a single greek verb that is used widely by Paul but no one else in the NT except James. The trajectory of the term is set decisively by the famous exhortation in Jer. 9:23-24.

“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.”

We also see the same description in 1:9-11

“Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. 10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.”

The reason to be humble 1:16-18

“Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.”

Three reasons why favoritism toward the rich and discrimination toward the poor are evil;

1. Such an attitude stands in contradiction to God’s own view of the poor.

Mark 10:35-45

2. Favoritism toward the rich shows a servile attitude for those who are actually persecuting the Christian community.

3. Favoritism violates the demand that we love our neighbor. Adds the command to love your neighbor to the Shema

   a. Deuteronomy 10:17-18, Leviticus 19:15

   Jesus combined these two OT passages
Scott McKnight

“When an expert in the Law of Moses asked Jesus for the greatest commandment, Jesus responded with the Shema, the ancient Jewish creed that commands Israel to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. But the next part of Jesus’ answer would change the course of history. Jesus amended the Shema, giving his followers a new creed for life: to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, but also to love others as themselves.

"'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.Leviticus 19:18

4“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7“You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9“You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4-9

2:2 Into this meeting come two people distinguished from each other by their dress.

1. One is wearing a gold ring and fine clothes.
   a. Gold ring can refer to the Roman equestrian class.
   b. Fine may be interpreted bright and shining and is applied to the clothes worn by heavenly beings. (Acts 10:30, Rev 15:6)

2. In contrast is the poor man in shabby clothes
   a. The word translated as shabby refers to characterize the sinful filth that Christians must put off.
   b. Luke 7:25 Speaking about John the Baptist
      i. “Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 25 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. 26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.””[b]
3. Compare God’s view of our own good works in Isaiah 64:6

   a. “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.”
   Also refer to James 1:9-11

2:3 The two men are probably visitors or new converts

   1. James shows how the Messianic community responds to the rich and the poor man. It is comparable to Jesus’s own words on the Pharisees in Matthew 23:6-7

      “**they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;** they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.”

2:4 The readers are now asked two questions.

   1. Have you not made distinctions among yourselves?
   2. Have you not become judges with evil thoughts?
   1. Have you not made distinctions among yourselves?

   a. There should be no distinctions between believers. Such divisions show a wavering of unity among members and a wavering of their view of God.

      i. Luke 6:20-26

      “Looking at his disciples, he said:
      “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now,
      for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
      22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil,
      because of the Son of Man. 23 “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.
      For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. 24 “But woe to you who are rich,
      for you have already received your comfort. 25 Woe to you who are well fed now,
      for you will go hungry.
      Woe to you who laugh now,
      for you will mourn and weep.
      26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,
      for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”
b. We need to watch how we speak of the poor
   i. James 3:9
   “With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God: (reference to Genesis 1:26-27)

2. Have you not become judges with evil thoughts?
   a. James is influenced by OT imagery. He refers to the evil thoughts involved in their favoritism and evil judgments.
      Lev 19:15-
      “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.”
   b. James also speaks about this later in chapter 4.
   c. James 4:11-12
      “Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor.”

Thus their evil thoughts and judgments are hurting the unity of the church for three reasons:
   a. They usurp the place of God
   b. They use a worldly standard honors wealth instead of humility
   c. They corrupt the minds of the Christians to presume to render judgment on God’s will for the community.

2:5-7 Interrogation

“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? 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? Are they not the ones who are blasphemying the noble name of him to whom you belong?” Favoritism toward the rich at the expense of the poor is wrong because (1) it contradicts God’s regard for the poor and (2) it makes no sense.

2:5 The command to Listen is James’ way of saying this is important and the implication is that what he is about to say is from God. This command has three imperatives: Attention, Absorption and Action

1. Attention – having ears that are open to God’s words by the power of the Holy Spirit.

   1 Corinthians 14:2 “For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.”
2. Absorption – when God’s people have ears that hear and also let his word fill their being.

I Kings 3:9 Solomon’s great prayer “So give your servant a hearing heart.”

- God did give Solomon “a wise and discerning heart” as shown in 3:12.

3. Action - Jesus calls his people to action.

Matthew 7:24 – “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and does them”

2:6 The greek word for poor that is used by James has two meanings. It can refer to those who are materially poor. But the word is also used to interpret a Hebrew word in the OT that has an added connotation for those who are poor in spirit.

Greek word antonym - Wealthy

Hebrew word antonym - Wicked

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 “Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.”

Douglas Moo

“God delights especially to shower his grace on those whom the word has discarded and on those who are keenly aware of their own inadequacy.”

James asks the question that aren’t the rich who the believers are showing such deference the ones who are actually persecuting them and taking them to court and persecuting them?

In Acts we see that Paul was such a person in Acts 9:1-2

“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”

The comparison here is a reference to may be to those wealthy people who attend the synagogue but also those who are not within the messianic community. James does not say don’t pay them any attention or compassion but he says do not show them deference over and above what they show the poor.

2:7 The wealthy referred to are also those who blaspheme the name of Christ. As in OT tradition and now in the Messianic community the name of God was sacred. The Christians have transferred the
name for God Yahweh to Jesus. Jesus predicted in Matthew 10 what is occurring in the early church and has continued to this day. That rich and powerful non-believers would exert social control to the point of violence over Christians is no surprise that Christians would still show them undue deference is what James condemns.

2:8-13 Instruction

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

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

The third reason that that favoritism is wrong is because it violates the “royal law” as communicated by Christ in his combining of Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to communicate the total demands God imposes on believers through Jesus. It is not enough to just love the Lord God with all your heart soul and might but now you must also lover your neighbor. Jesus expands the understanding of neighbor from just fellow believers but to everyone including Gentiles and the Poor.

Matthew 5:18-19

“For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Douglass Moo

“In obedience to their king, Jesus, Christians are to build among themselves a genuine counterculture, in which the values of the kingdom of God rather than the values of this world are lived out”.

“The law in question here not the OT law as such, but the OT law as reinterpreted and imposed by Christ on his followers”.

The law is now an implanted word written on our hearts that has the power to save us. Jesus has set believers free from the works of the Torah. Jews would not have expected that obedience has to be perfect because a way had been provided for forgiveness. (Yom Kippur-day of atonement) However James sets the same higher standard set by Jesus. James states they are now obligated to the law of liberty.
“Some of us should have been there with her.”

James Baldwin, author, civil rights activist

In 1957, 15-year-old Dorothy Counts was one of the four black students enrolled at various all-white schools in Charlotte, NC. This photo was taken on her walk to school on September 4.
The harassment started when the wife of the leader of the White Citizens Council, urged the boys to "keep her out" and at the same time, implored the girls to spit on her, saying, "spit on her, girls, spit on her."

More abuse followed that day. She had trash thrown at her while eating her lunch and the teachers ignored her. Her family received threatening phone calls and after four days of extensive harassment—which included a smashed car and having her locker ransacked, her father decided to take his daughter out of the school.

“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” James 8:12-13