

James 2:1-13

1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? 8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you 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 without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment (NRSV).

James holds to the theology that faith without action is faith that is dead. Your action comes from the love you have for God. James' concern is for the conviction of the believer; the moral character and the inner being. It is your attitude that determines your behavior. Faith in Jesus means that you will be living your life shaped by the words of Jesus. Your authenticity as a Christian is shown by how much you care. The world is not limited in its resources, with the infinite and renewable resources that God has gifted to us, we are to gift to each other.

James hits hard and challenges if we really believe. Our faith determines how we live and treat others. Faith dictates that we live without prejudice and no favoritism because the concept of loving your neighbor is the law. Being biased towards the rich contradicts the whole Christian experience. Your attitude and behavior is incompatible with your Christian faith when you demonstrate favoritism. The wealthy stranger comes in and his status is recognized instantly by his clothing. He is offered a seat of courtesy while the poor person is cast aside and has to sit on the floor. To the Christian, there is no oppression or special privilege; grace triumphs over judgment and love triumphs over prejudice.

To demonstrate how favoritism is a serious denial of faith, James points out three concepts. First of all, the scriptures show that God has special care and concern for the poor. They are honored by God and to dishonor those that are honored by God is a dishonor to God. The community of faith has to share the same preferences as God does, otherwise it would not be a community of faith. God's standards contrast the world's standards. People have to live up to their profession of faith as it is directly correlated to our treatment of others. If you refuse to help the poor, it is empty faith and inconsistent with the claim that we live by the love that is taught to us by Jesus. It is incompatible with the law of love. The second point is your own personal experiences. Think of the

way you have been treated by others, the times you have been oppressed. The third point is that demonstrating partiality is a sin. It is a violation of the will of God. Attending to the well to do is discrimination against poor and favoring one person over another is a sin and all sin is subject to the consequences. To demonstrate just how serious an offense this is, James links it to murder and adultery, and reminds us that we are accountable to God whenever we break the law.

The royal law is proclaimed by Jesus and prohibits partiality. It is God's law as demonstrated in **Leviticus 19:18** you shall love your neighbor as yourself (NRSV). The teaching is solid. It is from the Old Testament law and confirmed by Jesus Christ himself. If you fail one commandment, you fail the whole law. If you claim to live by the law but practice discrimination, then you have broken the law. Transgression from the law goes against the lawgiver. Discrimination goes against the law of love. It is incompatible. James calls upon us to live the Christian life. Faith in God and love for God cannot be separated from the way a neighbor is being treated.

Maybe you have been judged by others because of your appearance. Maybe you know firsthand the pain discrimination. It is inconsistent with the Christian faith. As we are challenged daily to live out our faith in the wholeness and integrity of a Christian life may our behavior be consistent behavior that is aligned with our convictions of our faith. Jesus calls us to follow the law of love. The royal law is to love your neighbor as yourself.