

Equality In Christ (lesson #3)

James 1:9-11; 2:1-13

Prejudice: the prejudgment of another without having sufficient information to form a fair & just opinion.

The Declaration of Independence states that all men are created equal. Our government has enacted various laws to insure the civil rights of all American citizens, yet it is impossible to have any society wholly free of prejudice.

As long as people have varying abilities, opportunities & conditions in their environment, there will be those who attempt to gain an advantage because of these differences, whether appealing for special attention from others, or whether attempting to dominate & control others.

There is truly only one place where all men are truly equal, i.e., in the church or body of Christ. However, even relationships in Christ can be corrupted by the general attitudes of society.

The Holy Spirit does not insist on a communistic form of equality among Christians, but He does command that such differences not be the basis of prejudice.

Read (**1:9-11**) – This is one of the most common reasons for distinctions among men (**1 Cor 1:26; Col 3:22; Acts 4:34-37; 21:8**).

1. Who is the brother of low degree, & how is he exalted?

He is not the rich man. **He** is poor with regard to worldly treasures. **He** may be prone to view himself as a failure & without any value to anyone. **But** a poor man “in Christ” should see himself much differently.

- 1) Loved & exalted by God (**Jn 3:16; Lk 4:16-21**)
- 2) Important to the world (**Matt 5:6; 28:19-20**)
- 3) He is exalted spiritually (**Rom 8:16-17; Eph 1:3**)

2. How is the rich brother brought low?

He is to realize that his high social standing & economic level is only temporary—like the sun dried grass & the fading of the flowers.

Why is he to glory in his humiliation?

There is joy in learning the truth about something...

- 1) Material riches cannot buy spiritual security
- 2) Fellowship with God cannot be bought with wealth, but it is available to all.
- 3) God is in control, we are merely His stewards ([Matt 6:19-20](#); [Gal 6:6-10](#)).

3. What is the point of verses 9-11?

Whether poor or rich, God will eventually put us all on equal footing.

But even when the rich & poor come to see themselves as God sees them & both submit their minds to the Truth, *there may still be a problem caused by how others treat them*—some will be tempted to show partiality & favoritism toward one over the other.

Read ([2:1-13](#))

4. Upon what basis were they showing “respect of persons” (2:2-3)?

External physical characteristics.

But why?

What might they have concluded from his appearance?

5. In what ways might we be showing partiality?

Refusing friendship with a fellow Christian on the basis: race or ethnicity – what part of town they live in – where they work, etc. (Gal 2:11-14).

6. What was the problem in dealing with these two men?

The seating arrangement; the church did not want to draw attention to this one by seating him in front or taking a seat away from someone more “important” & well-dressed.

{Keep in mind that there was no large middle class. Roman rule endorsed a very strict caste system.}

One’s motive is important when we consider the style of their dress:

- 1) Are they being rebellious?
- 2) Are they ignorant with regard to propriety & moderation?
- 3) Are they doing the best with what they have?

Expensive clothing can be worn to flaunt society.

Inexpensive clothing can be worn to flaunt carelessness & selfishness.

7. What is the sin in this problem (2:1, 3, 4)?

- 1) They were “hold[ing] the faith...with partiality (the Author of the faith is impartial Rom 2:11; Col 3:25; Mark 12:13-14; Luke 15:1-2; John 4:6-9).
- 2) They were “paying attention” to one over another.
- 3) They were making “evil” judgments.

8. How were they treating the poor (2:6)?

“Dishonored” – to treat with disdain, contempt, unworthy of esteem.

What are other ways we may be guilty of dishonoring the poor?

- 1) Snide, sarcastic remarks intended to belittle them.
- 2) Refuse them the gospel.
- 3) Or don't encourage them once they do accept the gospel.

How should they be treated?

With **“love”**, respect & honor considering their exalted position in Christ.

Is it always true that the poor are rich in faith (5)?

Only for those who “love Him [God]” (2:5; see also 1 Cor 1:26-31)

9. Why shouldn't the rich be given special honor (2:6-7)?

That class usually was the ones responsible for their persecutions.

10. What is the “worthy” or “noble” name (2:7)?

The name of Christ or “Christian” (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet 4:14-16)

11. What is the “royal law”, & why is it so called (2:8)?

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”

By showing partiality & favoritism we violate the Royal Law, which is Royal because of He Who gave it, & He is our Royal King & He is not a respecter of persons (Matt 7:12).

(Lev 19:15, 18; Deut 1:17; 16:19; Matt 22:39; 7:12)

It is easy to skirt this law. **The** Jews of Jesus’ day were proficient at getting around this law by carefully choosing their neighbors. **The** synagogue system helped to solidify their choices.

Jesus taught the parable of the good Samaritan in order to prepare men for the kingdom of God (Lk 10:25-37).

12. Why is the “royal law” mentioned in this context of scripture (2:9)?

Because by violating this law they themselves were convicted sinners, & worse off than the ones they had violated through prejudice.

13. What makes one a “transgressor of the law” (2:9)?

A single violation (see for an OT example: Gal 3:10)

The Jewish concept of the law of God was that it was a series of isolated injunctions. **To** keep one was to gain credit, & to break one was to incur debt (similar to accounting principles).

The law of God is one great whole. **To** break any part of it is to fall under its condemnation. **The** law is like a string of pearls when broken or a seamless garment.

The same authority is behind every law of God. **A** man is a criminal in society when he violates even one law, so it is with the law of God.

14. What do verses 12-13 suggest was their problem?

They misunderstood the “law of liberty”, as many do today.

They had forgotten the “mercy” that had been shown to them when first coming to Christ, which “mercy” would be withheld from them at the judgment seat of Christ.

15. What is the meaning of “mercy triumphs over judgment” (2:13)?

The Christian who shows mercy has nothing to fear when God judges him, for God will show him mercy (Parable of the unmerciful servant - [Matt18:21-35](#)),

We must be merciful in that we must not be partial in our treatment of anyone, especially our brethren.