

Sunday Feb. 7, 2021  
Lesson 10: Dealing With One Another  
Scripture: James 2: 1-13

**Context:**

Our series continues to focus on God's hope for humanity and a new sub theme: dealing with hypocrisy and holiness. For the next few weeks, we will explore how we are called to lives of holiness and to avoid the confines of hypocrisy. The first lesson comes from the book of James as we commit to learning how to treat others fairly and impartially.

The book of James is full of practical instruction in the life of the church. The authorship has historically been attributed to James, the biological brother of Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary. However, this becomes hard to prove as the careful, well-schooled Greek style of the book was probably not composed by a Galilean craftsman.<sup>1</sup> We do know Jesus's brother James was attributed as an early church leader in Jerusalem (Gal. 2: 1-14), and he was involved in multiple conversations concerning those who could and could not come into the ecclesial community.

The style of writing found in James does give us a glimpse into authorship. The style of exhortation follows conventions of Hellenistic school rhetoric, such as replies to imaginary interlocutors (diatribe) and the use of rare or elegant terms.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the author appears to be a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian who understands the significance of religion to worship of God and a commitment to superior moral conduct.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of proof if the author is indeed James, the brother of Jesus, we see the tradition deriving from James sending a letter to the churches in Syria setting the conditions for admitting Gentiles to the community.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, James was in communication with those in the early church as they discerned their identity.

This section in the letter deals with partiality and deference. Because of Christ, the author asserts we are to treat others fairly and impartially. To show preference to the rich causes disunity and distresses the community. After using an example of a well dressed person and poorly dressed person and how the poor treatment of the latter leads to judgment and partiality, the author moves to their main point.

If deference is paid to the rich, then problems will come about in the church. Dishonor will be shown to the poor and as the Christians act like those who have

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<sup>1</sup> PHEME PERKINS, "First and Second Peter, James, and Jude," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

oppressed them, they become no different than the world.<sup>5</sup> Thus, religious leaders are to insist on the equality of all persons as children of God as found in the law of love. Mercy triumphs all.

### **Application**

Treating others fairly and impartiality sounds so wonderful on paper doesn't it? We love the idea of everyone receiving what they are due with fairness and judicious process. There is a reason we stress to children to be fair to others. The dangers of partiality and unfairness present themselves time and time again throughout history and today. When people are given preference without logic and reason, trouble abounds.

I am particularly glad the author uses the example of favoritism when it comes to those who are wealthy and those who are poor. Often, we think in the western world of wealth as a mark of achievement. Our country values capitalism and how more money means you can buy things.

However, it is not just things money can buy you. Having money can also lead us to believe we can use our wealth for entitlement and privilege. As much as our country would like to say we have escaped the feudal tendencies of Europe, we have recreated it in our own society.

We see it even in the local church. While there are many incredible wealthy individuals who follow Jesus with all their hearts, there are others who use their wealth to live lives antithetical to the gospel. They threaten not to pay their tithe or apportionments unless the pastor makes the decisions they like or the conference gives them the clergy they want. They ignore the United Methodist polity and procedures of handling conflict as found in scripture, believing wealth entitles them to ignore the rules. In their minds, they are special because they are wealthy and it means they can do whatever they want. Just as James states, they cause unnecessary conflicts and do not reflect the call of the gospel.

Overcompensated clergy are no different. They use their money to live lives some of their own church members cannot live. They forget those who are entrusted to their care, particularly those who are vulnerable and perhaps without means. They lead lives of privilege, also believing the rules do not pertain to them.

To show deference to the wealthy and to give in to any group at the expense of the entire community of Christ does not fulfill the law of love we are given by our Lord. As James elaborates, when we show favoritism or deference, we slip into the ways of the world and forget we belong to one another. Once we begin to cater or show impartiality, it becomes a slippery slope. We begin to commit sins and the truth is hidden by back room deals and conversations where people are left out. As we do those things, the world watches. And as we do those things we also hurt those within our community. We forget who we are and what we have been called to do as followers of Jesus. We forget we have been made one in Christ.

We are a people who have been redeemed by God. As such we are to order our lives as showing mercy and care for all. We are called to treat others fairly and as impartially as we are able to do so. Both the rich and the poor are those who are given to our community and we are to love them equally. Just as God has been merciful to us, we

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 111.

are called to be merciful to others, to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Why is it sometimes hard not to show partiality to those who are wealthy? What do you think happens when we treat others unfairly? How do you think deference and partiality can lead to problems within the church? Why do think following Jesus includes “being rich in faith”? How does this give hope to those around the world?

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