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“If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well” (James 2:8).

Faith Loves Without Prejudice

Central Truth: Prejudice is inconsistent with Christianity.

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Topic: Faith: Of Believers; Race Relations.

There are many forms of prejudice: racial, religious, cultural, social, political, professional, academic, and the list could go on. This study emphasizes that *“God is no respecter of persons”* (Acts 10:34). There is no prejudice in Him.

In New Testament times, the Jews had great prejudice against the Gentiles. It took a special revelation of God for Simon Peter to drop his Jewish prejudice and witness of Jesus to a Gentile (Acts 10). Even then, the Jewish/Christian church in Jerusalem called Peter to account because he went to a Gentile (Acts 11).

It is natural for each of us to accept people like us and to reject those who differ from us. It is “natural,” I say, but we are not “natural” in Christ. We are not “in the flesh” but “in the Spirit,” because the Spirit of Christ indwells us (Romans 8:9). We look upon people from a spiritual viewpoint, not a natural one. There is no place for any prejudice in the life of a Christian. We must accept anyone Jesus accepts. That is what we are taught in James 2:1-13. To exercise prejudice means to prejudge, and God forbids us to do that.

Grace and Prejudice (James 2:1)

The grace which God has extended to us requires us to extend grace to others. God was not prejudiced toward us in extending His grace. We must

not be prejudiced to others in showing His grace.

Grace establishes family relationships. James calls his readers “my brethren.” Since each has God as his heavenly Father, each is a brother or sister to the other. “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God*” (Ephesians 2:19). How could I look with prejudice and rejection upon my brother or sister in the flesh? I could not. Then how could I look with such a spirit upon a brother or sister in the Lord? The grace of God excludes prejudice from the heart of the Christian.

Grace centers in the Savior. He is “*our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory*” (verse 1). Prejudice is alien to Jesus' nature. He called as one of His followers a man who was excluded from the “polite society” of the day (Luke 5:27-32). He went to that man's home when “good” people condemned Him for it. He made that man a disciple, an apostle, and the Holy Spirit gave the first of our four Gospels through him. His name was Levi (changed by our Lord to Matthew). The very fact that Jesus received sinners (Luke 15:2) was proof that there was no prejudice in Him.

Grace casts out prejudice. Grace may be misapplied if we look at people “*with respect of persons*” (verse 1). To show “*respect of persons*” means to receive a person by the way he appears—color of skin, age, beauty or lack of it, and other external differences between us. Such a spirit is strictly forbidden by our Lord in the words of James 2:1. Who sets the standard by which we judge one another? We are to “*observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality*” (I Timothy 5:21). To do otherwise is to sin against God by willful disobedience.

Grace leaves us no choice. We must look upon every human as being in the image and likeness of God, worthy of our respect.

Wealth and Prejudice (James 2:2-7)

Not all prejudice is racial though that has always been a major problem in human relations. Some prejudice (even in the church) may be based on wealth. No person should be received or rejected because of how much wealth he controls.

Wealth may be recognized and respected (verse 2). It is a gift from God who gives us the ability to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18; Ecclesiastes 5:19). But wealth does not commend a person to God; neither does poverty exclude anyone from God. We thank God for the prosperity of some of His children. But they are no more precious to Him than the rest of us.

Wealth may be honored beyond its due (verses 3, 4). To honor a wealthy person and disdain a poorer person is strictly forbidden in the Holy Scriptures. Those who welcome a well-dressed person into church but wish the shabbily dressed person would go elsewhere are “*partial*” in themselves, and have become “*judges of evil thoughts.*” Such people judge by false standards and become critics with evil motives. Beware!

Wealth does not recommend a person to God. “*Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?*” (verse 5). The person whom God has chosen, who is rich in faith and an heir to the kingdom of God, must be respected. Jesus told of a rich man who died and suffered in hell and of a poor beggar who was comforted in Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:19-31). God never receives or rejects on the basis of earthly wealth; neither must the children of God.

Wealth may be ill-gotten and misused (verses 6, 7). James asked three questions: “Have not the rich used you to better themselves? Have not the rich dragged you into court for their own gain? Have not the rich slandered the name of your Savior?” His readers had to answer yes to each question. They had experienced that. Why, then, should one think that God receives a person just because he is rich? That does not mean that all rich people are wicked. Many of God's choice saints are quite wealthy. The point is that money neither recommends a person to God or excludes him from God.

Law and Prejudice (James 2:8-13)

God set mankind under human government because each person can govern everything except himself. Human beings live under a system of laws which regulate their behavior in society. But there is a law that is supreme over all human regulations. It is called “*the royal law*” in James 2:7. And that royal law makes prejudice unlawful.

It is a “*royal*” law because it is given from the King of all kings. And it is a “*royal*” law since it rules over all other laws. Two things are evident in that royal law.

The royal law demands love. “*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*” (verse 8). To love God above all and one's neighbor as himself is more than all sacrifices ever offered (Mark 12:28-31).

The royal law forbids prejudice. “*If ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors*” (verse 9).

Prejudice is present when the law of love is not practiced. Prejudice is the very opposite of the law of love; it is sin. Christians are not justified in breaking any of God's law, particularly not the law to love as Jesus loves. That royal law is the standard by which we will be judged in the last day (verses 12, 13).

Prejudice is learned. Be mindful of what influence your attitude has upon those near you. Others can be prejudiced against you the same as you can be prejudiced against them. Many foreign missionaries report suffering prejudice from the very people to whom they would minister. The Christian principle is to love everyone Jesus loves and refuse no one whom Jesus would receive.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is *prejudice*?
2. In what areas can prejudice be seen?
3. How does Acts 10:34 speak against prejudice?
4. What does "*respect of persons*" mean?
5. How does grace forbid prejudice?
6. How might wealth arouse prejudice?
7. What is the "*royal law*" by which Christians are to live?
8. How does the "*royal law*" condemn prejudice?
9. How might foreign missionaries experience prejudice?
10. How can you be free from prejudice?