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Sunday School Lesson

TOPIC:

“No Respect of Persons”

James 2:1-13

VERSE DISCOVERY: James 2:1-13 (KJV, Public Domain)

Prepare

- Draw a straight line, like a number line you would use in math, with points in between. Write your name on one end and on the other end, someone or something that appears to be far different from you (example: a funny cartoon character, an object, etc.). On the points in between, starting from the far outer edges of each and working your way to the middle, write different things about yourself and different things about your opposing character, object, or whatever you chose. By the time you meet in the middle, you may find that there are some similarities that do not make you quite so different after all.

For instance, I can put myself on one end and a table on the other end. Starting at each outer point for myself I can put I have skin, and the table has wood. Next, I am alive, and the table is not. Then, I can put I am soft, but on the table's side I can write that it is hard. After stating some obvious differences, I can start to put some similarities such as I have legs and the table has legs. The table holds things up and I can support things, too. At this point, we have reached the middle area.

Here's the point: we may not all be alike, but if we look a little deeper at one another and make it a point to love a little harder we may find out that we have more in common than what tries to separate us. Therefore, we should treat each other fairly and with love and compassion.

- **Opposites Attract.** We may not all look alike or have the same social standing and background, but we can all still love one another right where we are because that is what Jesus did for each of us. Do an online search for an “**Opposites Attract**” object lesson to use as a lead-in for this lesson.

Explore – Full Lesson Available on pages 6-11

Love the Inner Man More

“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.” James 2:1

In our world and in our human thinking, it is easy to look at people and size them up according to what we perceive. Sin has marred humanity. Beautiful people made by a beautiful God have, since the beginning of time, been judged, ridiculed, and treated unfairly by how they look or what they do or do not have.

The church is to be uniquely different because we serve, worship, and follow a uniquely different God. The way He views people is how we should view them. When He looks at an individual, His inspection is more centered on the heart they possess than the possessions that grab their heart.

Each person is created, in love, according to God's perfect plan (Psalm 139:14), but God loves the inner man most. This is where his mind operates. This is where his heart beats in time with His Creator. This is where he holds all those special treasures of who he really is. It is the inside that most do not see. But it is the inside God sees the most, and He sees it perfectly.

Our world has obscured our vision of one another. Rather than loving, we judge. Rather than helping, we condemn. Rather than welcoming, we shun.

This is not how it is supposed to be. Christ did none of those things when He walked this earth and interacted with people. Those who others felt were not worthy, Jesus made them know they were worthy. Those who others did not want around; Jesus opened His space for them to draw near to Him. Those who others counted out, Jesus let them know they belong, they are important, they are special, and they are loved.

Much hurt has been experienced in this world, but through a loving Savior, redemption came near to deliver us. As such, those who have experienced this release from bondage, should in turn show the same love to others they received themselves. This is the gist behind James' teaching in this lesson. Then, and now, people for too long have been judged by the outside. Today, we are called to do something different. We are called to love like our Father loves. We are called to focus on and love the inner man more.

Activities

- Use the **Blank Journal Pages** provided on-site, these pages, one designed for adults and one for children, can be used to bring out, remember, or write about a particular part of the lesson you wish for you and/or your class to focus on.
- In the **Draw the Scene** section found on-site, students can draw a picture of themselves and their best friend. Note, you might be alike in some ways and in some ways you may be different. But, none of that matters in the eyes of God because He loves them both the same.
- **Unity Craft:** Use my **Outlines Peoples Template** (found on-site) to trace out a **Unity Chain** of people. Print the template onto cardstock and cut it out. Use the template as a tracing pattern on any paper you choose to make your chain of people, as long as you want it to be. Then, cut it out and decorate to represent many people from all walks of life. Or, you can use them as shown in the **Better Together Craft** found on-site. Just decorate your people however you wish.
- **Try Me on for Size Shoe Game:** This is an interesting game I came up with. Pile everyone's shoes in a pile in the middle of the room. Take a blindfolded volunteer to rummage through the shoes and try to put on the first shoe they pick up. While still blindfolded ask does it fit? Is it too big or too small? What can you tell about this person who wears this shoe, and so on? Literally, they are putting themselves in another's shoes. Teach them this is how James wants us to relate to others. We are to go beyond what we think we see and consider individuals a little more closely. Then, give another student a chance to go. When the new volunteer is blindfolded, mix the shoes up, and start again, giving everyone a turn.
- Alternate activity sheets are available for those who just want to work with printed materials such as **Memory Verse, Word Search, and more.**

Review

- Commit to memory the base verse from the lesson: ***"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." James 2:1***
- Fill out the review sheet provided (page 12)
- Do an online search of any Bible review game to reinforce the lesson.

Life

Take time throughout this week to be extra mindful of others. Put yourself in another's shoes and purposely look with a new perspective through the eyes of someone else. The Bible encourages us to, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

TOPIC:

"No Respect of Persons"

James 2:1-13

VERSE DISCOVERY: James 2:1-13 (KJV, Public Domain)

We all remember those playground days when the team captains stood in the front of the group declaring in order the people that were worthy to be on their team. One by one they would call out the names, from the greatest to the least that would help them win the game. Sometimes this decision was not made on ability so much as favoritism. Some in the crowd dared not look up, afraid of the desperation showing in their eyes of not being called last again.

This playground mentality humiliated some for the benefit of others, something James would not let Christians get away with in the church.

In light of one verse that says, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Is. 64:6a), how would we feel if God look at our sin-stained stated and judged us unworthy to receive His favor? Let's get into this lesson so that we may learn to appreciate all that God has done for us and that we might learn to express kindness toward one another by not yielding to the unfair preference of some while willfully neglecting others.

FAVORITISM IS NOT ALLOWED

James 2:1 "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons."

"Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . with respect of persons." Let us view our **"faith"** in light of what it really is. We were no good before Christ or had any goodness of our own to speak of or rely on. We have no righteousness of our own, Philippians 3:9. Our world before our faith in Christ is described as "dead in trespasses and sin," (Eph. 2:1). We were not fit for a heavenly home.

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But, “He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification,” (Rom. 4:25). Christ is He “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on a tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed,” (1 Pet. 2:24). Knowing what He did for us and where He brought us from, we are commanded not to use our faith as an occasion to have **“respect of persons.”** One is not to use their time of assembling together to belittle some and exalt others through outward appearing preferences of whom we count worthy or not.

James 2:2-4 “For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”

That word **“partial”** speaks of prejudice. Prejudices come in all shapes and forms. Regardless of how it comes, it seeks to pass judgment on another based on what one sees or perceives on the outside without knowing the person, their inside story, or their situation.

In this lesson, **“partial”** or the prejudices that are spoken against revolve around the unfavorable preference for those who are rich over those who were poor.

“Goodly apparel” versus **“vile raiment.”** These were the precursors James is addressing by which men **“become judges of evil thoughts.”** Outward appearances became the criteria by which one determines where one is worthy to be seated. If this is the case, then those to whom James is writing can themselves be classified as one who shows that in their way of thinking they are **“then partial in yourselves.”** A wrong spirit of dividing and categorizing people based on a superficial standard dwell in them.

It is so easy, by human standards, to fall into the trap of viewing with the eyes and judging one’s status. This is called “stereotyping,” when one thinks they know you by how you appear on the outside and places you in a certain category and determines for themselves, based on nothing else, that is where you belong.

Even the prophet Samuel fell into this dangerous mindset in searching for the next king of Israel. Judging by the mighty men before him, one of these, all appearing to fit the outer criteria, had to be the one. God rebuked such notions and told him, “Look not on his

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countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart," (1 Sam. 16:7).

With such a profound biblical example of exactly what James is teaching, let us take heed to this warning found in Leviticus 19:15 where it says, "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, no honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor." Our fair and just God wants us to mimic His holy character and treat others fairly without personal preferences.

Our faith is founded in Christ, who Himself said, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment," (Jn. 7:24). Place seating, such as was the case that James is confronting, according to "**goodly apparel**" versus "**vile raiment**" is judging "according to appearance." It is sizing people up according to what they can afford to buy or do for another.

This is unjust thinking. God wants equal opportunity Christians for God Himself shows no partiality, Romans 2:11. His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, came and died so that the whole world, not just some specific groups who others count worthy, might be saved, John 3:16. When one goes against His basis of salvation and is biased in showing partiality according to what is seen on the outside of a man, they "**become judges of evil thoughts.**"

FULFILL THE ROYAL LAW

James 2:5 "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?"

"Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?" Jesus once taught, "The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment" (Luke 12:23). Yet, these temporary things are what people strive for the most to achieve. One can have all the treasures in the world and "is not rich toward God," (Luke 12:21). These persons shall never inherit His "**kingdom**" in that coming day.

Those whose boast is in their material wealth, those whose pride rests in all they have acquired, are lacking the most important thing to enter that kingdom: a "**love**" relationship with "**Him**." Revelation 3:17 shows how the accumulation of things will never satisfy that holy

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requirement: "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

In other words, according to the world's system of judging success, these individuals thought they have what it takes to enter that "**kingdom**." Yet, they were really the ones who lacked the most. Jesus' instructions were, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich..." (Rev. 3:18). Jesus is and has been proven to be the only way to enter that "**kingdom**" and He wants people to depend on a "**love**" relationship with Him, not material possessions.

Matthew 5:3 tells us, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Those that recognize their depravity are prone to be more dependent on the grace of another, be it in the natural or spiritual. The natural poor have nothing great to boast of, no apparent accumulation of goods and accolades to give just cause to receive favor. The same is true for the spiritually poor. These are usually the ones marked as being "**rich in faith**" because they depend on what God can do and has done for them, and not their own selves or riches.

James 2:6-7 "But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?"

James really drew his readers in to really examine their unjust actions. Their inequality of treatment toward the "**poor**" was wrong and they did their fellow man a great disservice by despising them. This treatment of being "**despised**" for their lack goes beyond just making them feel rejected; rather, through their preference of the rich they are showing hatred toward the "**poor**."

To James, this made no sense because it is the rich who are always at enmity with them. He questions them, "**Do not the rich oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?**" This, to him, was all backward thinking.

Those in power and authority often act with great contempt toward the common man and sometimes toward God also, thinking their status in life affords them special privileges above others. They would "**oppress**" their fellow man and take them to court, using their wealth to gain favor not normally available to the poor.

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If you will allow me to paraphrase, James said, “Not in here. Not in the church.” This is a place for all humanity to humbly submit in worship before the Lord and there is no partiality allowed. When they come into this building, the only thing that matters is what the inner man possesses, and not their outward possessions.

James 2:8-9 “If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.”

“If ye fulfill the royal law according to scripture.” One day, a lawyer thinking to trip Jesus up on His words, asked, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Mt. 22:36). Jesus took no time in answering him and immediately said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment,” (Mt. 22:37-38).

But Jesus did not stop there. This was a prime teaching opportunity to let them know how they treat people matters, also. So, He went on to say, “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thy self” (Mt. 22:39), words James also reminds them of.

Treat people as you yourself would want to be treated. The Bible tells us “God is love” (1 John 4:8), therefore, those that belong to Him should operate in love also. Love is an energy that supplies the deepest crevices of man, filling a longing that has been present since the time of conception. Everybody wants to be loved, no matter their status in life, and the church should be a supply source of His great love.

“But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin.” In Matthew 22, when Jesus listed these two greatest commandments He also stated, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets,” (vs. 40). How we treat people really does matter. Showing **“respect”** to one who seems to be more affluently endowed could cause unfair actions toward those who are not, thereby committing sin.

Think about it. One of the greatest commandments spoken by our Lord was focused on how we treat others. To go against that grain of the love that He lived and died for is to go against Him. When one chooses to side with the rich (or any unjust group), they choose to partake in the characteristic of oppression that exudes from that individual.

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James 2:10-11 “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.”

Sin is sin! If one treats his fellow man wrong in any of the ways the Word of God lists, he is just as guilty as if he had committed any other sin. Therefore, he is teaching Christians to avoid it. Don't do it. Do not behave in or mimic these practices. It is not just an unpleasant way of acting - it is sin!

One can cross every “T” and dot every “I” of the law, but if **“they offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”** “All unrighteousness is sin,” exclaims 1 John 5:17. If it goes against God's commands, it is sin no matter how small or large we may view it. “For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee,” the psalmist said in Psalm 5:4. God hates all sin, Psalm 11:5.

MERCY RECEIVES MERCY

James 2:12-13 “So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”

One day judgment is coming and how we treated others will come back on us. If no **“mercy”** was shown toward one's fellow man than don't expect **“mercy”** for yourself, James taught. In other words, he was teaching them the same way they judged whether one was worthy to sit here or there is the same way they will be judged. “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,” (Mt. 7:2). All decisions have repercussions. Measure for measure, payday is coming. There are eternal rewards or judgments for how we treat one another.

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James 2:1-13

Please Answer the Review Questions Below

1. **T** or **F**. Jesus was teaching this week's lesson.
2. "My _____, have not the faith of our Lord... with respect of persons." (James 2:1)
A. Church **B.** Friends **C.** Brethren **D.** None
3. How were the two people in this story different? Why did it matter to some?

4. What do the words "**Respect of Persons**" mean?

5. When one judges people based on outward appearances, according to the lesson they are "_____ in yourselves. (James 2:4)
A. Partial **B.** Righteous **C.** Weary **D.** None
6. **T** or **F**. The people were showing preference for the very ones who oppressed them. (James 2:6)
7. Explain, according to the Word of God, what is the "**Royal Law**" (James 2:8). What steps can you personally take to make sure it is being done in your own life?

