

Make A Righteous Judgment
James 2: 1-9

As we continue along in our letter from James, we see how he - much like Paul in his letter to Timothy - is delivering guidelines and rebukes intended to show the church how to put their faith into real, regular practice in their everyday lives.

You'll recall that James is writing to believers that have fled Israel to escape persecution. These are people in new towns, new jobs, and are looking to 'settle in' and integrate in their new homes and social circles.

In the previous chapter, James has been speaking in metaphors as he gives encouragements and exhortations. But now he begins to get into specifics. Starting here and continuing through the rest of the epistle, James delivers some pointed examples which are intended to hit home with strong conviction.

Before we begin, however, we need to take a moment to mark exactly what sort of judgment James has in mind. We don't want to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater' and say believers aren't to exercise any sort of discernment whatsoever. For example,

Consider that the same Lord who indeed said in Luke 6

"Judge not, and you shall not be judged" (v36)

... is also that same Jesus who says in John 7:

“Do not judge according to appearance, but make a righteous judgment.”

... and so we hear from Christ Himself that there is a **righteous** way we are to judge.

The Scriptures show God expects us to judge **between right and wrong**, as from the warning in Isaiah 5:20:

*“Woe to those who call evil ‘good,’ and good ‘evil,’
who put darkness for light, and light for darkness!”*

The Scriptures show we are to judge **our own conduct** in comparison to the revealed will and word of God. In 1 Cor 10, Paul lists a number of ways the Israelites strayed from God in the wilderness, holding them as specific examples, after which he exhorts:

“... all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition ...

*“Therefore, let him who thinks he stands **take heed** - lest he fall.” (v11-12)*

And, for one last example (again from 1 Cor,) we know that we as a body are to **hold one another to a standard of Godly conduct**. Paul speaks of the church making this distinction between the unsaved and the saved as he says:

“What have I to do with judging those who are outside?

Do you not judge those who are inside?

But those who are outside, God judges.” (1 Cor 5:12-13)

These are all proper, Scripturally-regulated ways we as Christians encourage and support one another as we grow and conform to the image of Christ, both singly and as a body. We are accountable to one another, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, and so we must 'judge' ourselves as individuals and as a church, so that it may never be said of us:

"Do you dishonor God through breaking the law?

For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.' "

(Romans 2:24)

But these are not the 'judgments' that James is speaking of in today's passage.

It's very telling that he leads the charge with the sin of prejudice. You see, later on James speaks of hypocrisy, of boasting, of cursing, of worldliness - but these all are built upon the foundation he lays out now. James is going to use prejudice to hold a mirror up as he shows us four truths about the sinful judging of prejudice - and about ourselves as well.

You'll see them on your bulletin on the right hand side, so follow along with me as we go through and see first in verses 1 through 4 that:

1) Judging is incompatible with Christian faith - and evil

Next verse 5 shows how:

2) Judging conflicts with God's opinion of 'the poor'

James takes aim at the sophisticated by using verses 6 and 7 to point out how:

3) Judging shows hypocrisy and a lack of reason

And lastly in verses 8 and 9 he calls us all to account, using the words of Christ Himself to confirm that:

4) Judging denies the truth - while love fulfills the Law

So let's begin with James' first point, again,

1) **Judging is incompatible with Christian faith - and evil**

James states in verse 1 (read)

For his example, James speaks in contrasts. Into the meeting first comes a man : "*with gold rings, in fine apparel.*" Aside from the obvious sign of personal wealth, a gold ring held additional meanings for his readers. Recall in Genesis 41 how Joseph was given a signet ring by Pharaoh as a symbol of office. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, we see the father placing a ring on his son's finger in an act of acceptance, showing that he is once again "in the family."

So, then, a man with gold rings - multiple rings, notice - is a man displaying wealth, showing a position of high authority, indicating a heritage in a family of means and influence.

How does the congregation react? We read that in the first half of verse 3 (read)

Hidden here is a minor detail with big implications. You see, in synagogues of Jesus' day, benches were 'reserved' for important people. The rabble had to fight for a seat in the back - or stand along the side walls. The poor, the unsavory, they get sent to the back of the bus when it comes to the meeting halls of the day.

Knowing that little detail gives us a feel of how the congregants were falling all over themselves, "*paying attention to the one wearing the fine clothes,*"

saying to him "*You! Sit! Sit here! In a good place!*"

How great that you've come to be with us today!

Then James shows us another brother - remember, we're 'in the assembly' - verse 2:

"... and there should, also, come a poor man in filthy clothes."

'A poor man' - reduced to begging. Strong's defines the term as

"helpless - powerless to accomplish an end."

Remember that, for later.

And this one is dressed in filthy clothes. Remember that as well.

It's a street person. Right? We might say he's homeless. Looks like he's got nothing but what he's carrying, maybe he's unwashed, his clothes have who-knows-what on them.

How does the congregation react?

"You - stand. There."

Lord forbid someone give up their own seat.

But hey, the guy might be able to park on the floor next to them! You know, like a dog -
verse 3:

"... sit here, at my footstool."

Why does James brings up this contrast? Because it's one everyone can relate to. We can't help but understand when James commands - yes, commands! - in verse one: (read v1)

Then, to nail down his example, James warns that judging by that outward appearance is the result of "evil thoughts" - '*dialogismos*.' This is an inward consideration - we've looked, we've 'thunk,' we've deliberated with ourselves and come to our conclusions. Conclusions spawned from evil, conclusions measured in evil, and conclusions resulting in - no surprise here - evil.

James says 'EVIL.'

Not just wrong, not merely 'misguided,' not 'uncharitable,' but flat-out 'evil.'

Such thinking is certainly not in the will of God - the Scriptures make that abundantly clear:

"For there is no partiality with God," (Romans 2:11)

"... your own Master also is in Heaven, and there is no partiality with Him," (Eph 6:9)

"... he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality,"

(Col 3:25)

So - how do we begin to address our own natural instincts? How do we put ourselves in the will of God?

That's a simple task, and in fact it's the first facet of what James is showing us. Our application on this first point comes straight from Scripture. Make a note of it, it comes from Galatians 3:28, and it's this:

“You are all one in Christ Jesus.”

There is neither Jew nor Greek.

There is neither slave, nor free.

There is neither male, nor female, for (read again)

That man in the filthy clothes? The beggar, helpless to accomplish an end - remember?

The Lord speaks the same - of us:

“We are all like an unclean thing.

And all our righteousnesses are like ... filthy rags.”

“Do not be furious, O Lord!

Nor remember iniquity forever

*Indeed - **please** look -*

*we **all** are Your people.” (Is 64.)*

That poor man was us, brothers and sisters. That one in filthy rags, with no hope - do you remember? Do you remember that time when you were first aware of your sinful state

before the Almighty? Think of the despair that moment you understood there was nothing - nothing! - that you could possibly do to remedy your sin before the eyes of a Holy Father?

Can you recall the joy you felt when you heard the gospel - the love you felt when you learned how Jesus Christ took our sins, our shame, our iniquity - and then calls us 'Friend?'

Does gold jewelry impress you? Fine clothes? Is that what you seek? I tell you, you already have these things - and more besides!

For gold, Christ Himself will give you a crown - the crown of life!

For clothes, Christ Himself will dress you in fine white garments!

What matter, then, what we wear here? This is your brother - this is your sister!

That's not your spouse sitting beside you! That's not your child next to you!

That's not some stranger who walked in the door.

In Galatians, Paul tips us off as to who really has walked in our door:

"I have been crucified with Christ! It is no longer I who live - but Christ lives in me!" (Gal 2:20)

You - we! - are all one in Christ Jesus. - and He is in us and we in Him.

Knowing that truth, James is asking us:

Why would we ever receive a brother or sister with less of a welcome than that of our King?

Now that he's got us thinking, James has more to say! Have a look on your bulletin at our second point, where we see in verse 5 how:

2) Judging conflicts with God's opinion of 'the poor'

Verse 5 (read)

And right off the bat, it's: "Listen!"

Notice more than a few times, James asks for our attention with the word "Behold!" but this is the only time that he says "Listen up" - so we'd better hear what he's saying.

James is stating a truth in the form of a hypothetical question. It's posed in such a way that the expected answer would be "Yes!" "Well, of course!" What is James confirming to us? Let's list them out!

First, (read)

"God has chosen the poor of this world - "

... and I stop here. It's important.

God has chosen the poor of this world.

We shouldn't need anything after that, should we?

We shouldn't need any other scriptures about it - God has chosen the poor of the world.

It doesn't need to be about money, either - this covers all the bases.

What about that brother with marital troubles? Or the one with that child that's on a real rebellious tear?

How about that one that lost their job - maybe with good reason?

There are lots of ways that the Lord uses circumstance to make us 'poor.'

Aren't those the moments when we're most reluctant to approach?

"What would I say?" "What could I do?" "That whole situation with them is ... messy."

Yes. Yes it is.

Those are exactly the times that we're supposed to come together around that sister or brother and bring the fellowship to their hearts.

God has chosen the poor.

Has God chosen you? Scripture says He has, you know! Ephesians 1:4:

"... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him, in love."

James is posing the question here:

If God has chosen the poor,

and if God has chosen you,

why would you ever want to be rich?

Why would you desire the life of the rich - if "*God has chosen the poor*"?

Is it because they have more?

James tells us what has God given those whom He has chosen: (read)

“God has chosen the poor to be ... rich in faith...”

Let me ask you, if there's not a single person in this room that can say they've not, at some lonely hour, in some dark time, is there any person that has never cried out to God:

“Lord! Increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5)

... and God would have us to be *“rich in faith!”*

Are we living like spiritual paupers? Here's a good reason why!

Perhaps we're seeking the wrong riches!

God's will is not that we be exceedingly abundant in goods, but that we be *“rich in faith!”*

Hey, where do I sign up?

Not only that, but read on in verse five when James says 'the poor' are: (read)

“...heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised...”

Forget rich, do you want to be a prince? A princess? A child of the King?

James is asking: why try to fake it down here with some cardboard display of man's riches? Those kind can pretend all they like, but the King knows who His real children are - and they will inherit His Kingdom.

How limitless is that gift!

*“The Father loves the Son,
and has given all things into His hand.”* (John 3:35)

Is there some part of “all things” we’re not understanding?

No, it’s clear - but we’re not believing it yet, are we?

We’re still trying to hoard up tiny little pots of manna - and, James notes, growling like dogs when we think we might have to give some up, right?

All this when there’s a table groaning under the burden of the feast that awaits us! We need to stop looking down at ourselves and start looking up to the Lord! Christ has pulled out the chair, He stands waiting to welcome His bride! He has promised all this - to the ‘poor’ of **this** world.

Lord, impoverish me!

Yet James is still - not - finished in making this point!

He tells us: not only has God chosen the poor, not only are they rich in faith, not only are they heirs of the promised Kingdom, but most importantly, verse five, all this is promised : (read)

“... to them that love Him.”

Am I saying you have to be poor to love the Lord?

No, but Scripture does say that the poor are rich in faith,

and Scripture does say that the poor are heirs of the Kingdom,

and Scripture does say that the Kingdom is promised to those who love Him,

so if a “poor” brother or sister is filled with, is motivated by, is overflowing with that grace, that charity, that kindness which is a fruit coming only from the love of God, then I say again:

Lord, impoverish me!

James wants us to have that perspective!

When we know and apply this understanding, James knows we’ll believe the truth which is our next point of application:

The poor in Christ are rich beyond measure

(repeat)

Just like that paycheck is guaranteed to be there on Friday.

Do you have it now? no - not yet.

You may not be paying bills from it - not just yet - but it’s coming.

You know it for a certainty.

Let your mind run wild, imagine the most extravagant thing you can, whatever you dream up still can’t hold a candle to the ridiculously abundant reality. 1 Cor 2:9

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard

Nor have entered into the heart of man

*The things which God has prepared
for those who love Him.”*

Did you hear it? “HAS prepared.”

It's waiting for you!

The check isn't in the mail, it's in the bank, brother!

Dinner is on the table!

Will you believe it? James knows we need to - because everything to do with our walk flows from knowing it. How we see and treat others and how we ourselves act will all be radically altered from that one realization:

The poor in Christ are rich beyond measure.

Well.

Up to this point, James has been shedding light on the positives, right? He's displaying the benefits of being chosen out of this world, the riches that belong to those who are hidden in Christ. But James knows our hearts well - he knows that's not enough. Even with everything at our feet, the natural desire of man is to rebel.

It's not enough to show, to call, to cry

“O Taste, and see that the Lord is good!”

... because we're stubborn and stiff-necked and it usually takes a fair amount of beatings from the rod before we learn the lesson.

Understand, James is out to poison the well. He's going to take the bloom off the rose and lay it at our feet. In verses six and seven, he confronts us with the painful reality of his third point, read along with me on your outline:

3) Judging shows hypocrisy and lack of reason

(read 6-7)

We've seen that we *are* the poor! We've seen how God regards the poor as well. Now James delivers a stinging rebuke in how we've treated them, using a popular form of argument that questions our thinking.

Consider the word he uses here - 'dishonored.'

Recall Simon the Pharisee, who invited Jesus to dinner? Yet Simon failed to greet Him with a kiss, to wash His feet, to anoint him with oil. All of these are expected courtesies for a guest, and it was a deliberate slight to withhold them. Compare that with Abraham's treatment of the three strangers in Genesis 18 - he ran to meet them. He bowed to the ground, provided them water to wash their feet, and begged them rest for a meal. This was the expected courtesy of the time.

So when James says “you have dishonored the poor man,” he means not an accidental, but a very intentional disregard. This is meant to shame his readers - doubly so as he points out their treatment of ones the Lord Himself values so highly - that same Lord they also claim to serve.

In his “Commentary on the Epistle of James,” the German protestant minister Rudolph Stier makes a similar point about the ‘poor’ - he says, and I quote:

“Let not your faith, if you have it, despise his riches: the whole inheritance is his; you have a future King before you, who only waits for his crown. And if not yet, his very poverty may make his salvation probable, and his place among the poor brethren at the last. Therefore, scorn not the poor!”

James is forcing us to examine how we treat those we have “preferred” in contrast to those beloved of God. He does this by bringing out four points in the form of questions, meant as charges to be answered. James launches accusations - and there is no defense!

He launches the first broadside in verse six, where he asks:

“Do not the rich oppress you?”

That one word, ‘oppress,’ is thick with meaning - it’s saying the rich are continually using power to exert ungranted authority - over the church!

James says “These people place demands upon your brothers and sisters - and they have no right to do so! These are who you would give respect?”

With that still stinging, James follows up by pointing out how the rich:

“ ... *drag you into the courts...*”

... and, yes, that verb means literally to seize by force and drag into the courtroom.

The “rich” are hiring lawyers and accusers to bring brothers and sisters in to face judgment. Who do you think got the fair hearing?

These believers, recall, have just barely escaped the same sort of persecution back in Jerusalem! James is reminding them of that. This isn’t happening to someone else. He asks:

Who do the rich oppress? - they oppress you!

Who do they drag before the judgment seats? - they drag you!

James is asking: Is it’s “reasonable” to come alongside those accusers?

Of course not.

James then moves on to point out the contrast between the church and the rich: (read v7)

The “rich” - those in authority and positions of respect, or fame, or importance ... how did they speak then?

Why, the same way they speak today:

“...they blaspheme that noble Name...”

The rich of this world have no regard for the things of God - why should we want to be counted among them? Just as oil and water will not mix, James lays out the undeniable truth that we're not “of” that world, that we're not the same, that:

*“...**they** blaspheme that noble Name..*

*... by which **you** are called.”*

Just to make it plain, “called” in the Greek means “to permit one’s self to be surnamed.”

In other words, my wife’s last name is Rudisill - because I married her.

Beth’s last name is Lohse - because her father gave his name to her.

If a man were foolish enough to insult my wife, in my hearing - how do you think I would react? Or if Dan or Jacob heard someone insult their mother - in her own home?

Would such be welcome?

The rich are blaspheming the very Name you’re known by - the Name of that One who called you and is betrothed to you.

James says:

Your judging shows disbelief - and an evil heart.

James says:

Your judging reveals your ignorance of the will - and blessings! - of God for His people.

Now James says:

Your judging points out that you're both unreasonable and hypocritical! Not only are they working against your family but they insult you to your face.

In Numbers 12, Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days for speaking against Moses. How much more, then, is due those who blaspheme? Yet, James says, you would welcome them because of their wealth, or reputation, or status? Hypocrites!

It is true that God needs no help in defending His Name against His enemies - but we! We have a different assignment. We have this contrast before us - between the blasphemer and the righteous - because James wants us to strengthen ourselves - and each other! - with our third point of application today. It's one of the most important. James knows this truth will allow us to keep a clear head and a right footing, and it's this:

Love of the Name - and everything it carries with it - produces joy in the children of God.

Psalm 5:

"Let all those rejoice who put their trust in You

Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them;

Let also those who love Your Name

Be joyful in You.

For you, O Lord, will bless..."

... the rich?

... the famous?

No, not the rich. Of them, Jesus says :

"... they have their reward."

Who does the Lord bless?

"For You, O Lord, will bless the righteous;

with favor, You will surround him as with a shield!" (Ps 5:11-12)

Isn't that great news?

How can we worry? How can we care of the opinions of those "lifted up" by the world, when God Himself is waiting to bless us with *"favor like a shield?"*

We have faith - we have glory! We have a royal inheritance! We have forgiveness and blessing and provision and a crown and a place in the Father's house, and - get this, now - we have the favor of God - because he has named us with the name of His Son - if indeed we be in Christ.

Love of that Name - and everything it carries with it - produces joy in the children of God.

How can it not?

James is done explaining - the time is at hand, and he calls upon all to choose sides.

In verses 8 and 9, James makes his fourth and final point, which you'll see on your bulletin:

4) Judging denies the Truth - while love fulfills the Law

There is no room for prejudice in the church of Christ. There is no place for arrogance or pride among God's children. We were all in the same state - and, thanks only to Christ, we all share the same glorious fate. Denying this denies the gospel - and James lays it out in black and white: (read v 8 and 9)

How do we love?

Love *"is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not parade itself. It is not puffed up."*

Love *"does not behave rudely, does not seek its own."*

Love *"rejoices in the truth."* (1 Cor 13)

James has shown us the truth.

James has shown how we were - and what we are.

James has shown what we have - and what they lack.

James has shown how we care for one another - and what 'they' say about our bridegroom.

James has shown that - if we do not love - then we commit sin.

If we do not love, we disobey our Lord Christ:

"A new commandment I give to you - that you love one another.

As I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34)

All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in His sight.

Our garments were filthy as any - and we came as beggars to the door of the Lord.

How were we received?

You'll find that on the bottom of your bulletin on the right hand side in blue:

"Then He answered, and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying:

'Take away the filthy garments from him.'

"And, to him, He said:

'See, I have removed your iniquity from you - and I will clothe you with rich robes.' "

(Zech 3:4)

Christians aren't to judge - because we ourselves were spared that judgment.

We were saved - called, converted, cleansed, conformed - because we were loved by God.

"Yes, I have loved you - with an everlasting love,

Therefore, with lovingkindness, I have drawn you." (Jer 31:3)

Would you know this love?

Would you know what it is to be loved - not for what you've done, but for what you are?

Would you know what it is to be free of worry - worry about what others think, about what you think others see, about what you do, what you say, what you hope is enough?

Would you know a love that is above all of that?

A love that knows the very worst of you - and calls you all the same?

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish,
but have eternal life.”*

God has loved you - Jesus Christ loves you - and as He has loved us, we must love one another.

Not to thieves outside, who come to steal and kill and destroy,
but love to our brothers and sisters - of every race and tribe and tongue -
who will sing beside us in the Kingdom.

Let us show Christ the way He said we must:

*“By this will all know that you are My disciples:
if you have love for one another.”* (John 13:35)

“Make A Righteous Judgment”

(James 2:1-9)

Outline

- 1) Judging is incompatible with Christian faith - and evil (vv 1-4)
- 2) Judging conflicts with God’s opinion of ‘the poor’ (v5)
- 3) Judging shows hypocrisy and lack of reason (vv 6-7)
- 4) Judging denies the truth - while love fulfills the Law (vv 8-9)

Quote:

“Then He answered, and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying:

‘Take away the filthy garments from him.’

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Thoughts for Hymns

Hymn 1: 428: In Christ There Is No East Or West

Hymn 2: 680: All The Way My Savior Leads Me

Hymn 3: 429: They’ll Know We Are Christians