

4. EQUALITY IN THE CHURCH REFLECTION

Begin your study by sharing thoughts on this question.

1. When people visit your church, how do you make them feel welcome?

BIBLE READING

Read James 2:1–13 from the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

NKJV

1My dear brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, never think some people are more important than others. 2Suppose someone comes into your church meeting wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes. 3You show special attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, “Please, sit here in this good seat.” But you say to the poor person, “Stand over there,” or, “Sit on the floor by my feet.” 4What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better.

5Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! God chose the poor in the world to be rich with faith and to receive the kingdom God promised to those who love him. 6But you show no respect to the poor. The rich are always trying to control your lives. They are the ones who take you to court. 7And they are the ones who speak against Jesus, who owns you.

8This royal law is found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” If you obey this law, you are doing right. 9But if you treat one person as being more important than another, you are sinning. You are guilty of breaking God’s law. 10A person who follows all of God’s law but fails to obey even one command is guilty of breaking all the commands in that law. 11The same God who said, “You must not be guilty of adultery,” also said, “You must not murder anyone.” So if you do not take part in adultery but you murder someone, you are guilty of breaking all of God’s law. 12In everything you say and do, remember that you will be judged by the law that makes people free. 13So you must show mercy to others, or God will not show mercy to you when he judges you. But the person who shows mercy can stand without fear at the judgment.

1My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. 2For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” 4have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? 7Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

8If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; 9but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

DISCOVERY

Explore the Bible reading by discussing these questions.

2. Why is it wrong to treat rich people better than poor people?
3. How does God treat the poor and powerless?
4. Explain how partiality makes us unjust judges.
5. How does showing favoritism indicate a feeling of superiority?
6. List how Christians can show mercy.
7. List examples of favoritism or prejudice you see in the church today.

8. List some people who might feel uncomfortable in your church.
9. How can your church make those people feel more welcome?

PRAYER

Thank you, Father, that all people are equal in your eyes. Forgive us for judging people by appearances and accomplishments. Forgive us for favoring the rich and powerful over the poor and weak. Oh God, change our hearts. Teach us what it means to love our neighbors as ourselves.

JOURNALING

Take a few moments to record your personal insights from this lesson.

How can I gain victory over the sin of favoritism?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

10. Why do we tend to downplay the seriousness of favoritism?
11. If you have been a victim of favoritism or prejudice, how did it make you feel?
12. How can you help others change their attitudes toward the poor and vulnerable?

For more Bible passages on favoritism, see Exodus 23:2, 3; Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 19:6; 1 Timothy 5:21.