James 2:1-13 Relation of the Rich and Poor

By Charles Feinberg

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In the Epistle of James if you have your bible before you turn to the second-
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Our God and Father, as we come to a study of thy truth at this time we pray that we may be in the place of submission in the place of surrender of heart so that thy spirit who indwells us may do his effective work of teaching us thy precious word, we pray with Thanksgiving in Jesus' blessed name, amen. In his exhortations to practical Godly living, the apostle James called James the wise turns once more to the relation of rich and poor. The trials of the poor have already been touched upon. You'll remember in the first chapter verses 9 to 11 but let the brother of a low degree glory in his high estate and so on in such relationships of life as these are the true nature of one's profession becomes manifest. In verses one to 13 of the second chapter. That's the first division of the second chapter we have a warning against partiality and oh how much that's needed in our relationships with one another and in the church as a whole warning against partiality.

The first three verses give us the case, my brethren hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory with respect to persons, for if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring in fine clothing and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing and you have regard to him that's weareth the fine clothing and say sit thou here in a good place. And you say to the poor man stand thou there or sit under my footstool. Those first three verses give us the case. You notice the Apostle James is addressing my brethren; he's speaking to fellow believers. Their equality before God as brothers forms the ground of his admonition and he says hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's entirely out of keeping with partiality toward individuals the Faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory is not in keeping that faith is not in keeping with respecting the persons of any individual. God is not partial. God is not a respecter of persons.
The word Lord here in the first verse is not in the original but the reference is to Christ the glory the Shekinah glory of God. How could respect a person stand with him. That's the spirit of the world. They're partial. They claim to have certain principles, certain rules, certain standards of life but oh when it relates to certain ones somehow those rules and standards are modified and modified very drastically. Now verses two and three in order to understand them we must realize that those of the same rank or occupation sat together in the synagogue as they do today. Folk who are of a certain dignified position and rank occupy certain places. Those who are of lesser position or rank or occupation sit in another area another section of the synagogue. Why is the word synagogue used here in verse two because believers were still meeting in that manner only time in the New Testament that it refers to a Christian congregation.

Now should there come into this assembly of believers a man with a gold ring. And fine apparel. And he has every appearance of wealth and affluence. The scripture says you have regard to him that wears that fine clothing if you do that irrespective of his spiritual condition you tell him to sit here near the speaker and you give him the good place the chief seats that are spoken about a lot in Matthew 23:6 the Pharisees were all after the good seats the seats right up in the eastern portion of the synagogue the primary seats and then you see one who comes in with vial clothing. Here's a poor man. He has every indication of poverty. And you tell that man sit there far from the main seats or under my foot stool that's on the ground. Oh that's worship friends of the golden calf in just another form. And it can blind the eyes.

A man once visited Robert Hall to make exception to some statement which the preacher had made in his sermon. It was evident that the man was in the grip and bondage of the love of money. When Hall had gauged the man's character he took a large coin out of his pocket. He opened his Bible and he pointed to the word God. Can you see that? Asked Robert Hall. Why
certainly replied the man. Then the preacher took the money and placed it over the word God. Can you see it now? The man immediately understood the symbol. Through it he was led into the light gold hid God. Money blocked the vision. Love of Money shut out the face of the father. So with us if we are not mindful of the warning here in James and I'm sure you in radio land could multiply instance after instance. Case after case. Example after example where this kind of thing has worked havoc among believers where there hasn't been the proper evaluation of spiritual worth and there has been a partiality a prejudicial action in favor of those who have had wealth. That is not according to the will of God.

So verses four to seven give us the condemnation. Do ye not make distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts. Harken my beloved brethren. Did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him? Verse 6 but you've dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and themselves drag you before the judgment seats. Do not they blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called? Says the Apostle. Do you not make distinction among yourselves according to your natural feelings your own inclinations you're not going according to God's standards it's just according to your own human level and your own human inclinations and you are judges with evil thoughts not judges of evil thoughts but judges with such thoughts evil thoughts. And he says hasn't God chosen the poor as for the world rich in faith. Not all the poor of the world of course are rich in faith but proportionately there are more poor saved than rich and first Corinthians One tells us not many mighty, not many noble.

Not many rich. And not many wise and not many that amount in the eyes of the world as something but God has taken them to put to naught those that feel they are something but the poor are rich in faith, the riches is spiritual riches. But you've dishonored such and one by your
treatment of him because it's the opposite of God's way who honors the poor. And don't you forget that the rich oppress. These are not believers because of what's stated in verse 7. They blaspheme the honorable name by which you are called. Now this passage of course doesn't mean that all the rich are unbelieving. Thank God there are a number of rich who do trust Christ and we thank God for them. But he was talking about the rich who are unbelievers who dishonor and blaspheme the honorable name. That's the name of Christian ultimately Christ himself. That name by which ye are called and Christian means Christ's Ones, those who pertain to Christ.

Those who belong to him now friends, if verses four five six and seven of James two mean anything they mean that partiality is hateful to God. How odious partiality is to God. A lady living in a factory town noticed that a great many working men and boys came to Christian services but almost no women. She decided to see what could be done for the women calling two of her maids who were Christians. She asked them prepare the dining room for a Bible meeting on the next Lord's Day. She visited among the wives and daughters of the village and she invited them to her home. She read with them and she prayed though they were Scandinavians and couldn't understand her. Then she'd call on her servants to pray through their united effort. Seven persons were saved that very afternoon. That was the beginning of a wonderful glorious work for God. Sometime afterwards she was asked to go to a nearby town to start a similar work in the dining room of a wealthy lady. She took her waitress with her and she started. When she reached the destination by train. They found that an elegant car was awaiting them. The servant girl hesitated she says I will walk. She turned to her mistress and made that statement. I will walk. Her mistress said to her. I will walk. No you won't. No such I will walk. No you come into the car with me. You're not my servant today you are my sister. We are king's daughters. That's the proper attitude that the Apostle James is encouraging here.
Notice the contrast in verses 8 to 13. How be it if ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself you do well but if you have respect to persons you commit sin being convicted by the law as transgressors for whosoever shall keep the whole law yet stumble in one point he is become guilty of all for he that said do not commit adultery said also do not kill. Now if thou does not commit adultery but killed thou hast become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty, for judgment is without mercy to him that showed no mercy mercy glories against judgment.

Respect to persons verse 8 tells us is a violation of the royal law. The royal law is the king of all laws. What is it? It's the sum of them all it's the law of love and says the Apostle that if you fulfil that law, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself ye do well you are doers of the word then you're not hearers only just exactly what the apostle James has been after. That's what he's been emphasizing and stressing. That's the kind of life that's the kind of Christian testimony and walk and action that God is pleased with.

But in verse 6 verse 9 of the second chapter if you have respect to persons you commit sin you're working sin and you're convicted by the law on your own consciences your convicted. And whoever doesn't keep the whole law stumbles in just one point he's guilty of all. Oh how our legalizers need to realize this. Those who would put us under the law ought to know that though we may just offended one point just covet, the Tenth Commandment. Maybe just broken. But if we break one we are guilty of all, the commandment on stealing and on murder and all the rest like a seamless robe that's torn. No matter where the rent may be, if we are guilty if one we are guilty of all a whole song can be spoiled by one sour note a chain is broken even if only one link is broken the law is a unit. It's a whole. And if anyone offends in one point he offends in all and then verse 11 he gives some example he that said don't commit adultery said don't kill they're
taking the samples because they're so flagrant and glaring. But if you don't commit adultery and you don't kill but you do something else you still, you're a transgressor of the law. If you don't do one and do the other you're guilty of all of them and says the scripture so speak ye and so do as men that will be judged by the law of liberty. If you'll not in turn practice love to our neighbor. If we don't in that turn practice love to our neighbor. That law of Grace condemns us more heavily than the old law, which spake nothing but wrath to the one who offended in the least.

The law of liberty is the law that we've been talking about in chapter one verse twenty five that perfect law that one which is so blessed when one follows its precept. In Verse 13 we're told that judgment is without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy mercy glories against judgment Mercy glories knowing that judgment can't condemn him, mercy is clothed with the divine glory. Christendom said and stands by the throne of God where no mercy is shown none can be expected. Only judgment remains. Friends. Our life is like the dial of a clock. The hands are God's hands passing over and over again. The shorthand of discipline and the long hand of mercy slowly and surely the hand of discipline must pass. And God speaks at each strike but over and over passes the hand of mercy showering down 60 fold of blessing for each stroke of discipline and trial and both hands are fastened to one secure point. The great unchanging loving heart of a God of love. Let's remember friends how God hates partiality in our dealings. Let us avoid it like the plague. Let us avoided studiously let us avoid it day by day. In verses 14 to 26 of the second chapter of James we have brought before us living faith because of this passage Luther called the whole epistle right stroy epistle.

Now some claim James contradicts. Paul but that's untrue. James does not contradict Paul. Paul is giving the principle of salvation while James shows us how that principle of faith works out in life. Faith and fruit must always be joined. The subject under discussion is the
reality of profession. Notice that the passage is not speaking of being justified before God. It's not a matter of relationship before God because He knows the heart. It's the test before man who sees only the exterior only our acts. That's the only way he can judge. Paul's arguments are on the justification of the ungodly. James' arguments are on the justification of the one who professes to be a believer. It is the test of reality of the faith of one who says he knows God in Christ as Savior and Lord. Now in verses 14 to 19 we have brought before us dead faith. What doth it profit my brethren if a man says he hath faith but hath not works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food and one of you say to them, Go in peace be warmed and filled. And yet you give them not the things needful to the body. What does it profit? Even so faith, if it has not works is dead in itself. Yea a man will say thou hast faith and I have works, show me thy faith apart from thy works and I will by my works show thee my faith. Thou believe that God is one. Thou doest well. The Demons also believe and shutter.

Now. If a man say, now here's the key to the whole subject it takes more than mere saying. If a man says he has faith and here it's probably only a mental intellectual assent somehow the thing seems to add up mentally to him. It seems to appeal to his intellectual processes. The apostle James says if he has that kind of faith can that faith not just faith but that kind of faith save him and then in verse 15 we have practical examples of dead professions. Here's a brother here's a sister that's really destitute, hasn't the proper clothing hasn't the needed daily food lacks daily food. And this one has no more concern says go right along. Keep on going going in peace may all be well with you. More power to you. Be warmed be filled and yet doesn't give that one a thing needful to the body. What kind of faith is that? How does it profit the one who has his mocking the need of the other one? Faith is like a tree. If it's alive it will
surely give forth fruit. Someone has well said salvation is by faith alone. But saving faith is never alone. If a tree is alive if it has any life in it at all it's going to give forth fruit.

So the Apostle Paul apostle James here says yea a man will say thou hast faith and I have works show me thy faith, show me thy faith. That's a reasonable request because faith can't be seen. Give me some outward manifestation of your faith. If we see the fruit we can be sure of the root the one condition is as useless as the other to show faith to man works in some measure are needed we're justified judicially by God. Romans 8:33. We’re justified meritoriously by Christ on the basis of what he did. We are justified medially by faith. That's the means, that's the channel. And we are justified evidentially by way of proof and evidence and outward confirmation by works. Let's remember that. to show faith to man works in some measure are needed we're justified judicially by God, meritoriously by Christ someone has said medially by faith and evidentially by words and we read in verse 19 thou believest that God is one thou doest well. Well the Demons also believe and shudder.

A faith in an abstract thing or a proposition is of no value. You believe that way thou doest well. The apostle James speaks it ironically. Why he says the demons also believe. They are ungodly, fallen ones. The Demons also believe and shudder. They also believe. Notice their expressions concerning Christ in his earthly ministry. We know thee who thou art Oh thou son of God thou son of David. Thou holy one hast thou come to torment us before our time. They shudder. They not only believe, notice their earthly mini- their words concerned at the time of the earthly ministry of our Lord. They not only believe but they shudder. But that's far from saving them. It reminds them of the doom awaiting them. Lacking that bond between God and them in a living faith which gives a new nature. A scoffer in a railway train asked which is the nearest way to hell. The Christian worker to whom the question was directed said you open that
door and jump out and you'll soon be there. But remember you will not be there as an unbeliever. For there are no unbelievers in hell. When they get there they all believe in hell. They all realize that what they were told from the word of God was true but it's too late. After this life there is no opportunity for them to trust in Christ versus 14 to 19 then of Chapter 2 of the Epistle of James speaks of dead faith. Then in chapters 20 to 20 uh verses 20 to 25 of the second chapter we have living faith and this is the way the text reads.

But wilt thou know oh vain man that faith apart from works is Barren. Was not Abraham our father justified by works and that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar. Thou sees that faith wrought with his works and by works was faith made perfect and the scripture was fulfilled with Seth and Abraham believe God and it was recommended him for righteousness and he was called a friend of God. You see that by works of man is justified and not by faith alone not only by faith. And in like manner was not also Rahab the Harlot justified by works in that she received the messengers and sent them out another way. Living faith, versus 20 to 25 verse 20 says you want to know oh vain man. He's still talking about that if any man say a man just professing and he is a vain man because he is resting on an unreal faith and a baseless hope that has no foundation at all. He says do you want to know this proposition. It's a truth of God that faith such as yours apart from works is just a very unavailing faith. It's barren.

But notice wasn't Abraham our father justified by works because he offered up Isaac his son on the altar he showed it. He was justified before men just as we've been saying in verse 18 show me thy faith apart from thy works and I'll by my works show thee my faith. I have some fruitage from my faith to show that my faith is real that it is alive and it's living. The reference then is to the testing of Abraham's faith in Genesis 22:1 to show men God already knew the reality of his faith in Genesis 15:6. We read that Abraham believed God and it was counted unto
him for righteousness. God knew about his faith in Genesis 15:6 but in Genesis 22. The testing of his faith there showed men that he would go to the full length of obeying God submissively even if it meant offering up the one in whom all God's promises were focused, namely Isaac. Certainly we might argue that we couldn't know the reality of Abraham's faith as long as it was just in his own bosom and his own heart and his own spirit and his own soul. But oh when he went up the Mount Mariah and carried out to the letter until God thwarted his attempt to take the life. Of Isaac. Until that moment no one could have known outwardly the reality and the substantial character and the fullness of the blessedness the essence of the faith of Abraham. But after that we all know the reality of it how he could have done what he did. If he hadn't believed God how could he have done it?

How could he have done what he did if he had believed God? No wonder God calls him the friend of God. And he's called that in passages in Isaiah 41 verse 8. The second passage in the Hebrew canon second chronicles 20 verse 7 that's last book of the Hebrew canon. After he was dead for centuries he's called the friend of God. The Arabs call him El Halil Allah or simply El Halil meaning the friend. It's recorded of D.L. Moody that upon one of his journeys across the Atlantic there was a fire in the hold of the ship. The crew and some volunteers stood in line to pass along buckets of water. A friend said to Moody Mr. Moody let's go to the other end of the ship. And give ourselves to prayer. Let's engage in wholehearted prayer a common sense evangelist Moody said. Not so sir. We stand right here and pass the water buckets and pray hard all the time. He believed that prayer and works were the two hands of the one person that they should never be separated. And you and I know that he was eminently right.

Oh friends how impractical some believers are how little they manifest the common sense nature of our faith how little they give themselves to show that their faith is alive that it's
manifested in works that can bring glory to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh friends, here's the principal verse 26 for as the body apart from the spirit is dead. Never forget this. Let's write it on the tables of our hearts. But as the body apart from the spirit is dead, Even so faith apart from works is dead. There is the principle. That's a vivid comparison that sets the subject in bold relief. No faith can rightly be called a true and living faith. Now this may seem to be a sweeping statement but the Bible is the basis for it that no faith can rightly be called a true, a living, an authentic, and a reliable faith that doesn't result in fruitage.

The story is told of a ferryman that had the word faith painted on one oar and the word work on the other oar. He was asked the reason for naming in that manner the oars that he used and replied by showing rather than by words. He laid the oar that had work painted on it in the bottom of the skiff. He took the oar that had faith on it with both hands he pulled with all his strength and the boat went round and round and round gradually floating down the stream with a current. And then he placed the faith oar in the bottom of the skiff and he took up the work oar with both hands with the same result. The boat gradually floating down the stream. Then he took the faith oar in one hand and the work oar in the other and pulled with both together and the skiff moved out of the current and across the stream. Friends it takes faith and works to get anywhere in the Christian life. Doing is evidence that one believes if there's the root there's going to be the fruit. How dead is a body apart from the spirit? The body apart from the spirit is dead. There has to be a joining of the two. They have to be knit together. That's God's plan. That's God's way. If there's the root there has to be the fruit and the fruit is works. The fruit of faith is works if the root is there.

God expects you to be not only a hearer of the word, that's faith, you hear the word. Faith comes by hearing hearing the word of God. But along with the faith there must be works there
must be works. The message is clear that we're to manifest the vitality and the reality and the vigor of our faith in works in fruitage to God oh just don't say that the Christian faith is just a mental thing. It's just a theoretical thing oh it's practical. It talks to us right where we live. And what about you Christian friend? Are you're living the life? And if you are there in radio land never having trusted Christ, trust him now. God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son that believing on him you might not perish but have everlasting life. Trust him now believe him now. May God grant it.

[Musical Outro]

Announcer:

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