

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

How to Avoid Prejudice

James 2:1-13

1 How do you avoid prejudice in our very racial, political and economic biased culture? It's not easy even for genuine Christians. Prejudice never has done anyone any good and can hurt everyone involved.

Tevye, in the musical "Fiddler on the Roof", wrestled with his prejudices. As each of his daughters' romantic interests would push his Orthodox Jewish cultural envelop, he would adapt as best he could. That was, except for his youngest daughter's choice for a husband. Tevye just couldn't bend enough, culturally and religiously, to accept a Gentile, a non-Jewish man, as his son-in-law. That prejudice brought extreme heartache to him and his family.

A man, dressed in overalls and work shoes, walked into a new car dealership in Norway wanting to buy sixteen new automobiles, all the same model. The dealer, looking at his old work clothes, thought this was a joke and told the man to leave. The man proceeded to another dealership where he was treated respectfully and purchased the fleet of vehicles; with

cash! The man was one of sixteen crew members from a Norwegian fishing fleet which had returned from a highly successful fishing haul. Each crew member wanted a new car and this man represented them to get the best volume discount. Imagine the embarrassment the first car salesman had when he realized the truth! ¹

We have several examples of prejudice in the Bible. ²

Partiality hurt Isaac and Rebekah's family. Genesis, chapter 25, verse 28, says, **Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob**. The result was Jacob's deceit and banishment from his family. He never saw his mother again. ³

Partiality hurt Jacob's family. **Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.** ² Not only did Jacob have to work for his father in law twenty-one

¹ "The Sin of Prejudice", James 2:1-9, Our Daily Bread.

² Genesis 29:30.

years, his bias resulted in his own lifelong heartache with his children a generation later.

This partiality became apparent with his prejudice toward his son, Joseph. Family discord reigned as a result. ⁴ Genesis, chapter 37, verses 3 and 4 state, Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

The tragic result of this prejudice was Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery and telling their dad he was killed. Jacob grieved most of his life. ⁵

How can you avoid prejudice in your Christian Life? Our scripture today may help us. ⁶

James, chapter 2, verses 1 through 13, says, **My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes**

into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ³ 7

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? ⁴ 8

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the

³ James 2:1-4.

⁴ James 2:5-7.

whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. ⁵ 9

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! ⁶ 10

The first step to avoiding prejudice is . . .

I. You Need to Realize What Prejudice Is

You need to realize what prejudice is. ¹¹

Prejudice is a “preconceived judgment or opinion, an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge.” ⁷ It’s “a judgment formed beforehand without the examination of the facts”.

⁵ James 2:8-11.

⁶ James 2:12-13.

⁷ Prejudice, noun, Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

Prejudice is expressed by favoring some people and scorning or ignoring others. ¹²

In verse 2 and 3 we find that the rich may be more physically attractive, **Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” . . .** ⁸

Our society worships beauty.

Notice the television commercials always have attractive people selling their products. This attracts kids especially. Barbie Dolls are perfect images for little girls. Little girls might be tempted to starve themselves with anoxia or bulimia to look like Barbie.

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⁸ James 2:2-3.

In verse 6, the rich may have power. **But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?** ⁹ ₁₄

The word **exploit** ¹⁰ means to exercise power over. These are the bosses! ¹⁵ They are the ones who **drag you into court**. Debtors' prison, in ancient days, is where you could be imprisoned, and even tortured, until someone paid your debt. ¹¹ ₁₆

In verse 7, the rich are the ones slandering your name, "Christian". **Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?** ¹² The word **belong** here ¹³ means "to call upon". But it also is used for a wife being called by her husband's name.

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⁹ James 2:6.

¹⁰ καταδυναστεύω.

¹¹ Matthew 18:23-34. Verse 30, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. In verse 34, In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

¹² James 2:7.

¹³ ἐπικαλέω.

The rich were also less likely to be very spiritual. Possessions tend to be the rich person's idol. Lord Jesus encountered a rich young man and asked him to sell his possessions and, then, be His disciple. The young man went away sorrowful because he couldn't part with his idol; his possessions! ¹⁴ The Lord had to respond to him by saying, **It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.** ¹⁵ ¹⁸

The poor have nothing - but they are usually pretty humble. That's a goal God wants for Christians! ¹⁹

There should never be prejudice in the church! ²⁰ The church in Jerusalem went out of its way to care for the poor. ²¹

Acts, chapter 2, verses 44 and 45, **All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.** ²²

¹⁴ Matthew 19:16-22.

¹⁵ Matthew 19:24.

A couple of chapters later, we again read, All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. ¹⁶ ₂₃

This became a continuous practice for the Jerusalem Church! ¹⁷ ₂₄

The Apostle Peter would learn this lesson from a vision on a rooftop ¹⁸ ₂₅ which led him to present the gospel message to the Gentiles, non-Jewish people. His first converts were a Roman Centurion's family! ¹⁹

¹⁶ Acts 4:32-37.

¹⁷ Acts 4:35-37 - For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

¹⁸ Acts 10:34-35 - I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

¹⁹ Acts 10:9-23.

My last active duty assignment as an army chaplain was with the 7th Infantry Division at Fort Ord, California. My brigade commander, a full bird colonel, would come early on Sunday mornings to the brigade chapel with his family. He volunteered to be my greeter at the door, shaking hands and welcoming everyone to the worship service. He demonstrated to all that he believed everyone, from the lower enlisted to the highest-grade officer, and their families, were special to him and the Lord.

So, first you need to realize what prejudice is; and what it is not. Next . . . 26

II. You Need to Realize the Affects of Prejudice

You need to realize the affects of prejudice. ²⁷

How does prejudice affect those who are being treated poorly? ²⁸

They feel insulted and unwelcomed in the kingdom of God. Verse 6, **But you have insulted the poor. Low esteem tends to remain low unless it is encouraged. ²⁹**

Christians are king's kids, a royal priesthood, a holy people! ²⁰ Every Christian needs to be encouraged by the others to think of themselves as they ought to think. ²¹ ³⁰

How does prejudice affect those who are prejudiced?

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²⁰ I Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation . . .

²¹ Romans 12:3 - Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.

Verse 4, . . . have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? It makes you a judge with evil thoughts. ³²

Verse 11, For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. It makes you a law breaker. ³³

Verses 8 through 11, If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ³⁴ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. It makes you live the Royal Law hypocritically. ³⁵

What is the Royal Law? **Love your neighbor as yourself.** ²² ³⁶ It is sin to love only some “neighbors” and not others! ²³ ³⁷

It makes you not practice what you preach! Notice verses 12 and 13, **Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!** ³⁸

The “law that gives freedom” is the Royal Law! This is in contrast to the Law of Moses. ³⁹ The Law of Moses was “judgment without mercy”. ⁴⁰ But the Royal Law of Love satisfies needs regardless of who has the needs! ⁴¹

Lord Jesus told the story about a Jewish man who took a journey and was beaten and robbed. ²⁴ Two

²² Leviticus 19:18.

²³ James 2:9 - But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

²⁴ Luke 10:30-37.

religious Jewish men came along and saw him but refused to help.

Along came a Samaritan, a foreigner whom Jews traditionally hated. He was the one who rescued the Jewish man and nursed him back to health! ⁴²

So, who was the real neighbor? The Good Samaritan of course! ⁴³

The Lord's message to you right now is, Go and do likewise!

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