

## IMPARTIAL LOVE

Lesson Scripture: James 2  
Focus Scripture: James 2:1-13

*Key Verse: Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? James 2:5 (NRSV)*

### JAMES 2:1-13 (NRSV)

1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in,

3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet,"

4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?

7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

11 For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

### JAMES 2:1-13 (KJV)

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

2 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;

3 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:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

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?

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

11 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.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall



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12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

## KEY TERMS

- **Impartial Love** – Love that Jesus commanded (John 13:34); stems from “circumcised” hearts; freedom from biased and/or prejudicial motives. Equality, fairness and justice are manifestations.
- **James** – The brother of Jesus, also known as the apostle James; the name derives from the name, Jacob, a very popular 1<sup>st</sup> century name.
- **Stephen** – One of the first seven deacons; also known as the first Christian martyr.

practical advice on how to live as Christians. His book is like a “how-to” manual. In today’s scriptures, James focuses on the essential nature of *Impartiality* in the life of believers.

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

First century Jewish Christians,

who were living among Gentiles in communities outside of Palestine, are believed to have been the original audience to whom James was speaking. Stephen had been crucified, causing many believers to respond by fleeing Jerusalem to escape persecution (Acts 7–8). Believers from all walks of life were suddenly forming

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unprecedented communal relationships. The apostle James proactively attacked emerging conflicts by straightforwardly addressing sins associated with partiality and discrimination. He also reinforced and added emphasis to instructions from Jesus and the Old Testament regarding

## INTRODUCTION

James is the author of this quarter’s final lesson on love. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, James became a key leader among the struggling believers in Jerusalem. James’ message contains

God's indisputable love for the poor.

### Renounce Favoritism, James 2:1-7

James uses typical human behavior and experiences to magnify the sinful absurdities involved in showing favoritism. Furthermore, 1 Samuel 16:7b tells us that "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Because of favoritism, biased and improper judgments often occur, resulting in dehumanizing behavior that dishonors Jesus' commandment to love.

James is not suggesting that all poor people will go to heaven. Neither is he suggesting that all rich people will go to hell. His point is that discrimination and bias can cause Christians to sin. Neither wealth nor the lack thereof will determine whose name is written in the Book of Life. Instead, James is pointing to a pathway to eternal life that is marked by allegiance to the teachings of Jesus and conveyed through active faith. Of course, one common attribute for the poor should be an aspiration for all. It is their tendency

to totally submit to reliance on God more readily than others who consider themselves to be self-sufficient.

### Obey the *Royal Law*, James 2:8-13

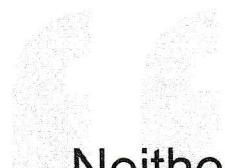
Demanding obedience to the *Royal Law* is another indication of James' fervent desire to encourage Christians to develop transformed lifestyles. The *Royal Law* is a synonym for Jesus' law as recorded in

John 15:12, to "love one another as I have loved you." This law fulfills Old Testament law (Lev. 19:18), and it informs godly interactions and relationships for believers. Many other scriptures, including Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 13:8, and Galatians 5:14, reinforce James' message on the essentiality of Jesus'

law.

### Deeds Confirm Faith, James 2:14

James' discussions on "deeds" parallels Jesus' teachings on "fruit bearing" (John 15:5). He reminds us that deeds (or fruits) are manifestations of our allegiance to Jesus Christ. James is not suggesting that salvation is not achieved through faith confessions. Instead, he



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## Lesson 13

encourages believers to see salvation as the beginning of new life in Christ Jesus. True faith is never stagnant! It transforms behavior as well as our minds (intellect, thoughts, etc.). From this perspective, James declares "so, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17, 26b).

**SANKOFA**

The Honorable Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, had keen insights into human tendencies toward bias and discrimination. One of his many famous quotes speaks to these

tendencies: "In judging our progress as individuals we tend to concentrate on external factors such as one's social position, influence, and popularity, wealth and standards of education... But internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one's development as a human being. Honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others – qualities which are within easy reach of every soul – are the foundation of one's spiritual life."

True faith is never stagnant! It transforms behavior as well as our minds (intellect, thoughts, etc.).

The Apostle James addressed bias and discrimination, based on social class issues, such as income, wealth, material possessions, and so forth. While these same issues exist in churches today,

bias and discrimination based on race continue to be a long-standing deterrent to unity among Christians in the United States. Lifeway Research (2015) quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from a 1963 speech. Dr. King lamented the fact that "the church is still the most segregated major institution in America.

At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation."

In a January 12, 2017 research report entitled *Racial Divides in Spiritual Practice*, the Barna Research Group acknowledged that progress toward reconciling racial issues, even in the church, has been slow. They proceeded to identify ways diversity impacts worshippers' perceptions on how they value and experience spirituality. For example, they identified

racially identifiable variances on how individuals define spiritual progress and the primary goals of discipleship. This could help explain the Lifeway Research finding that 53% of churchgoers in their surveys disagreed with the notion that

their church needs to become more ethnically diverse.

The need for more research is obviously indicated. However,

the need for Christians to become more open and receptive to people different from themselves, with more interracial worship experiences as well as

more biblically-based

teachings on race, is indicated.

### CASE STUDY

Gender-based discrimination and bias also impede expectations of unity among all Christians. One of the most recent prominent protests for gender equality in the church has been voiced by former president Jimmy Carter. In a poignant article entitled, *"Losing My Religion for Equality,"* former President Carter shared his painful experiences with having to take a stand that required him to go in

a different denominational direction. He identifies himself as having been a life-long practicing Christian, a deacon, and a Bible teacher for many years. True to these experiences and teachings, he was obviously able to discern how "selected"

... the former president found it intolerable to continue worshipping in an environment that endorsed bias and discrimination

Bible verses were being used to justify decisions that women should be relegated to subservient roles in the home and the church. Service as deacons, pastors, or military chaplains was to be denied women because of their gender. In fairness, he also noted that practices of viewing women as inferior is

not unique to any one religion. Thus, the former president found it intolerable to continue worshipping in an environment that endorsed bias and discrimination.

### LIFE APPLICATION

As we look at other denominations, it is important to revisit our own history. For example, the life and ministry of Jarena Lee are significant tributes to the AME Church's progress toward gender-based equality. According to her autobiography, Jarena Lee was converted during a



sermon by Bishop Richard Allen. She reported having received the call to preach around 1807. However, due to prevailing social, cultural, and religious norms against women preachers, Jarena was denied immediate acceptance as a preacher. She also experienced severe hostility and many demeaning experiences because of her persistence.

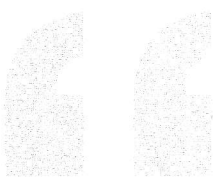
In 1819, Bishop Allen authorized Jarena to preach. With Bishop Allen's authorization, Jarena held services in her home, and she worked tirelessly as an itinerant preacher. In one year, she traveled "two thousand three hundred and twenty-five miles, and preached one hundred and seventy-eight sermons." Jarena continued her ministry until her death in 1849, without having been ordained. Fortunately, she was ordained posthumously at the 50<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial Session of the AME Church's General Conference in 2016.

Bias and discrimination are traits shared by all humanity. How we apply those traits is what matters. From the

scriptures, it is extremely apparent that along with conversion, we should seek to know and live more and more like Jesus. Accordingly, as James taught, how we perceive and treat others should mirror Jesus' ways. James also advises that those of us who lack wisdom should "ask of God" (James 1:5).

### QUESTIONS:

1. Are you aware of your own biases and discriminating beliefs and practices?
2. How do you see bias and discrimination impacting relationships with others?
3. When should bias and discrimination be considered positive or negative influences?



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### CLOSING DEVOTION

Creator in heaven, you know our hearts better than we do. Please keep us mindful of the fact that those who are the recipients of biased and discriminatory actions must guard against treating



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others in biased and discriminatory ways. Please search our hearts and reveal all that is unsatisfactory to you. Bless us to confess and repent while committing to

walk in new revelations to be gained from your interventions. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



## HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

**November 23-November 29**

<b>Monday</b>	Matthew 12:1-8	(Extending Mercy More Important than Sacrifice)
<b>Tuesday</b>	1 Peter 1:17-23	(Love One Another from the Heart)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Galatians 3:6-9, 13-14	(In Christ Gentiles Share Abraham's Faith)
<b>Thursday</b>	Exodus 2:1-10	(Faith of Levite Mother Saves Moses)
<b>Friday</b>	James 2:14-17	(Unexpressed Faith Has No Value)
<b>Saturday</b>	James 2:18-26	(Faith and Works Complement Each Other)
<b>Sunday</b>	James 2:1-13	(Disdain the Practice of Partiality)