

Hearken, My Beloved Brethren James 2:5-7

James 2:5-7 reads, “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? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”

Having declared a prohibitive caution against the practice of showing partiality in **James 2:1**, and having delivered a forceful confrontation against the problem of showing partiality in **verses 2-4**, James presents a challenging consideration of the contradictions in showing partiality against the poor in favor of the rich in **verses 5-7**. Grammatically, these three verses encompass five separate statements. First, there is the imperative call to attentive consideration – “Hearken, my beloved brethren.” Second, there is the rhetorical question concerning God’s dealings with the poor – “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?” Third, there is the reproof declaration of their dealings with the poor in direct contrast to that of God – “But ye have despised the poor.” Finally, there are the two rhetorical questions concerning the oppression of the rich against them as believers and the blasphemy of the rich against their Savior’s name – “Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”

I. The Call to attentive consideration of the truth

James 2:5 begins with the imperative call – “Hearken, my beloved brethren.” Again as in **verse 1**, James expresses his loving concern and burden for the spiritual walk of these believers. He truly viewed them as his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. They were truly dear unto him as his fellow brethren; therefore, he was deeply concerned for their spiritual walk with the Lord. Even so, possessing a heart filled with godly love toward them, James called them and challenged them to hearken unto the truth of God’s Word. Yet what did it mean for them to hearken unto these truths from God’s Holy Word, truths that were reproofing and corrective. First, it would mean that they had to attentively consider these truths from God’s Word. Furthermore, it would mean that they had to submissively receive the reproofs of God’s Word. Finally, it would mean that they had to humbly repent at the correction of God’s Word.

II. The Consideration concerning God’s viewpoint of the poor

So then, what are the truths that they were called to consider in this context? The first of these truths concerned God’s own viewpoint of the poor. Even so, **James 2:5** asks the rhetorical question, “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?” This rhetorical question implies an affirmative answer. Yes, the Lord our God has indeed chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of His kingdom. Now, throughout this paragraph the poor and the rich are considered as general classes,

even as these believers themselves had been regarding or disregarding individuals simply according to the class of their social status. Thus the truth of **verse 5** is not intended to indicate that all of the poor are automatically saved simply because they are poor, nor is it intended to indicate that all of the rich are excluded from eternal salvation simply because they are rich. Rather, the truth of this verse is intended to remind us that as a general class the poor in relation to and in the estimation of this world are much more likely to place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their eternal Savior. Whereas, the rich of this world as a general class are much less likely to place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior; for they are much more likely to set their focus upon this world, rather than upon the life to come, and are much more likely to depend upon their status in this world, rather than to humble themselves in depending upon Christ.

Even so, in **1 Corinthians 1:26-29** God's Word declares, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." In like manner, our Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples in **Matthew 19:23-26** – "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." It is not that it is completely impossible for one who is rich in this world to come unto faith in Christ, for with the Lord our God even this is possible. Yet it is much more rare for one who is rich in this world to come unto faith in Christ. It is not that not *any* among the rich, and wise, and mighty, and noble of this world are called. Yet it is that not *many* among such of high social status in this world are called the children of God through faith in Christ. Indeed, it is much more likely for the poor to hear and to receive the gospel message gladly (**Mark 12:37**), even as church history bears witness. Yea, according to this Biblical principle, the poor visitor from **James 2:2**, whom they disregarded, would have been more likely to respond in faith unto the message of the gospel than the rich visitor would have, whom they regarded with favor.

So then, as a general class those who are among the poor socially from the viewpoint of this world possess an advantage spiritually from the viewpoint of God. Yea, those many from the poor class in relation to this world who place their trust in Christ as Savior are chosen by God to be rich in relation to His kingdom. Regardless of their poor status in the realm of this world, they possess an abundantly rich status in the realm of faith. Although they may be considered to be poor from the viewpoint of this world, they are not truly poor. Rather, they are abundantly rich in the realm of faith. Due to their faith in Christ as Savior, they are called and chosen by God Himself to be His dear children and to enjoy all of the spiritual riches and privileges that are to be found in the realm of faith. Furthermore, as God's dear children, they are also called and chosen by God to be His own heirs and to inherit all of the glory that is to be found in His eternal kingdom. Indeed, this is the eternal, future kingdom of God that He has promised unto every individual who sets his faith

in Christ and his love in God. As such, they are the heirs of God and the joint-heirs of Christ. (**Romans 8:17**) In the viewpoint of this world, they are disregarded as the poor in material things who possess no social status. In the viewpoint of God, they are regarded as the rich in faith who are God's own heirs.

III. The Contrast with God's viewpoint of the poor

Yes, the Lord our God has set the favor of His choice upon the poor of this world who center their dependence upon Him. Yet in practicing partiality against the poor in favor of the rich, these believers had behaved in direct contrast to the Lord their God. Even so, the opening line of **James 2:6** proclaims, "But ye have despised the poor." The Lord your God has chosen the poor as a class, but in direct contrast you have despised them. Although the case of **verses 2-4** was somewhat hypothetical, it certainly represented their real behavior. They did demonstrate respect unto the rich as a class. Yet they despised the poor as a class, and they did this in direct contradiction to the Lord their God's viewpoint. Indeed, showing such partiality is nothing less than direct rebellion against the Lord their God!

IV. The Contention concerning the abusive opposition of the rich

On the other hand, in practicing partiality these believers not only despised the poor, but also demonstrated special respect and regard for the rich. Yet the rich as a general class had done nothing to merit this special respect and regard. In fact, the rich as a general class behaved in an abusive manner against them as individuals and in a blasphemous manner against their Savior's name. Even so, **James 2:6-7** asks the two rhetorical questions – "Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" Again both of these rhetorical questions implies an affirmative answer. Thus the first of these questions presents the contention that it is socially foolish to favor the rich, and the second presents the contention that it is spiritually foolish to do so. As we have previously noted, the majority of believers tend to come from the poor social class; and the rich social class in general tends to oppress and exploit the poor social class. In addition, the rich social class in general tends to disregard and persecute believers for their faith in Christ. Indeed, the word "oppress" indicates a manner of tyrannical abuse; and the word "draw" indicates a manner of forceful compulsion. The rich as a general class were abusively and oppressively lording it over these poor believers on the social and economic level. In addition, the rich were forcing these poor believers into the courts in order that they might cheat these believers out of their rights on the legal and economic level. Since the rich had both social and financial influence, they were able to manipulate the courts in their favor and to take advantage over these poor believers. The rich as a general class were not their friends and supporters, but their cruel oppressors and persecutors. Yet it was toward those very oppressors and persecutors that they were demonstrating special social regard and respect. How utterly foolish this was on the social level!

However, there was an even worse fault on their part in demonstrating special regard and respect for the rich. A believer may have defended his favor toward the rich by claiming that it might produce a level friendship with them and thus bring relief from their oppres-

sion and exploitation. Yet the rich as a general class also tend overtly to reject the gospel and outwardly to blaspheme the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?” The very name “Christian” means “the one’s of Christ,” that is – those who believe in, belong to, identify with, and follow after the Lord Jesus Christ. By His name we believers are called. Through His name we believers are eternally saved. In His name we believers are to live our daily Christian lives. Unto His name we believers are to bear witness before this spiritually lost world. For His name we believers are to suffer reproach and affliction. Indeed, the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is most excellent, most noble, most honorable, most worthy! “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (**Philippians 2:9-11**) Our trust and hope is to be set in His name. Our love and allegiance is to be given unto His name. Yet the rich as a general class tend to blaspheme our Lord and Savior’s all-worthy name. They tend to scorn and reproach His name and us who have committed our lives unto His name. They tend to revile His person and the truth of His Word and of His way. They are not believers in Christ or followers after Christ. Rather, they are rejecters of Christ and rebels against Christ. So then, how can it be that we might demonstrate special regard and respect unto them? Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, should receive all of the regard, respect, honor, and glory due unto His all-worthy name. Indeed, out of that very regard and honor, we should be deeply offended by all who blaspheme His name. Yet these believers were demonstrating special regard and were granting preferential treatment unto these very blasphemers of Christ. Indeed, to honor such rich individuals was equivalent to dishonoring their Lord and Savior. How utterly foolish this was – yea, how utterly ungodly this was on the spiritual level! Yea, how utterly offensive this was against their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

So then, to practice partiality against the poor in favor of the rich is to side against the Lord our God and against His principles of choice. Furthermore, it is to side against ourselves and against the principles of common sense. Finally, it is to side with the blasphemers of our Savior and with the father of all such blasphemy, Satan himself. Yet far too many who claim the name of Christ would rather pursue the social favor and friendship of those who possess higher status in this world, than the spiritual fellowship of their socially poor brethren. Indeed, although those who possess higher status in this world may publicly despise and blaspheme our Lord and His truth, many who claim the name of Christ would rather associate with them because of their higher social status, than assemble with their humble brethren for Biblical worship of their all-glorious Lord and Savior. My beloved brethren, such things ought not so to be.