# No partiality in the church

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

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James 2:1-17

[Review the armor of God from Ephesians 6:10-20]

As much as we’d like to think otherwise, I think we are pretty much constantly judging others, based on their appearance. It’s like we are constantly in a reality TV show in which we are all contestants and judges.

Our clothes and outward appearance send out messages to others about who we are, and who we stand with, and sometimes even what we believe.

How did you decide what to wear this morning? How do you choose your wardrobe? What do you first notice about someone?

I don’t think this is exactly a bad thing, but James warns about this getting out of hand.

James mentions people who come to “the assembly.” The word in Greek is “synagogue,” but James is definitely talking about the local assembly or local assembly place of Christians. (Interestingly, later in the book he talks about the “elders of the church” using the word more commonly used for a Christian congregation, ekkesia.

Anyway, someone walk into the synagogue, the local assembly, the local church. One person comes in, and they look fine: they are practically glowing. (The word here used for “fine” means something like “shiny”). And they have brought their bling: wearing gold rings. Given this description, what do you know about them?

Another person comes in. All they have, it appears, are the clothes on their back, and those clothes are more than a bit dirty, filthy, rumpled.

What do you know about them?

James’s point is not that we might be able to guess some things about people who dress well, or people who don’t dress so well.

His point is that we should not act out in favor of the wealthy and out of favor with the poor. You can see how easy this is to do.

Every congregation that has expenses has to cover those expenses. Every group of congregations does, likewise. We want to pay a pastor, or two. We want to have a building, or repair a building, or do some marketing, or sponsor some ministry.

“Come right over here, Mr. Gold Rings, we have a *special* seat *just* for you. Are you comfortable? Here, have this footstool. Deacon, would you see that Mr Raggedy Clothes kind of gets out of his way?”

*The New Bible Dictionary* says that if this were an actual Jewish court, the rich person would not even be allowed to wear his fancy clothes: the parties were supposed to dress equally, in order to lessen the chance of favoritism.

James gives some really strong arguments against favoritism towards the rich, and for favoritism to the poor.

1. God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. According to Scripture, God has a “preferential option for the poor.” Jesus said, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20). (By the way, this is an interesting and different take on “election” or “predestintation” which explains who God will tend to choose; it’s not God choosing at random, but there is this sense of God choosing some: the poor, the hungry, and the mournful, more than God chooes the rich, the full, and the happy. Luke 6:20-25)
2. A rich person is more likely to oppress you and sue you, and even to blaspheme against the name that was proclaimed over you at your baptism. The rich are more likely to have the resources to carry out their bad deeds, and have more reason to do so: to get even more resources.
3. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This is the basic rule of Christian behavior for how people treat one another, given to us in the Old Testament and repeated by Jesus himself. And Jesus is explicit that our neighbor is *anyone*, especially those who are hard to name as neighbors, as it were. If we show favoritism to the the wealthy over against those who are poor, we break the most important commandment.
4. We all stand in judgment under God, and we trust in God’s mercy. We might do well in one area of our lives, but fail in another. This has certainly been my own experience of myself, and my observation of others. So, we really do need to trust in God’s mercy. But, if we do not show mercy, what right do we have to expect mercy from God? “Forgive us our sins,” we pray, noting that “as we forgive those who sin against us.” Jesus’s parable of the unforgiving debtor (Matthew 18:23-35) comes to mind.
5. Finally, when we ignore the poor among us, we show ourselves as faithless to God’s mission in the world, it makes our faith alive.

Earlier, in chapter 1:9-11, James has already talked about those who are poor and lowly and the rich, and the kind of attitude they should have:

**9**Let the believerwho is lowly boast in being raised up, **10**and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. **11**For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.

Those of us with wealth need to understand our riches are extremely temporary. Those of use without wealth should rejoice that they are being brought into the kingdom. In the kingdom Jesus brings, we have equal standing: poor and rich, every ethnic group, women and men, sinners and saints, young and old, gay and straight, good and bad.

Our glory is not in our riches or our attire, but in living out the riches of our faith, to become as faithful as we can to the Way of Jesus, as members of the kingdom he is bringing. James reminds us, in 2:1, that we believe in our “glorious Lord Jesus Christ,” (or “our Glory, the Lord Jesus Christ”). And it is Jesus’s call and kingdom to which we aspire.