

**WELCOMING AND OBEDIENCE:**  
**A CHALLENGE TO CONVENTIONS**  
**James 2 1-13**  
**October 13, 2013**

Can you remember what you ate last Christmas day? Was it the traditional turkey with cranberry sauce, hot vegies and plumb pud with custard, for afters? Some of us may have been somewhere having cold seafood and salad?

Ah that traditional menu often gets set aside on the actual day, doesn't it and eaten in July. Not so easily, traditions surrounding weddings, they're a lot less flexible for a lot of people. I have met couples who're living together, quite faithfully, in de facto relationships, who tell me that an important reason why they've not married is that neither they nor their families could afford the ceremony—by which they mean the breakfast or reception.

Those two examples of traditions or conventions we have generally adopted in our society lead me to ask: is it essential that we have turkey for Christmas lunch? Must the bride-to-be's family bear the entire cost of a wedding, without contribution by the groom and his family; indeed, who says that wedding-breakfasts must be so elaborate and expensive? What is a wedding all about?

I firmly believe in the wisdom of conserving good traditions/conventions from the past, but that doesn't mean we should blindly accept them without examining how sensible, helpful and practical they are—however inevitable they may appear to be.

Don't misunderstand me, I believe there are often good reasons for the traditions/conventions we've inherited and so with a bit of thought about why we have them, we should easily discover those good reasons.

In today's paragraph, James addresses two harmful traditions which his readers were continuing to practice: differing treatment of people based on their social class v1-7 and a failure to see that obedience to God's Law must begin with a love for Him and neighbour in dependence on Mercy and not on their supposed superior spiritual achievement v8-13.

**(1) Welcome All Newcomers v1-7**

Obviously, Christian worship-gatherings were receiving attention from outsiders. Visitors were attending: perhaps some enquirers seeking the Lord, others already believers seeking fellowship whilst in that town; no doubt some curious to check the sect out; still others government-informers spying them out.

Notice the REASON motivating and underlying James' impassioned teaching at verse one:

*"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism."*

JAMES addresses them patiently, kindly, in a brotherly way, doesn't he. He's part of the family with them with the Lord Jesus as their Head. Because we belong to the Lord of Glory, *"our glorious Lord Jesus Christ"*, our evaluation of other people—whether fellow-believers or other people—must now change. Our thinking can now grow free from earth-bound conventional assessment of people and situations. We still note peoples' backgrounds, their limitations, their needs, their gifts; but need not "show favouritism" in dealing with them and relating to them.

James says We are free to evaluate them according to their current Spiritual standing and likely Spiritual potential and so avoid.

[A] making hasty evaluations of peoples' worth verses 2-4:

*"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?"*

If a well-dressed couple, who informed us they were from a Presbyterian church in Sydney and had just moved into town came to church and a person in torn jeans with smelly runners came, too, what would tend to happen? Wouldn't we tend to spend more time with the well-dressed couple and tolerate the poor person: we wouldn't refuse the poor person entry ... but could show by the level of attention towards the couple that we thought they were more significant, worth spending more time with. Oh how easy it is to get trapped into that kind of approach!

Remember, it's not been said, yet, whether one or both of these newcomers are fellow-believers, but their mere outward appearance was enough for some to treat them differently.

Basically, what the church-members were thinking was 'well, the well-dressed couple with power-influence-money is going to be more important/more helpful to the church than the poor person could ever be.'

Is that how God sees things?

To think like that is to jump to conclusions, isn't it.

[B] Forgetting daily persecution is based on such misjudgment verses 5-7:

*"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?"*

Poverty of spirit is an essential component of a Christian's character—it's the first element of the truly happy man which Jesus proclaimed (Mat 5 v3). God often gives the gift of genuine faith to the economically poor of this world and it is notoriously hard for the economically rich (usually smugly self-satisfied) to humble themselves enough so as to enter God's Kingdom so as to bow to His Rule—though they can do so by His Grace.

So by potentially despising the economically poor visitor and fawning-over the rich man, James says, they are insulting those whom God may well be Drawing to Himself! In fact, he goes on to warn that some of these "visitors" could actually be informers, potential oppressors who will testify against them in court trials. How foolish to do that!

While our social scene is different, I believe it important to guard against passing final sentence on people we meet. We must evaluate them as we meet them so as to help them but need to work hard to make people of various backgrounds feel welcome among us so the Gospel can get a hearing by them whatever their background may be.

James now goes on to address the problem of boasting which some believers he wrote to were displaying.

## **(2) Boasting In Selective Obedience To Certain Commandments v 8-13**

In a nutshell, this is what was going on.

Some believers were boasting about their growing obedience to certain of God's Commandments. Now

James says that this "Royal Law" of loving neighbour, of not showing partiality/favouritism is right up there with the love for God as first in importance verses eight and nine:

*"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing right.*

*But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers."*

Of course, God's Law is given to show us what He Requires and not as a means of Salvation and so our reading from Corinthians reminds us that our "boast" must be "in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1 v31).

In the light of this, James counsels those in these congregations:

*"Speak and act (towards all) 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!" [verses 12-13]*

What words of wisdom those are! We can only be Saved (put right with God) through Jesus. This renews a hunger within us to want to please the Father by conforming to His revealed Law and that Law begins right here with this "love God, love your neighbor" royal standard.

***TO TAKE AWAY:***

1. Whom do I find hardest to get on with at Church? Lord, Show me how I can pray for ... them and care for them.