

James 2:1-13

Favoritism versus Love

James 2:1 is a continuation of 1:26-27. Pure and faultless religion doesn't show favoritism.

1 Samuel 16:7: "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Verse 4

What does James mention here that often goes hand in hand with favoritism? Discrimination. James portrays favoritism toward the rich *and* discrimination toward the poor.

In its early days the church was predominantly poor and humble; and therefore if a rich man was converted and came to the Christian fellowship, there must have been a very real temptation to make a fuss over him, and to treat him as a special trophy for Christ.

Application: How do we show favoritism or discrimination within the church?

James' example is favoritism/discrimination at church was between rich and poor. Examples at church today might sound like this: "I never talk to those college students...or that old lady. I prefer certain types of people whose appearance or personality are like mine or in my comfort zone. A homeless guy showed up in church once in tattered clothes. He announced a need for money and we gave him some. But he never showed up again."

We also tend to show partiality in both our evangelism and our discipleship programs. We tend to avoid those who show no promise, no great potential, and we actively recruit those who are the "movers and shakers" in our society. When some well-known athlete or personality makes a profession of faith, we can't get to them fast enough. Imagine the conversion impact of Tiger Woods versus a homeless person.

At church, we need to focus our evangelism and discipleship programs on the youth Why? They're the future of the church, the leaders of the next generation, and their hearts are impressionable. Most people are saved before or during their teen years. The second decade of life can be an emotionally turbulent time.

According to James 2:6-7, why should we not show favoritism toward the rich? They were exploiting the church, dragging them into court, and blaspheming the name of the Lord. It is inconsistent to give special honor to those who despise the Lord that we as believers love and serve. The poor person is as worthy of our discipling and pastoral care and love as the person who has the means to rescue our church from its budget crisis.

Application: How do we show favoritism or discrimination in the military?

Rank (including wives), job, kids, etc. As a leader it is easy to show favoritism to your superstars, the guys who work the hardest, who make you look good.

It is important that we don't discriminate against enlisted personnel. They're the backbone of the organization. How should we treat enlisted personnel in a non-discriminatory manner? It can't be a passive issue. Show that you care. Be interested in their lives, know their names and their families, where they're from, goals, etc. Visit them in the hospital, etc. Earn their trust and respect. When they come to you with their problems, you will have an opportunity to impact their lives. Many leaders pay lip service to taking care of their people.

Jesus didn't discriminate. He didn't pick the "cream of the crop" when He chose His disciples from fishermen and common folks. He didn't pick the cream of the crop when He chose to save us, either!

What would lead someone to treat the rich better than the poor? Gain their favor, get something in return, get them indebted to you for when you need a favor.

The problem isn't that you are nice to the rich. The problem is that you are not nice to the poor man as well!

Application: Who are currently leading attacks on Christianity? How should we respond?

Why does James say we should not show favoritism?

- Verse 1 – The way we treat others is a testimony of our hearts as Christians. It hinders the effectiveness of our witness. God's great love, grace, and power are more evident when He takes seemingly insignificant people and uses them significantly.
- Verse 4 – We become judges with evil thoughts: "The homeless are buying booze and drugs with my handout."

- Verse 5 – God has chosen the poor in the eyes of the world to be heirs of God’s kingdom. They have a special place in His heart
- Verses 6-7 – The rich are the ones who have traditionally oppressed the believers, the people of God.
- Verses 8-11 – Favoritism violates the royal law of love and is therefore sin. It is a lack of conformity to the will of God.
- Verse 12 – Favoritism will be judged.

Application: What should you do when you encounter favoritism or discrimination? How can you avoid/prevent it?

Verse 8

What is meant by the Royal Law? It is the law of the King who heads the kingdom that believers will inherit (verse 5). It is also royal in that it is primary, preeminent; it governs all other laws dealing with human relationships (Matthew 22:39). Moreover, it belongs to a high order of law that is worthy of a king.

Verses 10 and 11: All sins are not equally serious in that the consequences of some sins are greater than others, but all sins are equally serious in that any sin is a violation of God’s will.

What is the law that gives freedom in verse 12?

- Not the law of bondage (Mosaic covenant, Ten Commandments) but the law of liberty.
- Freedom to do what is right (Romans 8:1-4).
- The law of liberty is the law of God that liberates us now. It is the same as the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2) in contrast to the Mosaic Law.
- It is the new covenant referred to in Jeremiah 31:31.
- Since James is speaking to believers, the judgment to which he refers must be the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).
- Nine of the ten commandments are referred to in the New Testament (not the Sabbath) They are not given as law here, but as instruction in righteousness. God says, “This is what I expect of you. I want you to live a holy life out of love and respect for me.”

God gave the Mosaic Law both to regulate the life of the Israelites and to reveal the character and purposes of God to the Israelites and all other people. Its regulatory function ceased when Jesus died on the cross (Romans 10:4, Hebrews 7:12). Its revelatory value remains forever.

Verse 13

How does mercy triumph over judgment? Mercy eliminates, supercedes judgment. Mercy is always the greater thing. It’s harder to give mercy. If we are merciful in dealing with our fellowmen God will be merciful in dealing with us when we stand before Him (Matthew 25:34-40). Mercy triumphs over judgment just as love triumphs over partiality.

When it comes to application to our lives, we need to ask questions like: “Who do I favor? Who do I look down upon? Who do I think I’m better than?”

The church should be a diverse group of people, racially, socially, and economically. A church full of look-alikes does not impress the world. The world is impressed when a very diverse group can be seen living together in love and unity.

Incidentally, we are not to show partiality to the poor, either (Exodus 23:3, Leviticus 19:15, Deuteronomy 1:17).

This world operates like most airlines. Generally, those who don’t have much money ride coach, those with more money ride business class, and those who can afford it ride first class. That’s the way things work in this world, and we understand why. But this should never be the case in the church. The church should operate like an airline with only one fare. Everybody rides in first class.

MEMORIZE: James 2:12-13