

Jas11 – NO Favoritism James 2:1-7

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Open your Bibles. Turn them to the book of James. Title of the message today, “NO Favoritism.” We will do verses 1 through 7 of chapter 2 today.

Do you know who is really good at seeing or perceiving preferential treatment? Children. My children were and now my grandchildren are very quick to perceive any possible injustice in how they are being treated compared to their siblings or other children. They say things like, “How come he gets to do that and I don’t get to do that?” or “How come she gets to eat that and I don’t?”

And what they are really asking in their little hearts is “Why are you treating them better (different) than you are treating me?”

Children are especially sensitive to seeing favoritism. But (quite frankly) we never grow out of that sensitivity. Unless of course that favoritism is being shown to us! Then, we have a little harder time seeing it clearly. But God says all favoritism is sinful and destructive and should not be known among his people.

All through the Bible this truth is made clear. God shows no favoritism and so, as his people we must not show any favoritism. That is the scalpel in the surgeon’s hand today.

Let’s pray. Heavenly father please, use the scalpel of your Word to drain the poison from our sinful hearts. Lord, we lay ourselves open, under your knife, under your Word that divides between bone and marrow, that is a discerner of our thoughts and intent, we willingly lay ourselves open. Apply your Word to our lives. Continue to change us, to convict us, to bring us to repentance and to transform us more and more into your image, Jesus. We give you the right, in fact we beg you to do it now, in Jesus’ name, amen.

There’s no break in the book of James between chapter 1 and chapter 2, we are in a continuation of the same flow of thought. Last message James gave us three examples of outward devotion to God that is pure and acceptable:

- #1) Control of our tongue
- #2) A compassionate heart for those in need
- #3) Refusing to allow the world to corrupt us

We read in James 1:27:

James 1:27 (NLT)

27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress . . .

And we said orphans and widows were not exclusive examples, they were representative of those around us in the greatest need. And so on the heels of saying pure and genuine religion is shown by us caring for those in need, James immediately begins thinking about how we treat other people inside our own meetings, or churches.

James is so good at saying, “Wait a minute, this actually applies to you.”

James doesn’t give us the option of easily skipping over these verses, but instead he says how does this truth apply to you? Right now? Where you’re at? Right in your own life?

And James subject today is one of the oldest tendencies in the human race, we come by it very naturally in our sin nature. And then our culture, our upbringing and our hidden motives cause us to really lean toward this dangerous tendency. That is the danger of showing favoritism.

When James was writing and in the culture James was writing to, there was no middle class. There were a very small percentage of people who were rich and everyone else was poor. More like you see in Mexico, or Africa, where 95% of the people are living in poverty and 5% are living in wealth. And so most of James readers would have been in the poor class of people. And James is talking to them and to the church leaders about how they interact with the few rich people versus the majority of poor people around them. And as usual, James starts with his main point.

James 2:1 (ESV)

1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

This is really hard to translate from Greek to English. If you have a King James Bible, I can almost guarantee that you cannot understand what it says without another translation. The ESV does a good job of keeping it literal, but here is what the NLT says.

James 2:1 (NLT)

1 My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?

Nailed it!! ***how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?***

In the Greek this sentence is written with shock, like “*I CAN’T even believe you guys...*” This statement is written so forcefully that it easily leads to the question, which part of “show no partiality” do you not understand? And I think James is expressing “shock” about this because this is one of the oldest commandments from God.

It’s important for us to understand, James isn’t coming up with this command right here. In a section of the law that flowed right out of the Ten Commandments in Leviticus 19:15 and 18 we read:

Leviticus 19:15 & 18 (ESV)

15 . . . You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

& *then* in V.18 - in the same context - we see the famous command

18 . . . but you shall love your neighbor as yourself . . .

And then in Deuteronomy 10 in the NLT it says:

Deuteronomy 10:17–19 (NLT)

17 “For the Lord your God is . . . the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed.

18 He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you . . . 19 So you, too, must show love to foreigners (strangers) . . .

And then, as a direct consequence of not obeying the Lord in this very area, we read in Malachi 2:

Malachi 2:7–9 (NLT)

7 “The words of a priest’s lips should preserve knowledge of God, . . . 8 But you priests have left God’s paths . . . You have corrupted the covenant I made with the Levites,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. 9 “So I have made you despised and humiliated in the eyes of all the people. For you have not obeyed me but have shown favoritism in the way you carry out my instructions.”

God has been serious about this command since the beginning of the law. Why? Because God shows no favoritism and so he commands us to show no favoritism.

And in the New Testament, this command to show no favoritism is only intensified by Jesus and in New Testament books. Even the Scribes recognized this about the Lord. In Luke 20:21 they say to Jesus “*Teacher, we know that you show no partiality . . .*” Even his enemies knew that. And after the famous sheet incident in Acts 10 where God lowers down a sheet with “unclean” animals on it and tells Peter to eat and Peter refuses until

God repeats it three times, and then after seeing God move in Cornelius the Gentile's house, Peter finally said in Acts 10:

Acts 10:34–35 (NLT)

34 . . . “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.

35 In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.

God shows no favoritism and he calls us (in the same way) to show no favoritism. But maybe we should expand the definition of favoritism. The word “partiality” (ESV) (Or “Favoritism”) NLT, NIV, comes from a Greek word that is literally, “To receive the face.” It means to make a judgment about a person based on external appearance. Do not receive the face, meaning, make no judgments on external appearance.

James is not saying we should never show respect or honor to any person. The New Testament calls us to do that for certain people. And James is not talking about treating our close friends different than other people – Jesus did that (the twelve disciples and the three disciples.)

What James is saying is: we are not to show preferential treatment. And as we continue you'll see he's specifically forbidding showing preferential treatment to those who have money, just because of their money. There are positions and people we are to show respect and honor, that's not what James is talking about.

He's going to say, if you show favoritism to someone *because* of their *money*, it proves your actions are actually guided by your evil motives. (James' words, not mine.)

This sin has been blatant in plenty of churches in the past, and still is in some churches today. But God is not speaking to us about those churches. He's not speaking to us about those people. God is speaking to us *about us* and about the specific church he has made us a part of. And may you (like me) would think, “We've done a really good job around here, not showing favoritism.”

But God's Word is never meant for us to say like the Pharisee in Luke 18 who arrogantly proclaimed “I thank God I am *not like* those other sinners!”

That is never the purpose of God's Word. Instead, God would have us open ourselves up to the surgical purifying of his Word in the book of James, allowing ourselves to be challenged, convicted and brought to repentance at whatever level is needed in our own lives and in our own church.

So verse one says forcefully, *show no favoritism*. Then in verse two James paints the picture...

James 2:2-4 (ESV)

2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,

3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,”

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

In the NLT verse 4 says

James 2:4 (NLT)

4 doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

The image of the rich man with gold rings and fine clothing is depicting a person who wants to be recognized for their wealth. They come in expecting to be shown favor. The image of the poor man in shabby clothing would look like our typical homeless person, soiled, stained and smelly. And James says if you put the rich man, who expects to be favored in a good place, hoping to win his favor and you put the homeless man in a meaningless place because he can do nothing for you, James says your decisions are guided by your evil motives. (Ouch.)

The problem is that money still does the talking in far too many churches. James says it was an offense to God in the first century and it is still an offense to God today.

Not long ago, in England and early Protestant churches in America, real pew ownership was actually common. Some churches would put name signs on the pews. Some actually put doors, even with a lock, on the end of the pew to prevent “just anyone” from sitting in your “reserved” pew, and the seating that was left was referred to as free seating. This obviously led to the exact problem James is referring to here. I guess the churches hadn't read the book of James yet. Now, that obviously appalls us, right? But when was the last time you walked into church and had someone sitting in your seat? And did you think about how you could care for that person? Or did you think something else about them sitting in your seat?

Some of us would like the idea of owning our seat. Some of you are thinking right now, “Now that is a good idea.” But if we want to know how we are to view people all we

have to do is look at how Jesus viewed people. Now, please hear this, Jesus was not “down” on the rich just because they were rich. He was not critical of them just because of their money. Jesus saw right past their money, directly into their hearts and that was all he cared about. But Jesus did know what we know today... money can easily prevent a person from recognizing their true need for God. And if a rich person’s money was keeping them from recognizing their spiritual need, Jesus was first to point that out.

And that is the same line of thinking that James takes in verse 5 and 6.

James 2:5-6(a) (ESV)

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

6 But you have dishonored the poor man . . .

James is not saying that only the poor are chosen by God to be rich in faith. Again, his example is not all encompassing, it is representative. If God has chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, should we not view them at least as equals to those who are only rich in this world?

Jesus so often showered his grace and his healing upon those the world and discarded. I wonder if he might have been setting an example for us? In fact, it seems (all through the Bible) that the poor in this world have actually had a spiritual advantage over the rich.

Because:

- #1) They don’t have the burden or the desire for money and
- #2) They are much more likely to recognize their spiritual need.

Listen carefully to 1 Corinthians 1:26-28:

1 Corinthians 1:26–28 (NLT)

26 Remember . . . few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. 27 Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. 28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

If you haven’t heard it before, hear it now, God’s view is upside down from the world’s view. How sad it is when we show favoritism to those who are rich in this world but lost as far as eternity goes. We should not be showing the favoritism they expect. We should be showing them how lost they are without Christ.

Now, God has saved many who are rich in this world and he uses them mightily for his kingdom. God is not against wealth, in and of itself. But God is very against us showing favoritism to someone because of their wealth.

If you've got a few dollars in the bank, God is not mad at you. But if you're using that money to expect favoritism, God wants to "have a talk with you" out back... and he is certainly not happy with any Christian or church that shows you favoritism because of your money.

Finally, James closes with one last example. Again, not directed so much at the rich, but directed at those who show favoritism to the rich.

James 2:6(b)-7 (ESV)

6 . . . Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?

7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

(The name of Christ)

James is saying, wait a minute. Why do you think so highly of those who are making your life miserable and who are blaspheming the name of Christ. Again he's using a representative example and he's saying: why do you show favoritism to these types of people?

To me, this is like "celebrity worship." Why in the world do we think so highly of some rich celebrity who's funding and promoting the total demise of the Christian foundation of this nation.

Ooooo look, it's so and so! Oh, wow!

Yeah, look, they are doing everything they can to blaspheme the name of God and remove all Biblical principles from our culture. Yeah, aren't they great??? Uhh, no. They're actually lost in their sin and doing damage to Christ, stop idolizing them!

I believe the remedy for our tendency to show favoritism to the high instead of the low in our society is referred to back in verse 1 where James says:

James 2:1 (ESV)

1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

The remedy is to consider Jesus Christ and his glory. Consider the glory he came from in order to reach us, when we were the poorest and most pitiful sinners. How far down did

Jesus come to be with us? How far down did Jesus come to care for us? How far down did Jesus come to save us?

Knowing how far down Jesus came for us, should cause us to give priority to those who are the lowest in our midst. And in addition to that, is recognizing that Jesus so identifies with the lost and the hurting and the broken, that he says in Matthew 25 that when we care for them, when we help them, something supernatural happens. \

In Matthew 25:40 (ESV)

40 (Jesus says) . . . *‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

The ground is level at the foot of the cross. WE must see all people level there. And if we are showing favoritism to one over another, especially if it has anything to do with money, we must recognize and confess our own evil motives. We must repent and pray that God would save us from our prideful, arrogant sin. Let’s do that now.

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus, that’s our desire, to have your mind on this. We want our relationship with you to come out in pure and genuine devotion. We want your life in us to change us and how we deal with others around us. And we recognize that there is an accounting of people in this world and we tend to classify them. God, help us .Forgive us right now. Help us to see, Lord, that you came to save all the lost. The low, wretched, filthy rich people and the blessed pure, poor people. You came to save them all. Use us, Lord, with no partiality to make decisions about the people in our lives. Use us Lord with no favoritism to decide who we are going to come alongside, who we are going to help, who we are going to carry, who we are going to minister to. Allow us to be driven by your Spirit. (If you’ve never made Jesus Christ your Lord, if this is all new to you, let me just tell you you’re a sinner. And for God to be holy he must judge sin. He can’t overlook your sin, he can’t ignore it, he sent his son to pay for it, the full and complete price for your sin has been heaped upon the Lord of glory, taken to the cross where he experienced the full and complete punishment for your sin. Every sin. The sin you’re in now. The sins of your past. The sins of your future. Jesus bore them all. But for you to receive the forgiveness of that and the cleansing of his blood you must receive him into your life. Do it now. Right now.) Say “Yes, Lord, that’s me. My sins are great, more than I can ever think you can forgive me for. But I believe, Jesus. I believe you are who you say you are. I believe you paid the price for my sin on the cross. And I ask you today to forgive me. To be my savior, and to be my Lord. I receive you as such. Come into my life. Fill me with your Spirit and make me new. I pray in Jesus’ name, amen.*

