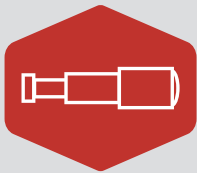




Lesson 6: Don't Show Partiality

Main Idea: People tend to misjudge other people's motives. The truth is no one knows another person's heart. The tendency most people have is to cast judgment on a person for what they say or do, or because of some external factor or some outward appearance. In this lesson, you'll see how James addresses this vital subject of prejudice, of making superficial judgements. With practical teaching, he instructs believers to demonstrate their faith by their lifestyle, emphasizing right speaking and acting.

Scripture: James 2:1-13



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

Believers fled from Jerusalem at the persecution of Stephen (Acts 8:1). These believers did not have a permanent place to live, so they had to work at whatever job they could find wherever it was. Unbelieving Jewish leaders hated them, and local people rejected them because they did not participate in the pagan feasts.

When James tells his readers not to show partiality, he uses a Greek phrase which literally means "to receive by face." When you receive a person by face, you are not judging them on the basis of their skin color, clothing, economic status, or any other external thing. James is exhorting believers not to receive people according to the external.

Much of the book of James is based on Leviticus 19:9–18, which deals with justice in judicial situations. A vivid illustration of this justice occurs in 1 Samuel 16, when God rejects Saul and tells Samuel to anoint a successor from the family of Jesse. The sons of Jesse, the brothers of David, all line up. Samuel’s eyes land on the first one and believes God will select him because of his excellent physical appearance. To Samuel, the first son looked like a king. But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).”

Jesus was complimented, even by His enemies, for never showing partiality. They said to Him in Matthew 22:16, “You do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.” Your friendships, as valuable as they may be to you, ought never to become closed groups that shut others out. As a Christian, your perspective on life should be inclusive rather than exclusive.

One commentator suggests, “The word translated ‘favoritism’ speaks of the attitude of partiality by which one person is shown favor, or special consideration, over another. In the Old Testament the concept often refers to unjust judgment against the vulnerable on the part of those in power (e.g., Psalm 82:2; Proverbs. 18:5; 24:23; 28:21; Malachi 2:9–10; so Martin, 59; Nystrom, 114).”¹

People tend to want to spend time with others who are similar in socioeconomic makeup, educational background, etc. While this works sociologically, James teaches that it does not work theologically. Christians should be inclusive, not exclusive. James points out the problems happening in the synagogue at this time, where the rich were oppressing the poor. During this time in history, there was no middle class. James is saying the Church needs to be different from the rest of society. It is in the Church that the rich man and the poor man sit down together. In fact, the poor man might even have spiritual authority over the wealthy person because the Church is the great leveler, where class, social distinction, and economic status means nothing.

James is saying you are to live by God’s royal law if you are a Christian. A royal law was given by a king, and as the king’s subjects, the people lived according the royal manner set forth by that law. The reason this law in James is “royal” is because it comes from God, the King of all believers. As members of His Kingdom, our conduct and motives should be significantly different from those who treat people according to external things rather than spiritual matters. One commentator suggests, “Jewish teachers of the era emphasized

¹ Guthrie, “James,” 13:231.

the unity of God’s law. For example, in 4 Maccabees 5:19–21, Eleazar, upon being commanded by the pagan king to eat unclean food, replies that there are no small sins, for to break the Law in small matters or great is equally serious.”²



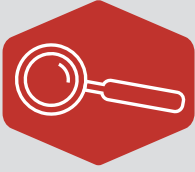
My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through completing the reading assignments below, you will better understand what God’s Word is saying to you.

When you see members of another ethnic community in your church, you have a special opportunity to reach out and welcome them. When you see people who are different from you, sit down with them and welcome them, appreciating your differences in Christ. Know that Jesus has made all the ground level around Calvary. All are equal in God’s presence, and He receives you, not by face, but by your hunger for Him. Consider these points:

- Don’t show favoritism (2:1).
- Don’t show partiality (2:2–4).
- God does not judge superficially (2:5).
- The world is partial so Christians should not be (2:6–7).
- Showing partiality is contrary to the command of Scripture (2:8–11).
- Showing mercy means that you understand God’s acceptance of you (2:12–13).

² Guthrie, “James,” 13:236.



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Application:

- Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:
 - » Who appears in this passage?

 - » Where is this passage taking place?

 - » When is this passage occurring?

 - » Why is this passage important?

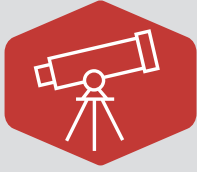
 - » What is happening in this passage?

 - » How does this passage apply to my life?

- Circle and write down any reoccurring words in this passage.

- When you hear the word "favoritism," what comes to mind?

- Have you ever had the motive of “what can they do for me?” when you met someone? Why?
- Do you believe that showing favoritism is a sin? Why or why not?
- Read James 2:13. What comes to mind when you read “mercy triumphs over judgement”?
- Read what Jesus said about mercy in Matthew 5:7; 6:12; 7:1-2; 18:21-35; and 25:31-46. How does Jesus say mercy should be displayed?
- On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being very well and 4 being not well, rate yourself on how well you show mercy. Write out a plan to improve.



Upward and Outward Focus (Telescope)

How does the Scripture affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers in your journal.

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about the text you just studied. How did these verses help deepen your love for God?

- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate this love to others?



Using My FireBible

Read the study notes for the following verses in the Fire-Bible and answer the accompanying questions.

- James 2:1. What is favoritism? In your own words, write the three reasons why favoritism is wrong.

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