

James' Letter

3: Favoritism vs Love

We have concluded the introduction to James' letter and now we move into the main section of his letter which contains twelve different teachings about how to wholeheartedly walk the talk of following Jesus in our everyday lives. In this first teaching, James points out how showing favoritism towards certain people while ignoring others is the opposite of love as Jesus defined it.

The Sin of Showing Favoritism

There is a tendency within all of us (some worse than others) to show favoritism based on superficial things such as good looks, race, wealth, success or social status. We are drawn towards the people who possess these types of qualities, and we tend to just ignore those who don't.

For some of us, we are just more comfortable being around those who are just like us. Those that are not like us seem foreign to us, and we don't know what to expect from them so just hanging around people like us is the safer play.

However, for many of us, we can trace our favoritism and discrimination towards others all the way down to a selfish intention that seeks out people who might benefit us and causes us to ignore those who can't.

- ❖ Are you just as quick to greet the various stadium personnel that you pass on your way to the clubhouse as you are your teammates in the clubhouse?
- ❖ Do you act differently around those with more service time and bigger salaries than you do with the rookies or September call-ups?
- ❖ Are you more likely to give the hot reporter more of your time and attention than the beat up beat writer?
- ❖ Do you find yourself happy to hook people up who can hook you up (tickets, merchandise, time, etc.) but annoyed to hook people up who can't give you anything in return?

In doing these types of things, James would ask us, "have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (v. 2:4)

Showing favoritism is sinful because it is a deceptive effort to use people (even our closest friends) for our own personal benefit.

Many of us don't want to waste our time and energy on those who make us uncomfortable or who don't benefit us in some way. Many of us also assume that poorer people are lazy, uneducated, unskilled, irresponsible, and so we keep them at a safe distance. We may write checks to organizations who care for poorer people, but that's the extent to which we will involve ourselves in their lives. Such behavior is sinful and the exact opposite of the way God acts.

God has always been in the business of exalting and honoring those that the world sees unfit and unqualified. James writes:

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? (v. 2:5)

Love Like Jesus

James makes a bold argument by saying that those who show favoritism are acting more like those who oppose Jesus than like Jesus himself.¹

Think about it, there is a tendency among those who are living a successful life here on earth to look down on followers of Jesus as weak, dumb and annoying.

However, Jesus viewed people differently. He was never hypnotized by the superficial things that hypnotize us, and he went out of his way to love those who were neglected and ignored.

He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."² And he declared, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."³

¹ see James 2:6-7

² see Luke 4:18

³ see Luke 6:20

The Kingdom of God is an upside-down type of Kingdom compared to the ways of this world. The last will be first; the least will be the greatest and the poor will be rich. And so, when we disregard or look down on those that we consider lower than us, we are violating the order of God and his Kingdom.

Tragically, we have a tendency to dishonor those whom God chooses to be the heirs of his Kingdom and to honor those whom Jesus said would find it nearly impossible to enter into his Kingdom.⁴ Therefore, we need to ask ourselves, "Are we hanging out with the right crowd?"

Now, to be clear, we must never go so far as to disassociate ourselves with the rich and only concern ourselves with the poor. Doing so would be a dramatic over-adjustment that would then lead to an alternate form of discrimination that many followers of Jesus unfortunately fall into. We should never ignore the poor, but we should never neglect the rich either.

As James alludes to earlier in his letter (v. 1:9-10), Jesus is the common denominator in which there is no discrimination. All have fallen short of the glory of God, and all are in desperate need of God's grace and mercy. We are all poor in spirit and spiritually bankrupt which means that all of us need the free handout of God's grace. And so, in light of the good news of this free handout that God has supplied for all of us, we should speak and act like people who are overwhelmed and blown away by the mercy that has been extended to us.

⁴ see Mark 10:23-25

According to James, true followers of Jesus seek to uphold the Royal Law of the Kingdom given by the King himself (v. 2:8).⁵

Why does he call it the Royal Law?

Because loving others as much as we love ourselves is the way followers of Christ live. We live like our King who is the epitome of loving others like you would love yourself. He is the King who willingly gave his life in order to restore people back into a right relationship with God.

Scripture reminds us:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Loving others like Jesus has loved us should define the way that we live our lives. We should be so radically revolutionized by the love and mercy of God that we do not discriminate or dishonor anyone around us.

Those who have been truly touched and amazed by God's grace will radically transform into relentless givers of that same grace.

A true follower of Jesus views everyone and loves everyone like Jesus.

⁵ see Matthew 22:37-40

We must remember what our King has taught us:

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy... For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:7, 46-48)

A true follower of Jesus views the world through the eyes of his Lord and Teacher and seeks the benefit of all men with the same sacrificial devotion demonstrated by his Savior.

Pray that the Lord may reveal the roots of discrimination and prejudices in your own heart, and pray that he would transform you into a creature so amazed by grace that you become a relentless giver of that same grace.