

Love Without Exceptions

Anybody have an interesting character in their family tree? Share my story of cousin Lester.

In Chapter 2, James starts out sharing about something God hates, and I think most of us hate, but it's something that I think most of us struggle with to some degree, even if sometimes we don't always recognize it.

Favoritism. What is favoritism? Dr. Daniel Doriani writes, "the word translated "favoritism" is a compound word based on an O.T. phrase. To be hyper – literal it means "to receive a face". To judge a person based on outward qualities not intrinsic qualities. It's showing partiality to certain people based on their outward appearance or social status.

Instead of coming out with the "big guns", James starts with something that may seem little, or trivial, in the grand scheme of life but it can have devastating consequences, especially in the church. And Jesus died for His church so it's a BIG DEAL to him.

Little Things Reveal the Heart.

It's often the little things that reveal whether our religion is T or F. "Religion" gets a bad rap. Like Pastor Daniel shared last week in this context it simply means "the outward practice". Pure religion means actually putting God's Word to work! **"Faith That Works"!**

James 1:22 – *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

We tend to do pretty good on the big things. The little things often get us. True religion is visible in daily life, both in big, public events and in small acts of obedience or disobedience.

Letter written to the church; Jewish Christ – followers, who were dispersed, or scattered, from Jerusalem because of persecution. Jews who didn't trust in Jesus, persecuted those who did, so they fled. James is a Jewish follower of Jesus and a leader in the early church, writing to a largely Christ – following Jewish audience - the twelve tribes dispersed abroad.

James sees a problem and addresses it. In a nutshell here, it is:

The Church is a Family. Favoritism has NO PLACE in a Family.

So, the early Christ – followers struggled w/favoritism then and we struggle with it now. B/C of the form we have this in now, we can miss easily miss things.

Chapter 1:26 – 27 directly sets up Chapter 2.

James 1:26 – 27 (NIV) Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Three things *true religion* does:

- Controls the tongue.
- Looks after widows and orphans in distress
- Remains unpolluted by the world

James states the *what* in 1:26 – 27. Then in Chapter 2, he starts to share *how* to live it out in & what can trip us up.

James 2:1 (NIV) My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

Like us today, these Jewish followers of Jesus met together often, but they also had to be warned to steer clear of some prideful practices that didn't honor the Lord Jesus. Evidently, they had the tendency to treat some people as more valuable than others because of their social status, clothing, or good looks.

They were making distinctions between people and James is saying "NO". The only distinction should be between our glorious God and people. "He's God, we're not". That's called favoritism.

Favoritism Contradicts the Character of God.

Faith & favoritism are incompatible. People play favorites. We often judge by appearance/social status. God does not. (God, Prophet Samuel, Bethlehem)

1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV) But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." *Even Samuel struggled w/favoritism.*

Favoritism is a constant in our culture, but it shouldn't be in the church.

When we put a tag on someone's worth, for any reason, we ignore the fact that Jesus paid the ultimate price for us all. Jesus willingly paid the same price for other people as he did for you and me.

The blood that bought our freedom from sin is the gospel that unites all of us as brothers and sisters in Christ. James is saying that if we believe in Jesus we should show no favoritism, no partiality.

Apparently, this was happening in the Church and the Church is a family. Favoritism has NO place in a family. James addresses it.

James 2:2 – 4 (NIV) Suppose a man comes into your *meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ 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,” ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

* Greek word you might recognize: *synagōgē*— which can refer to a PLACE of meeting or the PEOPLE who are meeting.

Set up the scene here. People have gathered. Seats are at a premium. Two guys arrive at the same time. “Gold ring/fine clothes” = signs of wealth. “Filthy old clothes” = signs of poverty.

We are to treat all people with equal value, red-yellow-black-white, big-tall-short-small, young & old, educated & uneducated, rich & poor; smellin' good or stinkin' up the neighborhood. God doesn't want us to treat another person with lesser value because of their social status, looks, clothes or outward appearance.

In fact, God had prescribed special help for the Jewish people who were poor:

- Those unable to afford a bull, goat, or sheep to sacrifice could offer a dove or pigeon (Lev. 1:5, 10, 14).
- Every 7th year all debts would be canceled, in order that a person would not go into perpetual debt without hope of repayment (Deut. 15:1–2).
- Crops & vineyards were not to be completely harvested so that the poor could pick food for themselves (Lev. 19:9–10).
- The poor were never to be charged interest on a loan (Lev. 25:35–37)
- If a person had to sell all of their property because of tough times, a family member was to redeem it - buy it back for them (Lev. 25:25)
- Poor who sold themselves to fellow countryman were not to be treated as slaves (Lev. 25:39)

In all these ways, God commanded the Jewish people to protect and help the poor. God loves poor people, and so should we.

Proverbs 14:31 (NIV) Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

Showing kindness to the widows/orphans; showing kindness to the poor is pure kindness. When we do that we give w/o expectation of receiving anything in return. That is God – like love. That is Christ – like kindness.

James 2:5 (NIV) Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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?

James is not saying that all rich folks are prideful while all poor folks are humble, but he is reminding them that Jesus came to care for people that many others didn't value.

James says, showing *Favoritism Contradicts the Character of God*. The church family is called to be a counter – cultural community. We are to live by different standards than the world does.

Favoritism has NO place in God's Family. If there's any place in this world where ALL should get equal treatment, it is God's Church. Everyone who is seated with Jesus has a prime seat.

James is reminding the church that when we play favorites we deny the gospel, the good news, that Jesus died for all of us. The gospel of Jesus honors every person who believes in him.

Not only that, he lets us know that favoritism is how the world operates. When we show favoritism, it pollutes us. James 1:27 "Remain unpolluted by the world".

Jesus treated all people with value but warned the reality that the rich were less likely to recognize their need of God. It has been well said that...

Jesus came to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Listen to what James says to the Church:

James 2:6 - 7 (NIV) But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

Many Jewish followers of Jesus faced persecution from other Jews who didn't follow Jesus. Many no doubt lost their jobs and others were dragged into court by the rich who were trying to squeeze every shekel out of them. Just as many of the scribes, Sadducees, & Pharisees dishonored Jesus, so they were treating the poor believers badly, even blaspheming the noble name of Jesus. Followers of Jesus were to be DIFFERENT, to treat poor & rich with the same value, rather than honoring one above the other.

Favoritism seeks the favor of the rich by giving them special attention. James says not only is favoritism wrong, but it's foolish. Who's taking you to court?

The struggle with the sin of favoritism is that our heart is tempted to see other people in terms of what they have to offer. We can dehumanize people and weigh their worth against how we think they may benefit us.

James says we should resist the temptation of favoring the rich and powerful in the hope of getting something in return. When we do we are living like the world lives and *Favoritism Contradicts the Character of God*. The Church is a Family and Favoritism has NO place in a family.

Are there certain people you struggle to love? Who would it be difficult to honor if they showed up and sat next to you?

How can we not show favoritism? What does it look like to live that out?

James 2:8 (NIV) If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

This command went WAY BACK to Lev. 19:18. Of course Jesus quotes this when asked what the greatest command was, breaking down all the 613 Jewish laws down to 2 (Matt. 22:37-40).

Love Without Exceptions

Is this how we love? When we love & receive ALL kinds of people, it shows God's ways are becoming our ways. Because God loves the poor.

Imagine a world where everyone who calls Jesus their Lord and Savior would live that out, where we choose to love, with no exceptions. A place where in every relationship we live to give, not live to get. Another time Jesus said it this way:

Matthew 7:12 (NET) In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets.

The very first need we CAN meet is to treat every person w/value, like WE want to be treated. Favoritism is the sin of NOT loving my neighbor like myself.

Share my story of Favoritism in Mexico. **If we're going to love w/God's heart, we need God's help.** Do we play favorites? Do we mean to? We need God help. We can't do it alone.

The church is a Family. There is NO place for Favoritism in the Church. Favoritism Contradicts the Character of God. We are called by God to Love Without Exceptions and we need His help to live it out.

Small Group Questions

1. What did you hear in this week's message that grabbed your attention & made you think? Share about it.
2. What do you typically value in other people? What connection exists between the sincerity of our faith and the way we value and treat other people?

3. Read James 1:26 – 27 and James 2:1 – 7. Based on those scriptures, what was happening in the early church? If that scene from verse 2 – 3 were to happen at The Bridge Church, what do you think would happen? How would we treat the two people differently?
4. What standards does our culture use to judge the value of people? How are those standards different from the way James calls us to treat people in the church?
5. Steve said, “The Church is a family & Favoritism has NO place in a family”. How was favoritism defined? What examples of favoritism do you see in today’s American church? Why is favoritism in the church such a big deal to James?
6. In James 2:5 – 7, what does it say about the poor and the rich? What are the main differences?
7. When have you benefited from a relationship with a brother or sister in Christ who’s very different from you? If you have no relationships with fellow Christians who are different from you, how can you change that?
8. What is the “royal law” mentioned in James 2:8? *Honestly*, are there certain people you struggle to “*Love without Exceptions*”? If so, who and why?
9. Read Matthew 7:12. What do you think Jesus meant in this verse?
10. To love with God’s heart, we need God’s help. Close in prayer asking for God’s help to treat every person you meet with value, like you want to be treated.