



Additional Notes

James Session #4

The good news is that we can be called sons and daughters of the living God! And if He's shown us that kind of mercy, then we should be out doing that for others. The last thing we should be doing is showing favoritism—"Let me look for the people that I really like and show favors to them." James says no; let me live a life that reflects the gospel, meeting people that I wouldn't normally associate with, people who have nothing to offer me. Let me just love them like crazy, like God did for me.

2:1

Having just linked true religion with looking after orphans and widows (1:27), James now extends that thought by confronting discriminatory actions with regard to the rich and poor—a topic he already introduced (1:9-11). Clearly this discussion was prompted by inconsistent behaviors among his readers that manifested itself in preferential treatment towards the rich over and against the poor.¹ In light of such inconsistency, James commands his readers not to show favoritism. The Greek word for "favoritism" or "partiality" (Gk = *prosopolamsiais*) literally means "receiving the face" implying that such favoritism was rooted in judgments based on external appearance. Such judgments, of course, run completely contrary to the character of God as revealed in the pages of Scripture (1 Sam 16:7; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11), and therefore, ought to run contrary to the behavior of those who follow Jesus.

2:2-3

To illustrate this point James now introduces a hypothetical situation as indicated by the word "suppose." James pictures a rich individual decked out in expensive apparel in contrast to a poor

person wearing filthy clothes. Instead of treating both individuals with love and respect, the rich man is given an honorable seat while the poor man is given an inferior seat on the floor.

2:4

James now asks a question that expects an affirmative answer. The above situation reveals that those engaging in such discriminatory behavior are not only guilty of showing partiality and favoritism, but have also "become judges with evil thoughts." Note that external behaviors of partiality are simply an extension of internal evil thoughts taking place within those human beings that are engaged in such behaviors.

2:5-7

Having introduced the problem of showing partiality towards the rich (2:1-4), James now gives three arguments to support his case: (1) The rich have a track-record of persecuting the poor (2:5-7); (2) Showing partiality breaks God's royal law resulting in sin (2:8-11); and (3) Showing partiality will be judged by God (2:12-13).⁸ In 2:5-7, then, James asks four questions to drive his point home regarding the rich and poor: (1) Hasn't God chosen those that are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and inherit the kingdom?; (2) Aren't the rich exploiting you?; (3) Aren't the rich dragging you to court?; and (4) Aren't the rich blaspheming the name of Jesus?⁹ Each of these questions anticipates an affirmative answer.

2:8-11

James now places love over and against favoritism. The royal law—that is, the command to love your neighbor as yourself—was a covenant stipulation originally given to the nation of Israel (Lev 19:18) and later affirmed by Christ in a question regarding which commandment is the greatest (Mt 22:39). This commandment is called the "royal law" because it was given by the King of kings, and therefore, is the king of all commands. To show love to your neighbor is consistent with God's law whereas showing partiality and favoritism violates it (2:8-9). James probably anticipated that some of his readers would consider showing partiality as a trivial violation of the law. For this reason, James drives home the point that there is no room for inconsistent obedience to God's law (2:10-11).

2:12-13

In a final effort to drive this teaching home regarding the rich and poor James reminds his readers that they will be judged according to their behavior (2:12-13). Total obedience to God is expected of mature followers of Christ. Moreover, while true obedience to God's law brings freedom, sinful actions only result in slavery. Instead of showing favoritism and thereby discriminating fellow followers of Jesus, believers are to love one another as consistent with the character of Christ. As such, "mercy triumphs over judgment."

Dig Deeper

Learn more about favoritism in the following Bible passages.

Luke 7:36–50; Luke 14:7–11 Acts 10:34–35

In Luke 7, what was the Pharisee's attitude toward the "sinful woman"? Do you think this was reasonable? What point did Jesus make? In Luke 14, what does Jesus say about social occasions and social status?

In Acts 10, when Peter says that God does not show favoritism, what does he mean?

Learn more about the poor and the rich in the following Bible passage:

Luke 6:20–26; Matthew 25:31–46; Matthew 19:16–26; Matthew 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19.

Based on these passages, what's the problem with wealth?

What advantage do the poor have?

If you have money, how can you keep yourself from loving it, serving it, or trusting in it?