

“No Favorites”

James 2: 1-13

1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 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?

5 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? 6 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?

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love Your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery,” but do commit murder you have become a lawbreaker.

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement.

Commentator Paul Cedar calls this passage and the rest of Chapter 2 the “heart of the message of James.” The Christians in James’ day faced a problem, which many of us in the church are facing today. Many Christians were coasting in their commitment to following Jesus as Lord. They acted and believed, incorrectly, that Christian faith was merely a matter of profession and not possession. They thought that all they had to do was profess their faith and then they were done. Their ticket to heaven had been punched so they were done. They had already pushed the button so they were saved. They forgot that if you ask Jesus into your heart, He comes in. Now He is your Lord and your Savior, not just some power to be taken for granted. Oh, they talked about Christian discipleship but they didn’t live it. **[NOTE 1]**

You can’t just say you are a Christian; prove it by the way you live. Authentic Christianity is not merely a matter of talk; it must show itself in appropriate action! We become known as Christians not for what we say but by how we demonstrate that faith in the way we live. If you are not producing fruit, that means you are disconnected from the vine (the power, the life source, the Spirit).

This is the underlying reason for the letter. But the problem is not just that Christians are not living out their faith, they were also doing things wrong that hindered their witness and the spread of the gospel. Partiality or favoritism is one of the most subtle of sins. But it is clear by His example that God shows no favoritism and neither should His followers. If you think about it, within the context of the Christian faith, practicing discrimination is the exact opposite of loving your neighbor as yourself. **[NOTE 2]** James starts with an interesting example. Most Commentators believe that James is proposing a hypothetical situation to get his readers to think. I want to tell you two stories and I want you to hold them next to each other and compare and contrast. This is story #1: Commentator Paul Cedar was worshipping in a fashionable southern California church not too many years ago when, during the service a shabbily dressed man staggered into the service and sat down right next to him on a padded pew covered in purple velvet. An usher quickly came and asked the man who had not bathed in quite awhile as Paul supposed because of the smell, to leave. But the man protested and refused to leave. The usher not wanting to totally disrupt the service decided to let the man stay. But the odor began to offend people and one by one they began to move away. The people were not willing to tolerate his presence much less reach out to him. Nobody talked to the man after the service.

Now story #2: In the same area of Southern California a few years earlier, a similar situation occurred. During the beginning part of the worship service in came a shabbily dressed man with long hair and a long beard. He was barefoot. He walked into the church and walked all the way to the front of the church and sat down on the floor quietly. The ushers and a Deacon discussed what should be done. But before they could reach a decision, one of the Elders, a distinguished man who was also one of the older people in the church, got up and slowly made his way toward the man. The Deacon told the ushers, "Oh, we don't have to worry now, Elder (we'll call him Allen) will get rid of that riff raff. Elder Allen made his way slowly to the front, bent over, and then to the surprise of everyone, sat down on the floor right next to the shabbily dressed man. After the worship service was over, Allen was having a tough time getting up, so the shabbily dressed man gladly helped him up.

Now which story is more likely to occur in Doster Community Church? Would such a person even walk into our church? I ask this because I don't think favoritism, discrimination, or partiality, are as obvious a sin as in James' example. If we simply make our church inaccessible to the poor (and I'm not saying we have), we are showing favoritism in a very subtle way are we not? In her testimony video last week Daisy said that they were concerned about the dress code and Pastor Steve said, "come as you are." So we aren't discriminating or showing favoritism according to how people dress.

It is so easy to judge a person though. It is so easy to look at the outside, the cover of the book, or someone's appearance and make a judgement. What if a hiker

walked in with a backpack on, very dusty with dirty ragged pants and shoes and several layers of sweatshirts and a watch cap on. Would we welcome him or her and make them feel comfortable? James tells us that we should not show favoritism. God looks at the heart, not the external appearance. When Samuel was listening to God to see who he would anoint as the next king of Israel, he kept thinking it was one of the bigger and more handsome of David's brothers, but God said that he looked at the heart.

I'm a little ashamed to admit that more than a decade ago, around 2008, when our daughter Courtney was still living with us at home while attending college, I watched a season of the Bachelorette on TV with her. It was interesting to listen to Amy and Courtney make comments. They had no idea why Deanna kept giving a Rose to this snowboarder dude who wore a crazy colored suit jacket and black tennis shoes with pink shoe-laces for the for the first night. He had long hair parted in the middle and it was always in his face. I didn't understand either. But we were all looking at the outside appearance. The bachelorette was looking at the inside. In fact, she picked that very guy in the end and accepted his proposal of marriage. A rare example in Hollywood of someone looking beyond the outside appearance. **[NOTE 3]**

In the church, we should be accepting people on the basis of faith in Christ, nothing more. It shouldn't matter what they wear, the accent they talk with, the color of their skin. We should be color blind, wealth blind, class blind, appearance blind, education blind, etc. etc. If we are not, then we show partiality or favoritism. Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18, and 7:22 all indicate that Jesus came to preach the gospel to the poor and in Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20 the poor are declared blessed and we can read that they are heirs of the Kingdom of God. Given that, it seems even more wrong to discriminate against the poor.

From the New Testament we learn that the early church consisted primarily of poor people especially in Judea and Jerusalem. Historians tell us that in Roman society there was no middle class. About 8% were rich, about 2% were gaining wealth and the other 90% were poor by most standards. These people who themselves belonged to the lower class of society were paying homage to the rich and despising those just a little more poor than they were themselves. It would be like us making \$12,000 a year and looking down on people that only made \$10,000 a year. This is the practice that James condemns. Then James points out that these people whom they are giving special favor to, are the ones who are exploiting them, dragging them into court and worst of all, slandering the name of Jesus Christ. **[NOTE 4]**

The solution to the problem of favoritism is found in verse 8. "If you really fulfilled the royal law according to Scripture, meaning 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well". Love is the key to overcoming partiality or favoritism.

When we love one another with Christ's love, we are always eye to eye, at the same level. Everyone who comes into your life is on the same level, whether rich or

poor, bathed or unbathed, white or black, impressive or unimpressive. God loves us all equally and unconditionally. Jesus is our example. He truly loved without conditions. He looked at people's hearts, not their outward appearance. **[NOTE 5]**

Love is the key to the Christian lifestyle. The Great Commandments, the summary of the law and the prophets, by Jesus very words, tells us to love God and love our neighbor as ourself. 1 John 4:8 tells us that God is love. God's love is unconditional and without limit. God's love with without conditions, or strings, you can't earn it or lose it, it is simply a gift to be received or rejected. The eighth chapter of Romans tells us that nothing can separate us from God's love. In the gospel of John we read Jesus' words: A new commandment I give you—love one another as I have loved you ... and all will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Why is it so easy to fall out of favor among our friends? Why is it so easy to lose the love of another person? I suppose the main reason is that we fail to depend on the love of Jesus Christ within us. The Bible tells us the Spirit of God is where there is love! If we are to fulfill the "royal law" of love, then we must allow God to be in us and live through us. Only then, can love pour out from our lives.**[NOTE 6]** We need three things: 1) to acknowledge that we have broken God's law, 2) Discover that only the life of love can fulfill the law, and 3) we must believe that only Jesus Christ can supply that love.

In regard to the first part, acknowledge that we have broken God's law, James is explicit. He basically tells us that if one could live their whole life and just break God's moral law (one of the ten commandments) once, you would be guilty of breaking them all. We all have sinned and have fallen short of God's glory. James tells us that we could keep all the commandments for 30 years only to commit murder two days after the anniversary, we would be guilty, we would be a lawbreaker! No one but Jesus Christ every made it a lifetime without transgressing God's law. Only love can fulfill the law and we read earlier that God is love. Love sent His one and only Son to die for us.

Commentator Paul Cedar recalls one student who talked about how he lived his life. He said that he pictured a balance scale. He said he just tried to let the good outweigh the bad. He tried to make sure that the scale always stayed tipped toward the good side. But even our best, even the best of the best, is like filthy rags compared to Jesus. We are not able to keep the scale weighed to the good side without the blood of Jesus. God sent Jesus to heal our rebellion and free us to obey.

Sometimes we get this severely negative view of God's law or the 10 commandments. If you read the Psalms seriously you can't help but see that David loved God's law. At that time, the Law was the majority of known Scripture. Yes Jesus came to abolish the law, but only because we couldn't live up to the law well enough to deserve salvation. The law was given to us as a guide. As a fish thrives in water because water is it's natural habitat, so the child of God flourishes in the setting of the law. You will be much happier and flourish; you will live a full and meaningful life, if you live your

life apart from adultery, stealing, deceptions, coveting, murdering, using God's name in vain and seek to honor your father and mother and worship God alone. If you live within the boundaries of the law you will be filled with joy and peace. God's gave us the law, the 10 commandments for our protection and safety. Following God's law keeps us dwelling in an environment conducive to growth, wisdom, peace, and fruit bearing.

[NOTE 7] As long as a Christ-follower stays within the boundaries of the laws of God, he enjoys complete freedom. But the moment he crosses one of the boundaries, he becomes a slave to sin and loses his freedom. All the words we say and all the deeds we perform will be judged. Judgment is inescapable. But one drop of Jesus' blood can cover all our sin. Mercy triumphs over judgement. So says James, speak and act like those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. Remember as you go through life that you will be judged. Be aware that there are consequences to your actions and your words. But don't despair because we serve a God of mercy and mercy triumphs ver judgement.

So love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength ... and love your neighbor as yourself. Don't just say you are a Christian, a Christ-follower ... prove it, demonstrate it, model it by the way you live, by your words, by the way you love.

LET'S PRAY ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for "No Favorites" based on James 2: 1-13
Given at Doster Community Church on June 11, 2023

- I. You can't just say you are a Christian; prove it by the way you live. Demonstrate your faith by the way you walk and talk, think and love.
- II. Which story do you think is most likely to occur at Doster Community Church, Story #1 or Story #2??
- III. In the church, we should be accepting people on the basis of faith in Christ, alone. We should be color blind, wealth blind, class blind, appearance blind, education blind and look at a person's love and faith in Jesus.
- IV. The solution to the problem of favoritism is truly loving your neighbor as yourself. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Royal Law = the Great Commandments.
- V. Love is the key to the Christian lifestyle, the key to following Jesus.
- VI. We need three things
 - a. We need to acknowledge that we are sinners, lawbreakers
 - b. Only a life of love can fulfill the law
 - c. Only Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit can supply that love
- VII. As long as a Christ-follower stays within the guidelines provided by the laws of God, they will enjoy complete freedom. So, what are you going to do about it? What is one thing that you can do today to avoid favoritism and do better at living a life of love. Write an "I will _____ statement".