

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

DECEMBER 10TH - 11TH, 2022 // BOOK OF JAMES

FAVORITISM (JAMES 2:1-7)

Chapter 1 concluded with a description of “pure and undefiled” religion (vs. 26-27).

- James will continue this idea in chapter 2 by presenting two requirements of pure religion:
 1. Not showing favoritism/partiality (vs. 1-13).
 2. Doing good works that prove genuine, saving faith in Christ (vs. 14-26).
- These things demonstrate that we are “doers” of the Word, and not “hearers only” (vs. 22).

We as believers are not to show favoritism: we don't show preferential treatment to people because of money, status, ethnicity, race, social standing, power, shared interest, gender, etc. (vs. 1).

- It's a natural condition of the human race to base a person's worth on something external.
- But this kind of favoritism is inconsistent with faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

Because our faith is in Him, we're to follow Christ's example in how we treat people.

- Jesus is “glorious”—His example represents the truest presentation of God's presence, character, and love.
- Even though Jesus didn't practice favoritism or partiality, some 17 years after His ascension into Heaven, this practice was creeping into the church (vs. 2-4).

The early believers were practicing discrimination in their gatherings toward people who had money, prestige, and social standing.

- The rich and “important” would be given preferential seating, while those who were perceived as “less than” were shown to the cheap seats (vs. 3).
- When we practice this kind of discrimination, we become “judges with evil thoughts” (vs. 4).

Judging solely by outward appearances will always lead us to a place of hypocritical, inaccurate, and ignorant mindsets that look nothing like Christ.

- This doesn't mean that we're to be gullible, naive, unwise, and foolish—discernment is always needed to make righteous judgments concerning people.
- It's very easy to make “unrighteous” judgments.

“JUDGES WITH EVIL THOUGHTS”

Which external traits do you use to judge a person's worth, value, or moral standing?

- The way they dress or the car they drive?
- The job they work?
- The mistakes they've made?
- Their ideological/cultural/political differences?
- Their skin color, race, or socioeconomic class?
- The sin or struggles they display?

Even if we discriminate against or look down on others for being poor, God doesn't.

- In fact, God “chose the poor in this world to be rich in faith” (vs. 5).
- God chooses those who are “poor in Spirit” to receive the Kingdom (Matt. 5:3).
- Those who are economically poor are usually in a better position than the wealthy to be spiritually rich.

Even though these early Christians probably knew these truths deep down, the allure, power, beauty, and influence of the wealthy and rich had a very intoxicating effect.

- So much so that these Christians were willing to overlook the evil, oppression, and persecution done to them by those who were rich (vs. 6-7).
- The practice of favoritism is inconsistent with our faith in Christ, who died for ALL people.

THE ROYAL LAW (JAMES 2:8-13)

The “royal law” of King Jesus in His Kingdom is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (vs. 8).

- We are doing well if we truly fulfill this royal law.
- But if we say that we're loving our neighbor as ourself and at the same time showing favoritism in how we express that love, we're actually proving ourselves to be a lawbreaker (vs. 9).
- It's easy to love those who are like you: but you don't get to pick your neighbor.

If we are truly showing partiality toward other people by not loving them as Christ has called us to, we are “committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (vs. 9).

- For some reason, many of us see our own sins as “baby sins,” while we see the sins of others (and the unbelieving world) as big sins.
- If we're obsessed with the sins of others, we can't see our own sin clearly (Matt. 7:3-4).

Some of us mistakenly see the law and commands of God like bowling pins we knock down one at a time.

- We think our obedience in certain areas makes up for our disobedience in others, and we judge our morality on the basis of comparison.
- But James says, “if you've broken one, you become accountable for all!” (vs. 10).

This doesn't necessarily mean that all sins are equal—committing murder doesn't have the same consequence as stealing a candy bar.

- But sin is sin: it only takes one sin to make a person a sinner in the eyes of God.
- We can't pride ourselves on being “less of a sinner” just because our sin looks different than someone else's. If we've broken any of God's laws, we are a lawbreaker (vs. 11).

When we judge others, we often forget that we ourselves will be judged someday by God according to the “law of freedom” (vs. 12).

- When we obey God by faith in Jesus, we find the freedom we need to serve God and escape from fear of future judgment.
- Faith in Jesus gives us freedom to escape hatred and selfishness and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We've been shown ridiculous, extravagant, undeserved grace through the cross of Jesus.

- So we're to act like it—we show grace to others because we've been shown grace by Jesus.

- We so often want others to show us the grace that we're unwilling to show toward them.
 - “Mercy triumphs over judgment...” As Christians, God's mercy triumphs over our guilt and judgment (vs. 13).
- If we've received God's grace, we will escape the coming judgment. Mercy triumphs in victory over our condemnation.
- Therefore, we look to show mercy to others instead of simply condemning others.
 - If there is no mercy, compassion, or grace in your heart toward others, maybe it's because you've never truly received God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness through Jesus.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS (JAMES 2:14-26)

TRUE FAITH WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY ACTION (VS. 14).

There might be someone who “claims to have faith,” but if they don't have any works that display it, what good is it? Is that even saving faith?

- We are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by works, but true saving faith WILL always have works to accompany it.
- “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone: it always comes with works.”

Verses 15-17 give an example of dead faith.

- Suppose there was someone who was cold, hungry, and needed real help.
- Then there's a person who claims to have faith in Christ and approaches this needy person with an offer of good wishes but no real practical help.
- That “Christian” could've helped but chose not to because of inconvenience and discomfort.

Instead, they did nothing except offer an expression of empty “Christianese” and “good vibes.”

- James asks, “What good is this kind of faith?”
- Poor and needy people don't just need “thoughts and prayers.” They need help.
- We can talk about how spiritual we are, but if we're not actually doing anything to be Jesus to those who need Jesus, we may not know Jesus.

A true living faith in Christ cannot be separated from works (vs. 18-19).

- You can't truly show your faith without works, but you can show your faith BY your works.
- Just believing in God doesn't really count—even the demons believe in God.
- You can believe in God and still not be surrendered to God. Saving faith is not just in your mind; it's in your heart and will.

ABRAHAM AND RAHAB (VS. 21-26)

James chose the OT characters of Abraham and Rahab as examples of people who showed genuine faith through their actions.

- These two couldn't have been any more different: one was the father of the Jewish faith, and the other was a gentile and a prostitute.
- This contrast is intentional—it's meant to show that true faith can be displayed by anyone.

Vs. 21 mentions the story of when Abraham demonstrated his willingness to obey God in sacrificing his son Isaac.

- The saving faith of Abraham showed itself by his total obedience to God in the matter of offering up Isaac.
- Vs. 23 refers to the incident in which “Abraham believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).

This is the kind of living, “justifying” faith that moves the heart and controls the life.

TWO THINGS ARE MENTIONED ABOUT ABRAHAM'S FAITH:

1. Abraham's faith and actions were working together. His faith prompted his obedience.
2. Abraham's faith was made complete by what he did. His willingness to give up what was most valuable to him demonstrated the existence of true, living faith.

JAMES THEN TALKS ABOUT RAHAB (VS. 25).

Rahab knew almost nothing about the one true God (Joshua 2), yet she believed in Him so much that she risked her life in order to hide the spies of Israel.

- She put everything on the line because she believed this God was everything He said He was.
- This is real faith. Faith that risks. Faith that acts!

As much as you can have a body with no life (a corpse), so you can have a faith with no life—and faith without works is a dead faith, unable to save (vs. 26).

- If we want to be sure that our faith is living, vibrant, and a true saving faith in Christ, we must be fruit inspectors of our own lives (Matt. 12:33; John 15:4-6; Col. 1:10; Gal. 5:22-23).

AM I GUILTY OF THE “SIN OF FAVORITISM” (VS. 1-13)?

- Do I treat people differently because of my own biases or assumptions about them?
- Do I assume the worst of people? Do I have a critical and suspicious spirit?
- In the name of standing for truth, have I disobeyed God's Word by hating and not loving people?
- Do I love unconditionally and let God be the judge of a person's soul?

DO I TRULY HAVE “FAITH THAT WORKS” (VS. 14-26)?

- Does my faith cost me anything? What have I given up to follow Jesus?
- Does my faith produce works of compassion, mercy, kindness, and love toward other people?
- Am I seeking to obey all of God's teachings or just the parts I like or are easy for me?
- Am I serving? Giving? Witnessing? Loving?

SAVING, LIVING FAITH THAT WORKS.

- Trusts in Christ, not our church attendance, religion, political affiliation, or religious activities.
- Walks away from the world, our sin, and our self (repentance).
- Surrenders to the Lordship and authority of Jesus.
- Results in a changed life that produces good works.