



FAITH IN ACTION

Topical Studies in the Book of James

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Lesson 3: The Danger of Favoritism



James wrote to Christian Jews scattered all over the Roman Empire during a very partial age, filled with prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. In the ancient world, people were routinely and permanently categorized because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor,

Greek or barbarian, or whatever. Favoritism and discrimination were not to be part of the Christian walk. It's not fair to take precedence of some people over others.

THE BIG QUESTION

Why is discrimination (favoritism) so unfair, and why is it not to be practiced by Christians?

JAMES 2:1-13 (NIV)¹

Christians must not discriminate against others (2:1)

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

Christians must not discriminate against the poor in favor of the rich (2:2-4)

"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?"

Discrimination is wrong for three reasons (2:5-11)

First, it is inconsistent with God's choice of the poor (2:5-6a)

“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.”

Second, it is inconsistent with the conduct of the rich (2:6b-7)

“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?”

Third, it is inconsistent with the law of love (2:8-11)

“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.”

Christians must act in ways which are consistent with God's coming judgment (2:12-13)

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

KEY WORDS

- Favoritism (Gk. *prosōpolēmpsia*): to unfairly judge another person by their outward appearance; to discriminate.² To show favoritism is to give preference to one person over others with equal claims. It is similar to discrimination and may be based on conditions such as social class, wealth, clothing, actions, etc.³
- Discriminate (Gk. *diakrinō*): to make a biased distinction mentally between persons. To become judges with evil thoughts (James 2:4).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Why is discrimination so unfair? Describe at least three specific examples of favoritism or discrimination you see in our world today?

SUMMARY AND APPLICATION

- To show favoritism is to give preference to one person over others with equal claims. It is similar to discrimination and may be based on conditions such as social class, wealth, clothing, actions, etc.
- The Bible teaches Christians are not to show favoritism: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism” (James 2:1).
- The Bible calls favoritism a sin: “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers” (James 2:8-9). Favoritism is a serious offense against God’s call to love one’s neighbor as oneself.
- Favoritism is a problem we still deal with. Favoritism and partiality are not from God, and Christians are called to love. As humans, we tend to form judgments based on selfish, personal criteria rather than seeing others as God sees them. May we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and follow His example of treating every person with God’s love (John 3:16).⁴

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² (Thayer 551)

³ (Houdmann, S. Michael GotQuestions.Org)

⁴ (Houdmann, S. Michael GotQuestions.Org)

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