

James 2:1-26

Week 3 - Shedding Favoritism & Clothing Faith With Deeds

Learning Objectives

- Examine how our tendency toward favoritism conflicts with Christ's love.
- Challenge each other toward a mature faith expressed through Christ-like deeds.

Pray for your time together as a group.

Part One: Love Versus Favoritism

Read Out Loud: James 2:1-13 (NIV)

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 judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

? What does it look like to show partiality in our Church today? Who are the "rich" and "poor" in our community?

Possible Answer: We show partiality when we sit by people who look like us, only talk with those who act like us, ignore people based on their appearance or personality, etc. Many separations between "rich" and "poor" could be made based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other distinctions.

Read Out Loud: “The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community; the wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves.” –Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*

? Consider the quote above. Why do we find it hard to *not* show favoritism?

Possible Answer: Favoritism is a great way to create advantages for yourself rather than taking into account the community & society as a whole. Not showing favoritism requires a humility to admit that we bend toward inequitable and unfair ways in this world.

? Looking at verse five, why do you think favoritism is harmful to the Church? Why does James consider it a sin?

Possible Answer: God doesn't show partiality. The Gospel is for all people. In verse 5, James is trying to get Christians reading his letter to realize their connection to those who are in poverty. So, it is important to not show favoritism because of the humble position from which we have become rich in faith and heirs of God's kingdom. In the midst of a Christian community, it is so easy to show favoritism towards those who are more well-off in some way, whether financial prowess, popularity, certain talents or personalities, etc.

? Who are the types of people you tend to favor? Who do you struggle to welcome into the God's kingdom?

Possible Answer: Answers could vary. Favoritism exists in social circles, families, communities. It could play out along gender, race, class, or personality lines. Someone may struggle to welcome into the kingdom of God those who display a certain kind of sinfulness that contrasts or aligns similarly to their own.

Part Two: Mature Faith

Read Out Loud: James 2:14-26 (NIV)

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that

his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

? In what way does James argue that faith without deeds is incomplete?

Possible Answer: It’s a faith without action, which means it’s a faith that doesn’t move (it’s dead.) It’s incomplete because it’s belief without action, acknowledgement without movement, faith without workings. James’ argument is that a belief in truth (v. 19) doesn’t mean that truth will change us, nor is a belief itself evidence of change. We can know that truth has changed us if it results in an active obedience and loving heart.

? James offers an example of how we disconnect faith from deeds by describing how the poor are neglected. What are some ways that your faith is disconnected from action in your life?

Possible Answer: Saying you’ll pray for someone in their hardship rather than finding a practical way to help them. Acting one way on Sundays and another during the other six days. Passionately loving God while not passionately loving others. Being faithful toward things you’re passionate about and not being faithful toward others. Living a life without sacrifice or mercy to help others in need (comfort).

? Re-read verses 8-9 in part one. Why does James use favoritism as a lead-in to talk about faith and deeds? How might favoritism suppress our faith’s display of good deeds?

Possible Answer: Favoritism is a perfect example of faith left without completion in the form of deeds. The good news of Jesus that we believe in as Christians is news extended to EVERYONE. All people matter to God, so favoritism stifles the universality of God’s good news to all families, tribes, tongues, and nations. Faith with completion would lead us to cast down our preferences of being around people that appeal to us for the sake of meeting with who the world considers outcasts. Faith with completion leads us to extend love to those who are overwhelmed and burdened by the brokenness, evil, and death of this world.

Read Out Loud: Matthew 7:21-27 (NIV)

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

? How do Jesus’ words from Matthew 7 complement James’ words in v. 14-26

Possible Answer: At certain points, these passages seem to be out of alignment (example: doing “good” things, yet being cast out by Jesus). However, Jesus says, “the one who does the will of my Father” will enter the kingdom of heaven.” He also says the one “who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice” will have a firm foundation (house on a rock). The connection between Jesus’ and James’ words is hearing (faith) and doing (deeds). Jesus adds that combining both hearing and doing brings a secure foundation. The soil from which the good deeds that Jesus desires comes from an intimate and personal faith in Him.

? According to Jesus, what is the difference between true believers and hypocrites?

Possible Answer: Hypocrites, though they do many marvelous things, do not conform their lives to God’s desires. True believers conform to God’s will and act in accordance with His nature. Hypocrites are not known by Jesus, while Jesus has intimate relationships with true believers.

? In this passage, Jesus describes what a life marked by obedience to His word looks like. How is God calling you towards faithful obedience?

Possible Answer: Jesus describes believers’ lives as ones built upon a rock. He means that believers are not shaken by the storms of life or faith, but are grounded in their identity and lifestyle. Hypocrites, who are more concerned with impressing others, build their lives on the sinking, shifting sand of human approval and pride. We can be encouraged that our lives will be grounded through obedience to God’s word. Moreover, we can be assured of a right and intimate relationship with God through our obedience. This doesn’t make the relationship contingent on our obedience, but our obedience occurs because of that loving relationship.

For Discussion And Accountability

? What challenges do you often face while trying to not feel favoritism in your community? Are there specific people that you want to reconcile with or pursue with humility in light of our discussion?

? Are you living a life full of loving deeds? If not, how might your faith be incomplete? Are there areas where God is calling you to act out your faith with greater deeds of love?