

“Fighting Favoritism”

James 2:1-13

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

We are continuing our series today walking through the book of James and remember what we have said up to this point – James is a “show me your faith” kind of guy. He is not so much interested in what we SAY we believe, but rather his focus and concern is that we live out WHAT we believe.

There was a famous evangelist in mid to late 1800’s named **D.L. Moody**. He worked in his uncle’s shoe store and was actually led to Christ as a teenager by his Sunday School teacher...his life group leader!

He once said this (I guess looking back at his job as a boot salesman): **“Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather.”**

What he meant was, that which is written in this book is meant to be walked out! It’s meant to be obeyed. This is what makes us different than the world around us...it’s the way that we live! This includes:

- the way we handle trials (1:2-12)
- the way we face temptation (1:13-18)
- the way we respond to what God’s word says (1:19-27)

And this week, we are going to see that living our faith out includes treating others the way Jesus would. I’m calling the message today: **Fighting Favoritism**

James 2:1-13 – “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? ⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Illus – Message prep – I’ve had the opportunity this week on two different occasions to talk with someone about writing sermons or messages, and I shared with both of them an outline that I often think of when writing a message.

I don’t remember where I first heard it or who even taught it to me, but here is one way to outline a message and if you listen closely to my sermons, they will often take this form – it’s five key words:

- HEY! – Attention! This text is for you!
- YOU! – This text will help you and apply to you!
- LOOK! – Look at the text. Here is what it says!
- SEE! – Explanation of the text.
- DO! – Apply the text.

I thought of this outline when writing the message this week regarding what James says about the sin of partiality...about showing favoritism because what he writes in (2:1-13) fits this message outline almost perfectly. Let me show you what I’m talking about.

1. HEY!

James 1:1 – “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

It’s almost a slap across the face. James is getting the attention of his congregation...those that would be reading this letter. It’s as if he is grabbing them by the shoulders – have you ever done this with your children?

You grab them by the shoulders...get on a knee so that you are eye level with them. You’re sharing something very important with them. You want them to know that what you are about to say carries some weight.

James writes, “My brothers...” 13x in the book of James, he will appeal to them as such – he calls them “brothers”. This is a term of affection and identification. These are believers he is writing and he’s coaching them up...it’s as if he says, “Come on, now!”

And look at what he pleads with them – “HEY! Stop showing partiality.” Some of your Bibles use the word were using in the title of the message, favoritism...another way you can translate it is “don’t be a respecter of persons.”

One Bible dictionary I read defined the sin of partiality/favoritism like this: **“the fault of one who when called on to give judgment has respect of the outward circumstances of man and not their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high born, or powerful, to another who does not have these qualities.”**

So, get what James is calling out here. He is calling it sin to look at someone and show bias for or prejudice against or make a value judgment of a person based strictly on their outward appearance – he calls this partiality...favoritism...and it is sin!

And James writes this in a tense that means to “stop doing what’s already in progress”. Meaning, James KNOWS this is taking place.

Now, we don’t know how he knows it’s going on – was this a sin a regular occurrence back in Jerusalem and James is just following up? Did someone report it back to him?

It could just be that it’s like your mom and dad growing up– you remember how they just knew things? You’d get called out for something you did and you are thinking, “how did they know that?!”

Well, this congregation wasn’t getting anything past their pastor. Don’t think you can pull things off without your pastor knowing! James knows what they are doing and he calls them out on it!

Now, based on the context of this book and the time that it was written, I have a feeling that this was probably a regular occurrence and a temptation to most believers in that time who were mostly poor.

You’ve got to remember, there was very little middle class during this time. You had the elites...and then you had the more common folk...and the more common folk were extremely poor! It was the haves and the have nots.

And James hints here that the temptation of the poor is to show preference to the rich...to show favoritism based on what someone had. And like any good pastor, he gives them an example of what he’s talking about.

2. YOU!

James 2:2-4 – “For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,”⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

So, James gives a real-life illustration of what he knows is taking place. You’ve got a man that visits the church – he comes into the “assembly” here (v. 2).

The word “assembly” is the word translated “synagogue”. It referred not just to official meetings that took place at the synagogue but could refer to any meeting. In our vernacular we could say this man walks into church or life group and based on the externals, this is one, important person. Just look at him! He is blinging it up!

He’s wearing gold rings...he’s dressed in the finest apparel. He’s got a custom suit on with his initials on the cuff of his sleeve. His beard is perfectly trim...this dude has got it! And everyone knows it.

Now, remember our definition of favoritism? It’s showing bias for or prejudice against...it’s making value judgments based on the external – and from an external standpoint, this person, he’s got it together.

But then, you have a poor man that walks in. He’s dressed in shabby cloths. He’s unkept. Maybe has a little B.O. going on and based strictly on the externals, look at how they are both treated – as different as they look!

The rich man gets the VIP treatment (v. 3) – “You sit here in a good place...we’ve got your seat right up front.” And to the poor person, “You stand over there” – or worse, “we don’t even have a seat for you, sit down here on the floor...we’ve got an obstructed view seat for you.”

And look at what James writes has happened when you have made a value judgment...when you have showed bias for or prejudice against based on the external only. He writes you have made a decision...a choice that reflects (v. 4) evil thoughts...you have judged someone with “evil or worldly motives” as some translations read.

Now, very quickly, let me just say this. Making judgments about people is not wrong or inherently sinful. We’re called to be wise and discerning. We can look at decisions people make, friends the associate with, how they spend their time and what they spend their time doing and we can make judgments.

That phrase “we’re not to judge others” or “don’t judge me” is really only half true!

We can judge others, we’re just not to judge in hypocrisy – we have to (Matt. 7:3-5) get the plank out of our own eye first so that we can see clearly AND we must not judge as James commands here, with impure, evil motives – we’re NOT to judge based strictly on the external, not knowing anything else about a person – that’s called partiality...it’s called favoritism...and it’s sin.

Now, James mentions this in the context of rich/poor, but it could also be applied to race. One of the great sins of the Church in America is what the **Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.** mentioned in a *Meet the Press* interview on April 17, 1960.

“I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies, that eleven o’clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hours, in Christian America. I definitely think the Christian church should be integrated,

and any church that stands against integration and that has a segregated body is standing against the spirit and the teachings of Jesus Christ, and it fails to be a true witness.”

See, there is nothing wrong with having preferences...likes...dislikes...there is nothing wrong with wanting to be a part of a congregation that is filled with people that look like you and express worship in a way that is familiar and desirable to you...NOTHING wrong with that! What's wrong is if you reject someone that comes into your congregation that doesn't look like you...that's the spirit of segregation and it's the spirit of Satan.

You can take this with race...or let's go back to the Jesus Movement in the 70's. The movie *Jesus Revolution* came out earlier this year. Based on a true story - this was at the height of the hippy movement and young people were looking for answers in drugs and sex and alcohol, but many of them found what they were looking for in Christ.

And yet they looked different. And the story of the movie is the story of a church that was infighting because they didn't want to let these young men and women who looked different (long hair, tattoos, dressed different) come into their place of worship.

Champion Forest let's be aware of this sin...our church is beautiful because we are right in the middle of the extremes. Five minutes one direction has the looks of poverty. Five minutes the other direction prosperity.

This past week we started our ESL program. We had close to 300 people show up representing 23 different countries. They come to learn English and we teach them using the Bible. We need to pray that many come to know Jesus through this incredible ministry.

We have our deaf church that meets here...our Vietnamese congregation continues to grow. All of us look different...share different customs...come from different backgrounds...have different preferences – and it's beautiful that with all our differences, we can all be in this same building, rubbing shoulders, and doing life together while worshipping the same God!

Let's NEVER bow down to preference and partiality...let's fight against favoritism with everything in us and let's not judge people based on outward appearance:

- what they have, what they don't have...
- what they look like...

None of that! Christianity doesn't have a caste system!

Chuck Swindoll – “If there's one place where class distinctions should be broken down, it's in our places of worship. Discrimination over color, political persuasion, financial status, fashion, or appearance doesn't belong in the church, either inside or outside its doors, in private or in public.”

To all this I say, “Amen”. And James tell us why this is important. We're still on the “YOU” part! Pastor James wants them to know what they are doing is wrong and to see the error of their ways...he explains why favoritism is so ludicrous.

Here's James reasoning for fighting favoritism. Let's begin with what we have already said.

First: **Favoritism is unchristian**

There is not a lot that is MORE unlike God than making value-based judgments off the external. God doesn't judge like this.

Do you remember when Samuel was told to go to Jesse's house and find and anoint the next king. Jesse lined his boys up and when Samuel sees the oldest, Eliab, he thinks this one is the one! Tall, good looking...this is him! But do you remember what God said?

1 Samuel 16:7 – “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

It is NOT Christ-like to judge based on outward appearance. We're told repeatedly, partiality and favoritism is NOT of God because that's NOT what God does...it's not how he is!

Job 34:19 – “who shows no partiality to princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands?

Rom. 2:11 – “For God shows no partiality.”

Eph. 6:9b – “knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.”

Not only is favoritism unchristian, second: **Favoritism is unreasonable**

James writes and says it doesn't make sense...it's not logical.

James 2:5-7 – “Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (John Fechner c/o Mike BridgeBuilders– the poor are rich in faith because they know they need God!) ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. (NOT Logical!) Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?”

You're showing favoritism to very people that are mistreating you...taking advantage of you...the very people maligning and blaspheming the name of Christ.

Now, I do want to say here...think it needs to be said here that there is nothing wrong with being wealthy...nothing wrong with being rich! This is not a “gang up on the wealthy passage”.

If God has given wealth (and btw – that’s all of us) compared to the world – and if you have more compared to those around you, thank God for that...it comes from him. He’s given you the intellect, talent, skills, put you in the position he has, set you up with the relationships that opened those doors – that’s all from God, so give him praise. This text just reiterates if you do have more, don’t look down on those that have less.

AND just a parenthetical point here – “poor are rich in faith” – this shoots down any prosperity theology that is being taught and embraced out there!

Don’t think that just because you have more, you are somehow more favored by God OR if you have less, you must not have enough faith! That’s horrid theology and it NEVER passes the smell test of scripture.

Often the MOST rich in faith are those that are the MOST poor from a material standpoint because they are forced by their very lot in life to relying on and trust in God at a deeper level.

James says favoritism is unchristian. It’s unreasonable. And third: **Favoritism is unloving**

James 2:8-9 – “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

HEY! YOU! **3. LOOK!** (look at the Bible!)

James drives his congregation to consider the text. Favoritism is the exact opposite of love. And he shows them this by quoting the Old Testament law.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” – that’s Leviticus 19:18. James is showing them scripture...he is teaching them and motivating them by the word! The word is our standard...the word is what forms our thinking and worldview.

We know FROM SCRIPTURE that Jesus takes this law and when asked what’s the greatest of all the commandments, responds in:

Mark 12:30-31 – “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

The “royal law” (v. 8) is the kingly law of love – it rules over all other rules! And James says when you play favorites...when you show partiality, you’re breaking the law of love.

You are not just violating the Law of God...the word of God, but violating the very character and nature of Christ.

Illus. Meeting with AA leadership – teach the WORD! This is what reinforces priorities and brings conviction and reminds us of what is MOST important – we are to live as Jesus lived and fulfil the royal law!

HEY. YOU. LOOK. **4. SEE!** (explain the text)

James 2:10-11 – “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”

This is so convicting right here. James says, if you break one law, you’re as guilty as if you broke all of them. Now, just think about that.

Certainly, there are sins that have a greater consequence to them if you commit them. If there is a murder, that’s a loss of life – the consequence of that sin is much greater than say lying to a friend about something.

The consequence of a certain sin may be greater...may be more significant...but what James is teaching here is that, that sin – regardless of what sin it is – ALL sin leads to the same result.

Sin is such a big deal...such an offense against the holiness of God, whether it’s murder...adultery...lying...or get this...showing favoritism – it’s sin. He puts the sin of favoritism on the same playing field as murder and adultery – as he should! Why?

Because showing favoritism will result in separation from God as much as committing murder will. Don’t write this off as a “small sin”...no sin is small in the eyes of a holy God.

HEY. YOU. LOOK. SEE. He concludes with application: **5. DO!**

James 2:12-13 – “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Those of us that have been saved. We’ve been set free from the law of sin and death and now live under the law of liberty or the law of the Spirit, we are to treat people and talk to people as Jesus would!

Do you remember how Jesus treated people? He did not show favoritism. He didn’t discriminate! He slowed down long enough to heal the poor, blind man, Bartimaeus and took the time to converse with the wealthy Nicodemus.

Jesus had time for everyone. He called out the rich tax collector, Zacchaeus as well as adulterous Samaritan woman at the well. He treated everyone equally.

Jesus saw color, race, ethnicity, and social status, but it didn’t matter to him. And it should not matter to us! He didn’t label them, he loved them. And we shouldn’t label either. We love.

James puts a final touch on his application and essentially says, “how do you want God to deal with you?” He’s the one true, judge that has a right to judge...and by the way, we will all be judged with what we did with our life – how do you want God to judge you?

I bet on that day, when we stand before God and give an account for our life, I bet you are going to want mercy. Well, you better show mercy to others – “for judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.”

We need to treat others as Jesus would. We don’t make value judgments of people based strictly off the external – this is a judgment that will bring judgment. Instead, we are to act and speak James says as those that are Spirit-filled...under the law of liberty!

HEY. YOU. LOOK. SEE. DO.

One final thought as it relates to fighting favoritism. Here’s a sure-fire way to avoid showing favoritism in the church.

Look back at (v. 1)...you see that last phrase, “the Lord of glory”. In my study, I found this is the only time in the New Testament that it’s ever used. What James is saying is, “How are you showing favoritism to people when the “Lord of glory” is present among us?

As Tony Evans states in his teaching on this passage, “in his presence ALL of us are shabby.” It’s true!

Listen, if we want to ensure we won’t show favoritism in the church...you know HOW we can do this? Yu ready for this? We STOP showing favoritism by make sure we START showing favoritism to the only one who is really worth it! Jesus.

We show favoritism to him (God this is about you today...I want to honor you today...you get first place today...we want to please you today) – we show favoritism to Jesus, and we won’t show it to others.

Let’s pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.