

# That You May Be Mature And

## Lesson 4: The Sin Of Showing Favoritism (James 2:1-13)

As James sought to help Christians become mature and complete in the faith (1:2-4), he needed to address the problem of favoritism (2:1-13). While it is common for people of the world to show prejudice based on a variety of factors, it should not be present among God's people. Yet, it is still a temptation that God's people can face in various circumstances.

**1) Do not show favoritism (2:1).** God directly forbids favoritism. Although James will focus on favoritism between rich and poor, the prohibition is not limited to this (i.e. nationality, race, gender, education level, etc.). This kind of prejudice was sometimes experienced in the early church (Galatians 2:11-14). But, favoritism/prejudice is always inconsistent with faith in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ (who died for everyone, John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; Romans 1:16). In fact, Jesus often spent time around people on this earth who were rejected by many of His fellow Jews (Mark 2:15-17; John 4:7-9).

**2) An illustration of favoritism (2:2-4).** James's illustration surrounds two visitors who come into a Christian meeting/assembly (Greek word for synagogue; used here for a meeting of the church). One man enters wearing a gold ring and fine clothes (indicating wealth and possible social status). He is viewed in a favorable way and given an honorable seat. Another man enters wearing filthy clothes. Though he is permitted to stay, he is not viewed favorably and is put in a less noticeable and honorable seat. James concludes that they had made distinctions between these two purely based on judgments from their outward appearances. So, they demonstrated their evil thoughts about what was more honorable.

**3) Keeping the right perspective (2:5-7).** James reminds all Christians to keep the right perspective of people and judge righteously based on

their actions (fruit, Matthew 7:15-20; 12:33; John 7:24). James's point is not to shift favoritism from the rich to the poor, but to stop the practice of making judgments based on external appearances alone. For example, they should have remembered that God has chosen the poor who love Him to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom (Romans 8:14-17; Titus 3:4-7). Although rich people can undoubtedly be saved, more poor people simply tend to respond to the gospel in obedience than rich people (Matthew 19:23-24). Therefore, they should not dishonor the poor! In contrast, they should have remembered that the wealthy often oppress those who are poor. These often reject the name of Jesus and blaspheme it. So, while this does not accurately describe every rich person, making distinctions and judgments based on external factors alone (i.e. appearance) fails to take many things into consideration.

**4) Failing to love is sin (2:8-11).** James now focuses on the true heart of the matter: Keeping God's law to love others. If you want to do well in God's sight, you must keep the law to love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:25-37). This is described as the royal law in that it comes from the King and it is greater than other laws because of how much it impacts (Matthew 22:36-40). Favoritism is, therefore, not just a violation of the law forbidding such, but also a violation of the law requiring love. If you do show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted as a lawbreaker (transgressor). Concerning the breaking of God's law, James shows it is serious to break any of His laws – demonstrating that every law comes from the same God. Therefore, if a person keeps every law God has given and stumbles at one point, he/she is still guilty of being a lawbreaker. And, remember that James has taught that sin results in death (1:14-15). So, showing favoritism is a serious matter to God (as is every sin)!

**5) Judge mercifully (2:12-13).** Every person will stand before Jesus Christ and be judged by the law of freedom (i.e. the New Testament, that offers freedom from sin through Jesus, 1:25; 2 Corinthians 5:10; John 12:48; Revelation 20:12). So, it is essential that we speak and act with this on our minds and remember this Day is coming. We do not want to be found as being guilty of showing favoritism on this day! Then, we must remember the mercy of the Judge. Although Jesus will punish the lawbreakers, He will also show mercy (pity) on some. But, you must never expect to receive mercy from God if you are not merciful toward others (Matthew 5:7; 6:14-15; 7:1-2). Namely, James is showing that favoritism lacks mercy in the judgments that are made (reaching improper conclusions that lead to improper actions)! Because mercy triumphs over judgment, we must aim for showing mercy (knowing that we all depend on God's mercy) and not be guilty of merciless judgments (in showing favoritism or anything).

Those who truly want to serve Jesus will not be unwelcoming or judgmental toward people in unrighteous ways. Rather, James makes it clear that God's people should obey both the command not to show favoritism and the greater command to love. Failing to do so will put you in danger of the judgment of God!

## Thought Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

**Teaching:** What are some key lessons learned from this lesson?

**Rebuking:** What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

**Correction:** How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

**Training & Equipping:** How can you apply this teaching to be trained in righteousness and equipped for every good work?