

# Favoritism Has No Place in the Family Of Grace

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There's an interesting YouTube video in which a man does an experiment with hidden cameras. His goal was to see if it made any difference if others perceived him as wealthy or poor. What he did was set up a hidden microphone and a hidden camera that showed the responses of different women he met on the sidewalk. If he found someone single, he would try to ask them out on a date. The catch? He was dressed in grubby clothes and looked like he was very poor, perhaps homeless. As one might predict, the women were very standoffish towards the stranger dressed in sloppy clothes. They didn't even want to give him the time of day. Without hesitation they turned down even having a conversation with the man. But the camera showed some of those women quickly changing their approach to this man when he pulled a set of keys out of his pocket, clicked on a button to unlock his Lamborghini parked across the curb. As the man put on a clean coat and climbed into his car the hidden camera showed a changed expression on those around him. He sometimes didn't even have to say, "Are you sure you don't want to hang out with me?" Some of the woman who noticed his expensive car immediately changed their tone with him and started asking to come along with him for a ride. But the end of each clip had him driving off saying, "You didn't like me before. It's too late now."

Favoritism plagues all circles. You see it by the way people treat one another in all aspects of life. It happens in the classroom, in the business office, at the sales floor, and even in the family. We see from letters in the early Christian churches that happens even in the place you'd never expect to see it: a Christian church. Today we'll look at James 2 and we'll see just how serious a problem it is and how it is avoided.

James writes to what he calls the scattered twelve tribes of Israel. But we see that he is not simply addressing people of an ethnic origin. He writes to Christians throughout the world. He starts this chapter by referring his readers as "brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ." What makes us one with James and his audience is that we too belong to Israel. We saw that in last week's message from Romans 9. You and I are part of the family of God. James can call us brothers and sisters through faith in Jesus. And as those who gather together united in faith, we share a special relationship with one another. What brings us together today is not race, age, musical preference, gender, ethnicity, cultural heritage, or social or economic standing, politics, or any other criteria. We are brought together as those who gather united in faith in Jesus and who walk together in the Word as brothers and sisters. We are family.

If there is anywhere where we should be able to stand equally loved, with equal attention and equal favor for all, it should be in the church. If there is any place where we can feel like we belong just as much as anyone else, it should be with the family of believers we worship with. Yet James had to write against favoritism creeping into the family of God. Imagine if two different people were to drive up to church. One drives up in a brand-new Lamborghini and is wearing an expensive suit. Another drives up in a 1963 Ford and is wearing old blue jeans and a worn-out shirt. The pastor runs up to greet the first man but hardly even acknowledges the second. This is like the example that James gives us. It seems utterly ridiculous. Yet this is exactly the injustice that happens with every act of favoritism. It's just not always so obvious to us.

James harps on showing favoritism to the rich and dismissing the poor because this will always be a temptation even in the church. But favoritism can happen in many other ways too. It happens in the family when one child is favored above the others. This happened, for example as Isaac showed love for Esau the hunter and Rebekah showed more love to Jacob the chef. Jacob in turn showed more favor to his son Joseph. It caused strife and division in the home. It happens in the school when a teacher plays favorites with the student they always select or praise. It happens in school when children are selecting teams and leave out the unpopular child but select the popular. It happens when children are choosing who to hang out with and some individuals are teased or left out. It happens in the business world when an apparently wealthy client gets all the attention. It happens when a waiter or waitress serves the affluent couple first in hopes of getting a better tip and dismisses the poor family who came in first. It happens in the office when one person who is deemed more attractive gets more attention and favor from a boss. It happens in the business world when people try to network with the most influential people. Need I even mention favoritism is sadly most often what makes politics and political money flow? It happens at a church when the people who give the most money or do the most work get the first say whenever there is a decision to be made about anything. It happens at church when the person who takes control of an area of ministry only invites their closed circle of friends to be involved. It happens at church when the family that has the most connections gets away with sin unrebuked and dismisses the Word of God because they hold more sway than others at church. It happens at church when a congregation won't call a pastor because he is too old or too young. Favoritism happens at all places because there will always be opportunity. It happens in all areas of life based on race, gender, age, ethnic heritage, upbringing, music preferences, and other things.

Though it is everywhere we don't always want to recognize it. Someone might say, "It isn't really that bad, is it?"

***Favoritism can make us blind*** to what is really important! *"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? <sup>6</sup> 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? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?"* The early Christians James writes to were so blinded by their

favoritism! They forgot that many of the rich had slandered Jesus' name while many of the poor they were dismissing were heirs of the riches of heaven and chosen by God! Their favoritism caused them to care less about justice, the gospel, God's will, and all that really mattered! When we show favoritism, we are blinded to what really matters!

But then again, is it really that bad to show favoritism? Everyone has to have some favorites. But judging between people and showing special attention to some and dismissing others is plainly wrong. James says by doing this you "become a judge with wicked thoughts". It is really bad to practice favoritism. It is sin. All forms of it are wicked. And it's not a lesser sin we should think we can just get away with. James lists favoritism as something which makes us equally guilty as any other sin. It is not, as we might like to suppose, a permissible or lesser sin, it makes us lawbreakers. Someone might say "I keep all God's commands, so what if I play favorites every now and then." It is Jesus who said, "love your neighbor as yourself." Break this command and you are guilty of breaking all of God's will.

God hates favoritism because it tosses out mercy and grace. Behind it all is a lack of grace. We do things expecting some kind of return from others. That's not grace. That's a transaction. That's not love. That's an investment for personal gain in the future. Favoritism is at its core is loveless plotting and selfishness for personal gain. It is loveless manipulation.

James urges us to live as those who will be judged by God's law. He calls it the "law which gives freedom." Since we have been set free by Christ, we have a whole new view of God's law. We delight in it and see it as good. We are guided by it and follow it with a new perspective. To show impartiality is to do what is good and God pleasing. The unbeliever sees no value in removing any favoritism. The world runs on it. The believer in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ sees only evil in every act of favoritism. They run from it.

**James' closing warning is the strongest for us.** "Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful." If we fail to be merciful and loving to those who cannot pay us back, we fail the most crucial test of mercy. And God will look on those who tossed aside mercy and say there is none for us. Those who live by the law and without love will die by the law and without love.

When our Judge comes how will we stand? What about that time when you didn't give attention or love to someone because you knew they didn't deserve it and they couldn't pay you back? What about the time you showed favoritism and gave someone attention and honored them, but it was only because they were important to you? If you have in the slightest way ignored someone's needs because they weren't consequential to your own life, you failed to show mercy and you showed favoritism. If you even once showed partiality to one person over another you are guilty of wicked thoughts. Our judge will see every wicked thought of selfishness. And we will be judged.

Thank God that "mercy triumphs over judgment." Favoritism plagues all circles. But it doesn't enter into the mind of God or influence his dealings with us. God does not look at the world and say, "I will help only those who can help me." He needs nothing and can't be swayed by a sinner's payment. That also means he doesn't look at his church and say, "this one deserves my saving and that one doesn't." God doesn't exercise favoritism. He operates on the basis of his mercy. He paid for the sins of the whole world. His forgiveness is to be preached to the whole world. And in grace he chose you to inherit his kingdom. He didn't do this on the basis of your age, your ethnicity, your education, your wealth, your good deeds, or the amount you could pay him back in praise or good deeds. He chose you with complete impartiality. You were poor, pitiful and wretched in his sight. I was helpless and needy, a beggar from birth. So were you. He had mercy.

And God did more than show you impartiality. He showered you with love. He in grace chose you to be his own. He did this not because of righteous things you had done, but because of his mercy. You now belong to Jesus and bear his noble name. In total impartiality and expecting and asking nothing in return, Jesus gave you everything. He laid down his very life to give you and all people forgiveness. The price he paid was one we could never imagine. But he did it for us all.

And he elevates us all the same in his kingdom. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, where you are going, what you've done or what you will do. God does not show favoritism. Therefore, there is no difference in status for those brought into his kingdom. There is no difference between Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female, old, young, redneck, conservative, liberal, traditionalist or anything. All who are in Christ are one because all have received the same forgiveness and grace in Christ. It doesn't even matter whether you are a brand-new Christian or a life-long Christian. All are one in Christ. All have experienced and received the same new status before God as forgiven and heir of heaven.

Thank God he is entirely free from favoritism and showered us with love, attention, mercy, and every gift!

Now we live according to that same mindset. There was a certain man years ago that became frustrated when his congregation wasn't listening to him and making decisions around his desires. Finally he burst out in anger in front of all his brothers, "Then why do I give to this church if no one is going to listen to me?" At that moment it became clear why he had been giving to church. And it clearly wasn't in response to the mercy of God. He was like one of those women chasing after the man with the Lamborghini and couldn't understand why she was being rejected. His evil thoughts were now out in the open and shown for what they were. So will it be at the judgment. Every time we sought to manipulate or tried to get what we wanted by throwing our weight around will be seen. All our selfish acts will lie bare before the judge. But he does not judge us on that if we have received his mercy. And that same mercy and impartiality, love for all, is what we now live and act on. Because we are family, one created by grace. And favoritism has no place in the family of grace.