

**“The Inconsistency of Favoritism”**

*James 2:1-13*

**INTRODUCTION**

It always seems as though athletes, at least good athletes, are always being shown favoritism. Every time you turn around people are going out of their way to get an autograph or be close to some superstar. I doubt Tom Brady or Peyton Manning have a hard time getting a table at their favorite restaurant. UK basketball players are known to receive special attention from time to time as well. Which is good, we need to win a national championship!

I have a friend who witnessed this first hand. Chad Ludwig was a guy who attended UK some years ago. He was roommates with Kenneth Bruce and Micah Millican for a time. If you knew Chad, you knew a person who did not do much of anything outside of study. There were rare occasions you would find Chad out of his room and not pouring over his notes. He was the person who would get the syllabus before the semester started, read the entire book once, and just for good measure, type a book review of it. He was a serious student, which is good and God honoring.

So, you take a guy like that, a hard working, honest student and imagine him the night before a biology final. He has studied intensely and is well prepared. Now, running on a few hours of sleep he runs across campus trying not to be late for his final. He has a professor that is notorious for not allowing students to take their final if they are late. He runs, comes into the class, only to find out he is late.

At the same time a KY basketball player, who we will not name, is late as well. The professor pulls the player to the side and it looks as though he will have the chance to take the test after all. This does not sit well with Chad, who makes his case that if the basketball player takes the test then so does he. Chad takes the test!

You can apply that principle to your own life in some other context, but the principle will remain the same. There is something about Favoritism or Partiality that did not sit right with Chad and does not sit with us. It does not seem consistent with the way God has created the universe. (TIE THAT IN AT THE END)

This is not an issue the church can afford to shrug off! The world around us has been watching us, and they see the church as a place full of hypocrisy. They see us claiming to follow Jesus, the very one who called us to love our neighbors, but failing to have any concern for the communities that surround our churches. Many times the church is seen as a place that cares for those that have deep pockets, nice homes, and positions of power long before they care for the sick, poor, and homeless.

James is going to show us that partiality/favoritism is not consistent with living out a life of true religion and faith in Christ. The believer should be marked by an

attitude of love for all people, regardless of ethnicity, color, language, socio-economic status, or anything else on the outside.

### **Intro Text: Setting the Stage**

In chapter one James has called believers to “*count it pure joy*” when they fall into times of hardship. Those times of suffering are times when God wants to conform the believer into the image of Christ for their pleasure and His glory. He ends chapter one by calling them to “*be doers of the word, and not hearers only.*” It is a call to pure religion or genuine faith that is expressed in the life you live.

In chapter two, James will continue the train of thought that permeates this letter. He continues to point them towards practical obedience, living a life that reflects the things they claim to believe. He says two things will be evident in the life that is truly given over to the Lordship of Christ. The first is that you will see all people through the eyes of Christ, showing no partiality. The second is that genuine faith will always express itself in fruit or works. Tonight, we handle the first.

### **The Text: The Principle Stated**

*“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.” (2:1)*

The first thing that James does is state the principle that he wants these believers to understand and avoid practicing. The **NASB** translates the verse as not holding the faith “*with an attitude of personal favoritism.*” The idea that James is conveying is that to show favoritism is inconsistent with the character of the God we are to imitate, and it is inconsistent with the faith that we claim to have in Christ.

God Himself is repeatedly described throughout Scripture as a God who shows no partiality.

*“God is not partial to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all work of His hands.” (Job 34:19)*

*“Affliction and distress for every human being who does evil, first to the Jews, and also to the Greek; but glory and honor, and peace for everyone who does good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. There is no favoritism with God.” (Romans 2:9-11)*

God is a God who loves all, because all have been created to bear His image. For us to show favoritism is to place a higher degree of value on one person than we do another. **The idea is NOT that we are giving respect to those who deserve it, that is right and good.** We should honor those among us who are worthy of honor (pastor, deacons, elders, political leaders). The idea here rather, is to show favor on a purely superficial level, favoring one person over another based on a worldly judgment.

This attitude of favoritism is inconsistent with the gospel because the gospel comes as a call for “all” to repent and turn to Christ. It is a call to “whosoever will believe” to forsake their sin and cling to the cross.

James wants to make sure they we understand this point so he gives us an illustration.

**The Text: The Principle Illustrated.**

*“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, 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’, have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (2:2-4)*

The picture is this: The early believers are assembled together (as we can gather from the word assembly), probably in someone’s home, for a time of worship. The house is almost full, people squeezed onto the couch, the kitchen chairs in the living room, and some folding chairs have been brought out. There is only one chair left.

You have opened your home on this particular evening and are excited to have the church meeting in your house. Everyone grabs a chair and gets ready to spend a few minutes talking through prayer request and their weeks when you hear a knock at the door. As the host, you make your way to the front door to see who it is.

When you open the door, you see two men standing in the doorway. The one man is dressed in “*fine clothing*”, a nice pair of designer jeans, a colored shirt with a sweater vest pulled over it. He is a “spiffy” looking gentleman. The other is a man who looks differently, dressed in “*shabby clothing*”. The clothes he wears are worn out, have holes in them, and to be honest, he doesn’t smell all that great. You have thoughts of ushering him upstairs to the shower before letting him into the living room, but your judgment gets the better of you.

Both men come through the door and you lead them into the living room where prayer requests are being taken. The man of humble circumstances has come in first with Mr. Spiffy keeping his distance behind, careful not to rub shoulders with this man. You see the open chair, but instead of offering it to the poor man, you actually tell Mr. Spiffy to take that seat as you pull up a footstool for the poor man. He doesn’t mind that much, he is just glad to be there, but there is something that doesn’t sit right with him, and with you.

You have just showed favoritism on a very superficial level and James says you have become judges “*with evil thoughts*” or “evil motives” (NASB). You have judged those two men based on what you see on the outside and have not imitated the God who has died for them both.

Favoritism and partiality do not have to be that obvious. We are guilty in more subtle ways than that most of the time. We show favoritism in:

*The Subtle Applications:*

1. Whom we sit with when we go out to eat.
2. Who we give our cell phone numbers to.
3. When we plan a get-together and are careful only to invite a select few.
4. Etc.

I know I am guilty of these but I cannot speak for you. In what ways do you show favoritism in your life? What are the subtle ways you are partial to one person over another? We all have them, and we will all answer for them.

### **The Text: The Inconsistency Revealed.**

*“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? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?” (2:5-7)*

James moves from illustrating the principle that he stated in verse one to showing how it is inconsistent with who God is and how He works.

The man in “shabby” clothing, whom we made sit in the floor, is the very one God has chosen *“to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.”* (2:5) The idea here is not the idea of the “poor in spirit”, but rather the economically poor. Throughout the history of redemption, God has continually called the financially deprived to Himself.

*“Your people settled in it; by Your goodness You provided for the poor, God.” (Psalm 68:10)*

*“The one who mocks the poor insults his Maker.” (Proverbs 17:5)*

In the New Testament, we as believers have become “new creations” and are to reflect the nature of God in our own lives. That nature involves an uncompromising and impartial love for all, regardless of how much money they have, what they look like, what color they are, or where they are from. Failure to do so is a failure to reflect the very image that we are to bear.

*“In short, though God pours forth His grace on the rich and the common with the poor, yet His will is to prefer these to those, that the mighty might learn not to flatter themselves, and that the ignoble and the obscure might ascribe all that they are to the*

*mercy of God, and that both might be trained up to meekness and humility.*”—John Calvin

When these Jewish Christians were showing favoritism to the rich they were catering to those who “*drag you into court*” and “*blaspheme the honorable name*” of Christ.

They were playing favorites to the very ones who were persecuting them because of their faith. How backwards it is when we treat with favor based on worldly judgment those who treat us with contempt.

### **The Text: The Seriousness of Favoritism Exposed!**

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

So far, James has Stated the Principle he wants believers to avoid, he has given them an Illustration of the Principle, and has Revealed the Inconsistency of showing favoritism based on superficial judgment. Here James shifts gears and informs the reader of the Seriousness of Favoritism.

It is like knowing you’re not supposed to do something but you don’t really understand the consequences. My friends and I used to steal pumpkins and thrown them at mailboxes when I was younger. We knew that it was wrong but we did not know it was a Federal Offense to destroy a mailbox. The readers of this letter probably know that showing favoritism is not a good practice but fail to grasp the seriousness of this sin. James informs them.

He says that if you love “*your neighbor as yourself*” you are doing well. No doubt that there are probably believers that were loving people the way Christ commanded them to. James is quick to give them a “well-done”. However, there are those that were failing at this very point.

To them, James says they “*are convicted by the law as transgressors.*” The sin of favoritism is like any other sin in that it causes us to stand guilty before a holy and just God. This is the God who has said you shall not “*commit adultery*” and “*you shall not murder*”. If you break one, you are “*a transgressor of the law*”.

The message is this: you may be loving those who are in your circle of friends, and that is an honorable thing, but when you judge someone on the basis of superficial judgment, you break the law of God and are proven guilty.

### **The Text: Instead, Live Your Life Consistent with Who You are in Christ!**

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

Here James says simply to go and live a life that reflects the Christ who has redeemed you. Let your life match your beliefs. You say you follow Christ, have been made a “new creation” in Him, then act like it. Has your life been one that has refrained from showing favoritism on the basis of superficial judgment? If not then you fail to give evidence that you have been “born again” in the likeness of Christ.

It is “mercy”, James says, that will be a measuring rod against us. It is obvious that James has the “poor man” in view here. This word mercy on the human level is one *“best described as one’s consideration of the condition and needs of his fellowman”*. (Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary) Living a life that goes beyond mere emotion and actually moves out in love to meet the needs of those around us. (SOCIAL GOSPEL?)

We live this way understanding that one day there will be judgment. All people will one day bow their knee to King Jesus. For the person who has failed to show mercy, to love all people from all places, then we live in a way that gives us no grounds for claiming the name of Christ. God’s judgment will be without mercy on those who are not covered by the blood of Jesus.

### **The Text: The Power of Mercy Over Judgment.**

*“Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (2:13b)*

When we surrender our lives to Jesus, we find the undeserved favor of God. His mercies are ours. Because of the sinless life of Christ, His sacrifice on the Cross, and His resurrection from the dead, we receive the mercy of God based on our faith in Him.

When we stand before Christ on the Day of Judgment all we will deserve is hell. Through our faith in Him, all we get is mercy. And in light of that truth, we are called to go out into this world and love all people, regardless of their wealth, looks, color, language, or where they live. We love the Arab in the same way we love an American. The North Korean loves the South Korean, the Englishman loves the Frenchman.

*“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free: but Christ is all, and in all.”*  
(Colossians 3:11)

When we live that way, we live in a way that is consistent with who God is, the God of impartiality, and we live in a way that points people towards the gospel that is for all peoples.

### **The Conclusion and Appeal.**

Our churches must be places that love the way God has loved. When those who don't look like us walk into our fellowships, do we seek to make them welcome? Do we see them through the eyes of Christ? When those that don't look like us, don't speak like us, or think like us walk through the doors do we see skin color, nationality, or do we see an image-bearer of God.

Ignite and Porter must be communities of believers that are known for their love of Christ and their love for the peoples of this world. We stand in awe of our great God who has loved us even while we were unlovable. We stand amazed at the unfathomable depths of His mercy and grace. We look upon a Christ who suffered in horrific ways to save the His enemies.

*“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for the righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8)*

God didn't look at us on the outside and choose us because there was something about us that merited us being redeemed. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world on the basis of His good pleasure. He showed no favoritism in His choosing. In the same way we must love all people, because all people have been created in the image of God, and Christ has come to give His life for all who would believe in Him.

In what ways do we show favoritism in our individual lives and as the body of Christ? The challenge tonight is to come together and identify the ways that we play favorites, undermining the character of God and the gospel of Christ.

Then let us live this week, and the rest of our lives, with the mindset that we are going to love all people, we are going to invest in others regardless of who they are, and do everything we can to reflect the mercy that God has shown us at the Cross of Christ.