

James

Lesson 3

James 2:1-26

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Lesson 3
James 2:1-26
Favoritism and Discrimination

Listen, my dear brothers: 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? *James 2:5*

Prayers

Introduction

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that Sunday morning at 11 a.m. is the most segregated hour in America, referring to the fact that in the 1960s, Blacks and Whites tended to worship in churches where the congregation was mostly of one race. Even today, a recent survey conducted by Baylor University found that 86 percent of all church congregations in the United States are made up of parishioners of mainly one racial or ethnic group. When churches do make efforts to diversity, they tend to lose more members than they gain.

James 2 discusses the pit of favoritism and discrimination head-on. These attitudes have no place among God's people. In James' day, the issue was favoritism to the rich and discrimination against the poor. There are many ways we create division in Christ's body – racial, ethnic, gender, age, political, profession, or zip code – to name a few. The theme of unity occurs in every epistle to the churches because Christ has only one body, and there is no room for division. As you read this lesson on favoritism and discrimination, search your heart, identify your fears and prejudices, and ask God's Spirit for healing to become a person of peace.

Read James 2:1-12, Favoritism Forbidden

Jas 2:1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

Jas 2:2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.

Jas 2:3 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,"

Jas 2:4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Jas 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers: 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?

Jas 2:6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?

Jas 2:7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

Jas 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

Jas 2:9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

Jas 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

^{Jas 2:11} For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

^{Jas 2:12} Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ^{Jas 2:13} because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

1. In verses 1:19-27, James began listing practices indicating genuine faith. These included controlled speech, listening before speaking, being slow to anger, knowing and applying the scriptures, and caring for widows and orphans. What signs of genuine faith does James add in verses 2:1-12?
 - a. Verse 2:1 **Don't show favoritism**
 - b. Verse 2:4 **Do not discriminate**
 - c. Verse 2:8 **Love your neighbors**
 - d. Verse 2:12 **Speak and act with mercy**
2. In Verses 2-3, How was the Jerusalem church showing favoritism to the rich and discriminating against the poor?

Greeted and given places of seats of honor. Poor were also greeted but were told to stand or sit on the floor at people's feet

3. How does God view the poor (verse 5)?

God loves them and has chosen them to inherit his eternal kingdom.

4. Despite being honored in church, what was the behavior of the rich when they were not in church?
 - a. Verse 6 **Exploitation**
 - b. Verse 6 (2) **Lawsuits**
 - c. Verse 7 **Slandering the name of Christ**

5. According to verse 8, how are our prejudices and divisions overcome?

We recognize prejudice and discrimination are not loving our neighbor as God commands.

6. In verses 9-13, James shows the seriousness of favoritism.

- a. What does he say in verse 10 about the consequences of showing favoritism and practicing discrimination?

Guilty of breaking the whole law.

- b. In verse 11, the topic changes abruptly to murder and adultery. What point is James making by including murder and adultery in his discussion on favoritism?

Everyone would agree that murder and adultery are examples of breaking the law that deserves punishment, but discrimination? James is saying if you practice favoritism and discrimination, you are no better than a murderer or adulterer before God under the law.

- c. James says we are guilty of breaking the whole law if we break any part of it. How is this view of breaking the law so different from our cultural view of guilt (and spiritual sin) today?

James says we are guilty of breaking the whole law if we break any part of it, and as Paul said – the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

In our culture today, we believe in graduated punishment for guilt (which is a good thing), but this thinking also spills over into our spiritual view. None of us thinks we are so bad – especially compared to the other guy! We certainly don't believe we need to be eternally punished by God for what we've done and left undone. Unfortunately, this view makes many people today blind to their need for a Savior and their need to be rescued from the wages of sin.

7. In verses 2:12 and 1:25, James refers to the law as giving freedom. James, Peter, and Paul all refer to freedom in Christ, but Paul probably describes this concept most completely. Refer to the following passages and discuss the meaning of the “perfect law that gives freedom.”
 - a. ^{Ro 8:1} Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2).
 - b. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17).
 - c. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness... But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life (Romans 6:18, 22).

Christ sets us free from the prison of sin and the condemnation of the Mosaic law. We are redeemed and forgiven all our sins by Christ. We are free from the law but bound to Christ through devotion and gratitude to practice the perfect law – love God and our neighbor.

8. Poverty has many facets in America. Poverty in the US affects 1 of every 11 people and is defined as earning less than \$11,700 for a single person or \$25,926 for a family of four. Half of the poor live 50% below the threshold, and about 30 % of Americans live above *but near* the threshold. Poverty disproportionately affects Native Americans, Blacks, Hispanics and children, seniors, the disabled, uneducated, large urban cities and rural areas. What are some ministries effectively serving the poor in your area where your church can serve to promote a better understanding of the poor?

- a. **Rebuilding Together**
- b. **Habitat for Humanity**
- c. **Food pantries**
- d. **Assistance Ministries.**

Read James 2:14-26, Faith and Deeds

Jas 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

Jas 2:15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

Jas 2:16 If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

Jas 2:17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Jas 2:18 But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

Jas 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that —and shudder.

Jas 2:20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

Jas 2:21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

Jas 2:22 You see that his faith and actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

Jas 2:23 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.

Jas 2:24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

Jas 2:25 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?

Jas 2:26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

9. What practical examples of faith in action does James give in verses 14-16?

- a. **Providing clothing**

b. Daily Food

c. Physical needs – warm and shelter

10. James used Abraham and Rahab to illustrate faith in action and whose significance in the life of Christ would have been familiar to Jewish Christians. Refer to the following verses and discuss the importance of their faith, actions, and their significance in the life of Christ.

d. Abraham’s faith, action, and relationship to Christ

Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Heb 11:9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

Heb 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Heb 11:11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise.

Heb 11:12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Heb 11:17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ^{Heb 11:18} even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”

Heb 11:19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.

Ge 28:13 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. ^{Ge 28:14} Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

God promised Abraham land and descendants as numerous as stars in the sky even though he and his wife were beyond the age of childbearing. Abraham believed all God's promises and faithfully followed God’s commands, even to the point of being willing to sacrifice his only son. Jewish and Arab nations trace their ancestry to Abraham, but Christ fulfilled God’s promise to Abraham to make him a father of many nations, make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and bless all peoples on earth.

e. Rahab the prostitute’s faith, action, and relationship to Christ?

When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me

by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you (Joshua 2:11-12).

Rahab hid Joshua's spies in Jericho because she feared God and recognized he was LORD over heaven and earth.

Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David (Matthew 1:5-6)

Matthew 1;5. Rahab was Jesus' great x11 grandmother

Closing Prayer and Blessing