



## Session 4: Favoritism Forbidden (2:1-13)

### 1. BEWARE OF FAVORITISM (2:1-4)

- **AS BELIEVERS IN OUR GLORIOUS LORD JESUS CHRIST** levels them in their common faith and under the lordship of Jesus Christ, alone worthy of glory and honor. (See Proverbs 22:2)
- **FAVORITISM** literally means to lift up one's face to show favor (a Greek form, *prosopolempsia*, of a Hebrew word). The word also has the idea of "receiving by face," that is by outward appearances.
- **MEETING** here is the original Greek word for "synagogue." These are Jewish Christians who receive this letter, still possibly meeting in synagogues.
- **GOLD RINGS** were a sign of status, often worn on every finger to show wealth.
- **POOR MAN** refers to someone who wants to work, not the "sluggard" who does not (Prov. 6:6-11; 13:4; 19:24).
- **CLOTHES** again focuses on outward appearances. Clothing marked the rich as wealthy. The poor usually had only one or two changes of clothing.
- 2:3: The church was the first to bring slave and master together in a public setting. There were to be no special favors for the rich, no choice seating. The same instruction appears in early service order books, such as the Ethiopian *Statutes of the Apostles*.
- **DISCRIMINATED** (*diekrithete*) refers to judging that creates divisions, even classes, in the church, as well as judgments based on selfish prejudice (Matthew 7:1).



### 2. EXPLOITATION (2:5-7)

- **CHOSEN THOSE WHO ARE POOR** affirms that God shows no favoritism based on worldly standards (wealth, status, etc...). The poor receive the riches of faith and inherit the kingdom – all by God's grace. "God must love the common people because He made so many of them."  
— Abraham Lincoln
- The rich would **EXPLOIT** the poor by demanding work for unfair wages. The same word is used of Satan in Acts 10:38. They would also drag the poor into court to collect their debts. James is reminding his readers that the rich have not been their friends.

- ***SLANDERING THE NOBLE NAME*** may refer to the name of Christ now carried by Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28). No doubt wealthy masters saw a difference in their slaves who had become Christian.

### 3. THE ROYAL LAW (2:8-11)

- ***ROYAL LAW*** refers to an imperial edict, here the edict or law issued by God Himself. This edict is recorded in Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39, and Romans 13:9.
- ***FAVORITISM*** breaks the royal law of loving the neighbor as oneself. It is not a lesser sin or of lesser importance to God. Those who show favoritism toward the rich are convicted by the law of love taught by Jesus Himself.
- To break one of God's laws is to break ***ALL OF IT***. No matter how good we may be at keeping God's laws and precepts in nearly all respects, one "small" infringement makes us lawbreakers as if we had broken it all. God does not add up the times we obey and the times we disobey into two columns and come up with a balance of credit or debit. One failure to obey breaks the bank.
- James puts favoritism in the same conversation as adultery and murder. Committing one or the other makes us a lawbreaker (one is not less or more).

### 4. FREEDOM AND MERCY (2:12-13)

- ***THE LAW THAT GIVES FREEDOM*** sets Christians apart from those who are slaves of the law, driven by legalism and fear. Christians are judged not by the letter of law but by the law of love taught by Jesus Christ and placed in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Only in Christianity is "law" a source of freedom. God's law sets us free to love and to serve. Luther wrote, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all."
- ***JUDGMENT WITHOUT MERCY*** will be shown to those who are not merciful. This truth runs throughout Scripture (Psalm 18:25; Matt 5:7; 6:14-15; 18:22-35).
- ***MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT*** - Ultimately, God's mercy trumps God's judgment. Acts of mercy far outweigh acts of judgment.

Note: James in this section teaches against showing favoritism to the rich on these grounds: the rich are not worthy of it (vss. 5-7); it breaks the law of love (vss. 8-11); and it will be judged (vss. 12-13).

*NEXT WEEK: JAMES 2:14-26*