

“Faith Without Favoritism”

May 27, 2012

Text: James 2:1-4

**A church’s college students were on a bus, talking excitedly,
as they headed for the campus where their 3 day retreat
was to be held.**

They had looked forward to this for months.

It would be a time to get away from the pressures of school,
to rethink personal-goals, enrich themselves with
God’s Word, & make new friendships w/ fellow Xns,
including potential life-mates.

About an hour-&-a-half into the trip, the group leader spotted a
hitchhiker w/ a backpack on the side of the road & said,
“Let’s pick him up. Giving him a ride will help him out.”

As he boarded the bus w/ his backpack, most tried not to stare at
his scruffy beard, matted hair, & dirty/grimy clothes.

He also brought with him the unmistakable odor of dried
out sweat.

They tried to converse w/ him, but he wasn’t talkative, so having
done their duty, most just ignored him, thinking “Thank the
Lord, that’s not me!”

A couple of the students tried to give him the gospel, but
when he showed no real signs of interest, they
left him alone, & talked w/ each other instead.

When the bus reached the turn-off for the retreat site, it stopped
to let the transient out.

The clicking sound of bus windows being opened caught his attention, and he looked back momentarily, as his former bus-mates tried to rid the bus of his smell. After lunch, the first teaching session began w/ an introduction of the main speaker that weekend.

A shock wave went through the group, as the transient rose & stepped up to the podium—now cleaned-up & clean-shaven.

No one stirred as he read his text, the same one we'll be studying this morning (Jms 2:1-4)=> *“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. / For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, / and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’ / have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?”*

As it turned out, the supposed “transient” was actually a youth pastor from a nearby church, recruited for this role by the group leader.

It would be a long weekend, he had a busload of illustrations, and no one was going anywhere until the bus took them home.

The issue here was/is prejudice and partiality (or to use James’ term—“favoritism”).

It’s a matter of writing people off for inconsequential reasons.

It may be because they don't live the way we do, or they lack education, or intelligence, or a certain respectable level of income, or certain political loyalties, or a certain racial background, or charm, or interest in sports, or an interest in certain sports teams, or preference for certain types of music, or they lack a full set of teeth, or a full head of hair, or countless other minor reasons, that have no eternal significance.

It may be that they are too young to matter, too old, too house-bound, too loud/outgoing/boisterous, too shy and socially inept, or too problematic in an infinite number of other ways.

Favoritism ignores the fact that the only truth that really matters is that every man/woman/child is created in God's image for His glory, & will spend eternity either in His presence in heaven, or endlessly alienated from Him in the miseries of hell.

Favoritism sets aside these enormous/eternal considerations and replaces them w/ far simpler, more self-centered and more self-serving criteria=>

* I like them, or I don't like them.

* I like what they can do for me, or I don't.

We are morally obligated to be impartial, because God is impartial.

Personal qualities for which the world labels a person as important (or even great), or as an unimportant loser, are absolute non-issues in God's sight.

If there were anyone anywhere who had a right to look down on people & say, "You aren't good enough for Me," it's God.

But ironically Scripture reveals Him to be absolutely impartial=>

- * Rom 2:11=> "*There is no **partiality** with God.*"
- * Deut 10:17=> "*The LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show **partiality**.*"
- * Acts 10:34-35=> "*God is not one to show **partiality**, / but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him.*"
- * I Pet 1:17=> "*If you address as Father the One who **impartially judges** according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth.*"

On the Day of Judgment, no one will have an "in" w/ God, making him immune from judgment, and God's judgment will be unwaveringly, uncompromisingly impartial.

Because favoritism is a core value w/i the evil world system, & God's Kingdom is the absolute opposite of the world, there's no room for favoritism w/i the Kingdom or in the lives of Kingdom citizens.

I Cor 1=> "*God has chosen the **foolish** things of the **world** to shame the wise, and God has chosen the **weak** things of the **world** to shame the things which are strong, / and the **base** things of the **world** and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not,*

that He might nullify the things that are” (1:27-28).

If we belong to the Kingdom of God, we must reject favoritism.

2 Chron 19=> *“Let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or **partiality**” (vs 7).*

Xns must have nothing to do w/ unfair partiality, prejudice, or (to use James’ word) favoritism.

We are not to form selfish attachments w/ others simply because of their wealth/power/social-rank/popularity. Scripture calls Xns to reject such worldly evils, so we must repudiate partiality/prejudice, accepting and loving all men as God our Father loves us—w/o discrimination.

We are to engage in indiscriminate agape love for everyone we happen to encounter.

In today’s text, James will first prohibit favoritism, then he’ll illustrate favoritism, & finally he’ll condemn favoritism.

*** The Prohibition of Favoritism**

[James 2:1]=> *“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, with an attitude of personal favoritism.”*

“Favoritism” (within today’s text) accepts or rejects people on the basis of worldly considerations having nothing to do w/ their character or their spiritual standing, or the eternal value to God of their souls.

I don't want anyone to think I'm preaching this sermon to others, but not to myself.

Every one of us struggles with favoritism, to one degree or another, and that struggle began about midway through our childhood.

When God established Israel's government system, He forbade its judges from making decisions based on favoritism.

Not only did He forbid them to accept bribes from the rich, He also forbade them from ruling in favor of the poor, just because they were poor, instead of simply weighing the merits of their cases.

He said—*“You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be **partial** to the **poor** nor defer to the **great**, but you are to judge your neighbor **fairly**”* (Lev 19:15).

God rejects favoritism, so Israel was to reject it, and we, as believers today, are to reject it as well.

James begins our text by addressing his readers as “*My brethren,*” which (as we have seen in the past) implies that he views them as born-again Xns.

In verse 5 (which we'll consider next time), James will even refer to them as *“**Beloved brethren.**”*

But some of these beloved brethren were disobedient Xns who had disregarded God's prohibition against favoritism/discrimination.

Where is James going with this?

In verses 5-6, he will show that they were actually
opposing God, by dishonoring the poor, whom He
has chosen to become heirs of His Kingdom.

The brethren thought themselves to be Kingdom citizens,
but they were behaving just like the rest of the world.
As a result, verse 9 will convict them of violating the whole
Law of God, by sinning in this 1 point, of favoritism.

In vs 12, James will inform them, they are judged by the Law of
liberty, which opens up the question, Were they really Xns,
if they were judged by God's Law at all?

Vs 13 will openly consider the possibility that they weren't.
There, James will warn=> "*Judgment will be **merciless** to
one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over
judgment.*"

Merciless judgment could have nothing to do w/ a true Xn,
because we are no longer condemned by the Law.

Rom 8:1—"*There is therefore now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

So what is James getting at?

** He'll answer that in verse 14=> "*What use is it, my
brethren, if a man says he has **faith**, but he has no
works? Can that faith save him?*"

Implied answer=> No, his faith isn't actually saving faith.

He acts on the values of the world, because he's still
part of the world—not God's Kingdom.

James is ultimately going to tell us, that if we continually engage in favoritism, or if we are unjustly prejudiced against certain people or groups of people, we aren't truly born again.

It's possible that we're just disobedient brethren who are sinning.

But it's equally possible that we really aren't Xn brethren at all;

That all our personal favoritism, which we've tried so hard to justify, is nothing less than proof that we are not redeemed.

This is very serious business!

Personal attitudes of favoritism/prejudice would violate the glory of our Savior, Jesus, & our faith in Him.

He has told us=> *“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”* (Jn 7:24).

So it would be incompatible w/ the nature of our Xn faith for us to judge a person's worth on the basis of his ethnic-background, his looks/weight, his clothes, his car, the neighborhood where he lives, or any other such superficial criteria.

If we've truly believed, becoming born-again, we'll see the sinful vanity/worldliness of such judgments & rise above them.

We will flee from the sin of evaluating others on the basis of personal preferences, that have no biblical basis.

Favoritism involves selective love, which is really selfishness, not love at all (at least, not agape love).

We can't be obedient to our faith in our glorious Savior and
indulge in selfish/sinful favoritism.

It's not that certain people aren't more compatible than others
with our interests & personality—the are.

But when we exclude others with whom we are not
compatible, that's sinful favoritism.

*** Jesus possessed the same divine glory as God the Father
and God the H.S. before His incarnation in human
flesh.**

* When He came to earth and revealed His glory to
Peter/James/John during the Transfiguration, they saw His
face shining as brightly as the sun, & His clothes become as
white as light.

Later on, John would write=> *“We beheld His **glory**, glory
as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace
and truth”* (Jn 1:14).

* When X ascended/returned to heaven after His resurrection,
He was glorified once again, w/ the glory He
had w/ the Father from eternity past (Jn 17:5).

* And when He returns to earth, He will come in the clouds
*“with power and **great glory**”* (Mt 24:30).

No one will care about the way He dresses or what kind of
car He drives, because in the light of His great glory,
no one will even give a thought to such things.

And compared to the value of a single eternal soul, it's just as irrelevant here/now, among God's people today.

X was never a respecter of persons, & we shouldn't be either.

He didn't mind listing among His ancestors the likes of Rahab the harlot, Bathsheba the adulteress, or Ruth the Moabite. It didn't bother Him to eat with tax-collectors & sinners. Nor that His parents were poor people from Nazareth, a place without distinction in Israel.

In fact, He told His disciples=> *"When you give a reception, invite the poor"* (Lk 14:13).

He understood that poverty/lowliness are mere worldly considerations w/ regard to a person worth/importance. And that those the world considers first will be last in the Kingdom, & those the world considers last will be 1st. Jesus knew the world's whole value system is upside-down from all that is right/true, so He ignored it, and lived according to the principle/values of God's Kingdom.

X's glory, was in the fact that, despite His being the Creator & Sustainer, the Owner/Operator of the whole universe, He came into it as a poor man, and humbly spent His time with the poor and the lowly.

And those are the humble Kingdom values we Xns are to adopt as well.

If instead, we indulge in selfish favoritism, we live by the world's way of thinking, and in denial of our faith in our glorious Lord, Jesus Christ.

So James forbids/prohibits us to engage in the world's sinful favoritism.

*** The Illustration of Favoritism**

[Verses 2-3]=> *“For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, / and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool...’”*

James doesn't tell us whether/not these 2 men were saved, simply that one was very/very rich, & the other very/very poor.

He isn't really concerned about the 2 men themselves—but rather the reaction to them of the people in this church.

They pandered to the rich man, and showed nothing but contempt for the poor man.

It's a clear illustration of the favoritism he has just forbidden/prohibited.

The worldly attitude of these Xns is directly opposite from what James said about the rich & the poor back in Jms 1:9-10=> *“Let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position [in the Kingdom of God]; / and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.”*

Here again we see the Kingdom perspective which is an exact reversal of the world's perspective=>

* The "last" (the poor/humble/powerless) will be 1st, so they already enjoy an elevated position, from God's p.o.v.

* The 1st will be last, which might be bad news for a rich man, except that God promises to humble him, so he'll develop a correct Kingdom perspective.

This is why Paul told Timothy to=> *"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy"* (I Tim 6:17).

The original church in Jerusalem had a Kingdom perspective, so

"all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; / and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need" (Acts 2:44-45).

But sinful attitudes had crept into the Church since those early days, and now they judged people the same way the world did=> The 1st were considered 1st, & the last were last, w/ no thought of Kingdom values or priorities.

* The rich man's golden, ring-covered finger, and his long, bright, flowing robe, caught everyone's eye, because it meant to their worldly minds that he was a VIP.

* The poor man's filthy/stinking clothes also caught their eyes/noses, stirring up feelings of revulsion/disdain.

The treatment received by each man was just as opposite, as the congregation's judgments them.

The rich man was shown great courtesy/deference and was ushered to a prominent/comfortable seat.

The poor man was told to stand "*over there*" (somewhere away from me), or sit on the floor "*by my footstool.*"

He wasn't even offered the footstool to sit on.

No one noticed/cared about the spiritual status of either of these 2 men.

The rich man was outwardly clothed in "*fine* [lit. bright] *clothes,*" but if he was clothed inwardly w/ his own righteousness, he was clothed in filthy rags in God's sight (Isa 64:6).

The church actually did him a disservice w/ all its worldly fawning/adulation by implicitly endorsing his own worldly obsession w/ outward appearance, rather than inward reality.

By contrast, the poor man must have felt humiliated because of his appearance, knowing that everyone there felt he would

be a liability (not an asset) to the church, if he stayed and joined them.

The contrast might not have been quite so painfully obvious if he hadn't shown up the same day as the rich man.

He wasn't welcome, & the treatment he received from the church's members had made that very clear.

They were merely tolerating him, and they made no effort whatsoever to hide their true feelings about him.

It would have been nice, if someone had put a comforting arm around him & said=> "My friend, glory in your humble circumstances because someday the last will be first."

But no one even gave thought to such a loving gesture.

No one wanted to do anything that might encourage him to stay or return.

I would hope that the next time a poor man visits our church, he would get a greeting that made him feel like a king.

And that it would be sincere, not just a perfunctory, condescending, hypocritical performance.

*** The Condemnation of Favoritism**

[Verse 4]=> *"have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?"*

This is a rhetorical question, the expected answer being, "Yes, we've made distinctions/judgments, motivated by evil."

James is inviting his readers to examine their own hearts
and make a judgment about themselves.

Instead of gazing in worship at the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ,
they were looking at other people's appearance, and what
the world considers symbols of their worthiness; or
worthlessness.

And instead of honoring X, they were honoring rich-men,
whom Paul described as "*rich in this present world*" (i.e.,
just temporarily rich).

They were making "*distinctions*" among themselves—creating
divisions among people, based on worldly criteria, and
fracturing the unity of the Body of X, who has made us all
one.

Scripture teaches us to=> "*Be of the same mind with one
another according to Christ Jesus; / that with one
accord you may with one voice glorify the God and
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. / Wherefore, accept
one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the
glory of God*" (Rom 15:5-7).

Instead of obeying this command, these Xns were making
judgments about who was acceptable to them, and
who was not.

And those they found to be unacceptable were being met w/
cold/unloving indifference/disdain.

When we catered to the rich/powerful/popular, it is all done with “*evil motives*,” hoping some of their wealth, power, and popularity might rub off on us, through association.

These people in our text pandered to the rich, hoping to get something from them; & they held the poor in contempt, knowing there was nothing of value to be gotten from them.

They were acting out of self-interest that was grotesquely selfish, superficial, & blatantly unloving.

In fact, James called their motives “*evil*.”

Of the 3 words he uses for *evil* in this book, this is the strongest one, referring to vicious intentions.

Someone: I engage in favoritism at times, but I can’t help it.

I hope you’ll learn to help it, because it’s unjustifiably evil, from God’s p.o.v.

It dishonors the glory of Jesus, whom you call your Savior, and raises questions as to whether/not He really is your Savior.

Q: What can I do to deal w/ my prejudice against certain people?

Again, although I’m going to use the pronoun “you,” I offer these suggestions for us all (including myself).

1st, treat them as if they were your superiors.

Phil 2=> “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one*

another as more important than Himself; / Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others” (2:3-4)

Deal with others as if you were their personal
servant—their valet.

You say, “But that would be hypocritical, because I know
w/i myself I’m better than they are.”

Maybe so, according to the world’s standards, but not
according to those of God’s Kingdom.

Stop being a double-minded man, who jumps back/forth
between the-world & the-Kingdom.

2nd, meditate on the infinite glory of Jesus X.

You’ll find yourself in the same mental position as Isaiah
when he stood before the glory of God in a vision,
saying, “Woe is me!”

Any supposed “superiority” you think you have, will dwarf
into insignificance/non-existence as you
focus/meditate on X’s glory, & compare yourself
with Him.

3rd. meditate on the humility of X, in order to emulate Him.

He came as a poor man, to preach to poor people, not even
having a place in which to lay His head.

He chose 12 poor people to be His disciples.

Become poor/humble in spirit like Him, knowing that the
Kingdom belongs to such people (Mt 5:3).

4th, stop judging others harshly, knowing that X will use your own standard for judging, when He judges you.

In Mt 7, Jesus said=> *“Do not judge lest you be judged. / For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you”* (7:1-2).

You’re not equipped to judge, not knowing the hearts of other people.

You can only judge by outward appearance (as the world judges) & that is ultimately meaningless, worthless judgment.

If you can’t stop thinking like the world now, there’s a real shock awaiting you when you wake up in heaven & find everything is upside-down, the last truly having become first, & the first now being last.

5th, to whatever degree you have sinned w/ attitudes of favoritism/prejudice, confess it to X, & repent of it.

Let God use James’ words here in this text to persuade you that any favoritism/prejudice you harbor in your heart, is wrong—intolerably evil.

6th, ask the H.S. to show you whether your prejudice & love for favoritism are actually indications that you still really belong to this world’s evil system, and not to the Kingdom of God.

I.e., whether your “faith” is living faith, or dead faith, that can’t save your soul.

Humble your heart before Jesus, seeking His face, as your Savior/Lord.

Psa 107:9=> *“He has satisfied the thirsty soul, & the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.”*

So here’s the question=> Is your soul spiritually hungry/thirsty?

If so, Jesus will fill/satisfy your soul, as you repent of sin, seeking cleansing/forgiveness/new-life from Him by faith.

7th, worship/adore Jesus X, for being so gracious that, although He was rich, for your sake He became poor, that through His poverty, you might become rich (II Cor 8:9).

It will make you so humbly grateful, you’ll find it easy to drop all favoritism.

“Faith Without Favoritism”

May 27, 2012

Text: James 2:1-4

1. Prejudice and partiality is a matter of writing people [8 off] for inconsequential reasons.

2. We are morally obligated to be impartial because [8 God] is impartial.

Rom 2:11; Deut 10:17; Acts 10:34-35; I Pet 1:17; I Cor 1:27-28; II Chron 19:7

In today’s text James will first *prohibit* favoritism, then he will *illustrate* favoritism, and finally he will *condemn* favoritism...

*** The Prohibition of Favoritism**

[James 2:1]

3. “Favoritism” accepts or rejects people on the basis of worldly considerations having nothing to do with their character or their [22 spiritual] standing.

Lev 19:15; Jms 2:5-6, 9, 12, 13, 14

4. Personal attitudes of favoritism and prejudice would violate the [12 glory] of our Savior, Jesus, and our faith in Him.

Jn 7:24; 1:14; 17:5; Mt 24:30

5. Christ was never a respecter of persons, and [6 we] shouldn’t be either.

Lk 14:13

*** The Illustration of Favoritism**

[Verses 2-3]

6. The people in the church pandered to the rich man and showed nothing but contempt for the poor man; it is a clear illustration of the [24 favoritism] just prohibited.

Jms 1:9-10; I Tim 6:17; Acts 2:44-45

7. The rich man was shown great deference; the poor man was told to stand “*over there*” (somewhere away from [6 me]).

Isa 64:6

*** The Condemnation of Favoritism**

[Verse 4]

8. They were making “*distinctions*” among themselves—creating divisions among people based on worldly criteria and fracturing the [12 unity] of the flock.

Rom 15:5-7

Q: What can I do to deal with my prejudice against certain people?

*9. First, treat them as if they were your [20 superiors].

Phil 2:3

*10. Second, meditate on the infinite [12 glory] of Jesus Christ.

*11. Third, meditate on the humility of Christ, in order to [16 emulate] Him.

Mt 5:3

*12. Fourth, stop judging others harshly knowing that Christ will use your own [18 standard] for judging when He judges you.

Mt 7:1-2

*13. Fifth, to whatever degree you have sinned with attitudes of favoritism and prejudice, [16 confess] it to Christ and repent of it.

*14. Sixth, ask the Holy Spirit to show you whether your prejudice and favoritism are actually indications that you still really belong to this [16 world's] evil system.

Psa 107:9