

James 2:1-13
“Faith without favoritism”

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I. Introduction

The remainder of this letter is where James explains practically how we can see “mature faith” demonstrated in the life of the believer. This is the mature faith that he explained in the first chapter that came about by *three things in the life of the follower of Jesus; the first two, happen to the believer and the last is something that we positively engage in:*

- 1. Enduring through trials
- 2. Escaping the temptations
- 3. Educating through teaching

What we immediately learn is that the “*believer’s maturity*” is **NOT** visible apart from **personal transformation**. It cannot be seen in a person's stated views doctrinally, neither is it detectable upon faithful attendance or busy religious activity. Instead it is to be noticed in simple everyday practice some of which is negative (*what we no longer do*) and some of which is positive (*things that we now do*) **but all of which is contrary to what we and the world apart from Jesus currently practices**. The first place that James says that “mature faith” is visible is in how different maturity will be seen in how we treat those in the seats next to us. Maturity in Christ, “true faith”, is absent of favoritism

or prejudice! James in verses 1-13 will present this in a six-fold argument. There several general observations that are noteworthy before we begin our examination:

- A. With 13 verses dedicated to “*true faith*” which is without favoritism and the fact that James places it first in his list of what “*mature faith*” looks like; suggests that favoritism and prejudice was a problem the early church faced.
- B. With the illustration given by James of a person entering the church both wealthy as well as poor suggests that the early church of this letter was “middle class” and had personal experience of being excluded by the very people they were giving preferential treatment towards. This sheds light upon the context and that such “favoritism” is not corrected by mere experience as it goes to our fallen unrepented nature.

The six-fold argument is:

- 1. Vs. 1 Favoritism is the opposite of Jesus
- 2. Vs. 2-3 Favoritism is the barometer of the health of the church
- 3. Vs. 4-5 Favoritism disregards God’s heart
- 4. Vs. 6-7 Favoritism ignores reality
- 5. Vs. 8-11 Favoritism distorts God’s word
- 6. Vs. 12-13 Favoritism is nearsighted to God’s judgment

Also, indirectly James words reveal *four doctrinal truths that are against favoritism:*

- 1. Vs. 1-4 It is against the *deity of Christ*
- 2. Vs. 5-7 It is against the *grace of God*
- 3. Vs. 8-11 It is against the *Word of God*
- 4. Vs. 12-13 It is against the *judgment of God*

II. Vs. 1 Favoritism is the opposite of Jesus

Vs. 1 What isn’t immediately clear in the English is that; James expresses surprise that such favoritism was in the Jewish believer’s church service. The word “*assembly*” in verse 2 is the word for synagogue which indicates that the church had not changed its format or structure of meetings. In the phrase “*do not hold the faith OF our Lord Jesus*” the correct interpretation ought to be **IN** instead of which would make the interpretation about the faith of the readers IN Jesus and the evidence of this being without favoritism.

The use of the words “*My brothers*” indicates James is surprised that these believers

hadn't "*matured in their faith*" beyond that which is clearly contradictory of a true follower of Jesus and the reason why he now offers 6 arguments as of why that is so.

1. ***It is opposite of Jesus and his nature:*** There is no way to separate the way we behave towards people from the what we say we believe about God and specifically Jesus. Human relationships cannot be separated from divine fellowship! That is the exact point of the apostle John in 1 John 4:20 where he writes, "*If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"*" This was a constant argument made even by those who question Jesus' deity as they said that "*We know that You are true, and teach the way about God in truth; nor do you care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.*" They said this to trap Jesus but in so doing they inadvertently both acknowledge the truth of God's word and that Jesus followed it while they didn't. Jesus was able to always maintain the heart that was both the friend of sinners while not approving of their sin, He **never** "***compromised truth***" at the altar of "***compassion***"! Thus, the Christian and the church are called to practice the deity of Jesus in our earthly relationships by looking at everyone through the lenses of Jesus. The contrast couldn't be any greater than the Lord of Glory in Jesus and the temporary worldly glory of wealth. ***Jesus wealth was on display not by a gold ring or fancy clothing but rather that, according to Philippians 2:5-8, what He willingly gave up to those who have nothing.***

III. Vs. 2-3 Favoritism is the barometer of the health of the church

Vs. 2-3 Because of the above truth;

2. ***Favoritism is the barometer of the health of the church:*** This is the only time in the New Testament where the word "*assembly*" is the translation of the synagogue and as stated above indicates the surprise from James that the conduct of the Pharisees who according to Matthew 23:6 "*loved the best places at feasts and best seats in the synagogue*" had continued into the church that was following Jesus not religion. As such the illustration given by James serves as a type of barometer of the hearts of those who profess to follow Jesus and not religion. If they were to be more concerned about the wealth of the visitor instead of representing the glory of Christ, they would indicate a lack of maturity and carnality. They needed accept people on the basis of their faith in Jesus and not the dollars in their wallets. The story is told of a poor woman who visited a wealthy church and after the service was visited by wealthy leadership. When told that she would like to join the church they replied that she ought to pray about that every day for a week and come back. She showed up the next week and said that she did, and the leadership said that she now needs to read her bible every day for a week and come back. When she didn't show up, they thought nothing of it for a year until the

leadership ran into here and asked her if she ever heard from the Lord on the matter of making their church her home church. She replied she had, and the Lord said to her, *“That this wasn’t the place for her or Him as He had been trying to get into that Church for years and that they wouldn’t let Him in either.”*

IV. Vs. 4-5 Favoritism disregards God’s heart

Vs. 4-5 The third argument James uses is:

3. ***Favoritism disregards God’s heart***: James makes a point to say that their favoritism of the wealthy above the poor dishonors God’s grace. It is these that Jesus in quoting Isaiah 61:1 that God had sent him to preach the gospel to the poor. James is not saying that God ONLY saves the poor, nor is he saying that the poor are automatically to be saved apart from faith. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 that weren’t ***MANY*** noble, not that weren’t ***ANY***! Jesus doesn’t love the poor more than He loves the wealthy but often times the poor respond quicker to the offer of the riches of His grace than do those who have earthly wealth. God’s grace makes ***“The rich man poor and the poor man rich.”*** A church that has cliques and favoritism is one that is ignorant of the grace of God.

V. Vs. 6-7 Favoritism ignores reality

Vs. 6-7 The fourth argument James makes against favoritism is one based upon their own experiences.

4. ***Favoritism ignores reality***: James wades into this by asking three hypothetical question that these believers already knew the answer of. They were showing favoritism to people who had abused them.
 - A. Vs. 6a ***Do not the rich oppress you?*** James has to remind his readers that it was the wealthy that were oppress them and now they were giving these very people preferential treatment. Favoritism is blind to the reality that such treatment changes no hearts yours or the person you are showing favoritism towards.
 - B. Vs. 6b ***Who drag you into the courts?*** These wealthy people were oppressing believers by litigation to rob them some by false witness. Jesus warned that *“they will deliver you up to councils..”* These believers were actually pandering to the very people who were causing them harm. This indicates that the recipients of this letter were middle class and were now engaged in oppressing the poorer while they were being oppressed by the wealthy.
 - C. Vs. 7 ***Do they blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?*** Worst of all these wealthy folks of whom James writes about spoke against Jesus whom they served. James was no denouncing the wealthy as evil, he wasn’t advocating reverse discrimination, favoring the poor above the wealthy. Instead James is arguing against all favoritism. The mention

of the wealthy is not on what they have but what they trust in!

VI. Vs. 8-11 Favoritism distorts God's word

Vs. 8-11 The fifth argument James makes against favoritism is:

5. **Favoritism distorts God's word**: It is clear from both the First Testament as well as the New testament that favoritism violated God's Word. James menses no words in verse 9 where he declares, "*if you show partiality you commit sin*". James refers to the word as the Royal Law which he defines as "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*." This is the law of love that Jesus stressed and when asked by the Pharisee which was the greatest commandment answered by quoting this. Jesus took this from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 where the first four commandments deal with a person's love of God then the next 6 deal with their love towards their fellow man. The person who loves God with all their heart will love the children of God without partiality. We would have no need for most of our civil laws if we all just practiced "*loving your neighbor as yourself*." Obey this reveals that you are a child of the King and hatred proves you are still a slave of the liar. Love always liberates us from favoritism. The truth is we "**Only believe as much of the Bible as we practice**"! James is not saying all sins are of the same magnitude are have the same result in effects towards others but that breaking one sin puts all in too the same class, transgressors.

VII. Vs. 12-13 Favoritism is nearsighted to God's judgment

Vs. 12-13 The sixth and final argument James makes against favoritism is:

6. **Favoritism is nearsighted to God's judgment**: Literally James writes "*Keep speaking and keep on acting as those who will be judged by the perfect law of liberty*." James mentions three parts of the believer's life that will be judged, not for salvation but for reward:
 - a. **So, speak: Our words** will be judged in what we say to others. Jesus said in Matthew 12:36 that "*every idle word men may speak; they will give account of it in the day of judgment*." The words we speak reveal where our heart is really at.
 - b. **So, do: Our actions** will be judged, even though Jeremiah tells us that God remembers our sins no more the consequences of this actions carry on. We cannot sin lightly and still serve faithfully.
 - c. **One who shows no mercy**: Our attitudes will be judged as James contrasts those who show no mercy with those who show mercy towards others.

New birth must change our attitudes; our beliefs must change our behavior. One of the truths of the reality of our faith is how we treat others.