

## I. The Sin of Favoritism (2:1-13)

- A. The PROBLEM stated: Christians must not discriminate (vs. 1)
1. “Favoritism” – to “receive a face” – to prefer someone because of their outward appearance.
  2. Contradicts our faith in “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.”
  3. Not just any kind of favoritism – but that focusing on the rich and poor.
- B. The ILLUSTRATION of favoritism (vs. 2-4)
1. In our society we show favoritism as well – (even on the mission field)
    - In our culture money brings status, showcases value, and wields power.
  2. But to truly obey James command we need to respect all of the poor:
    - We can’t just prefer the poor in whom we see a future “potential”
      - a) Poor in personality – dull/complaining
      - b) Poor in mind – slow/uneducated
      - c) Poor in body – wrinkled/bald/overweight
  3. Church is not a club, favoritism has no place. It is a family.
- C. The REASONING for the warning (vs. 5-11)
1. Favoritism is contrary to the attitude of God – v. 5
  2. Favoritism is the antithesis of true religion.
    - It seems trivial – but can prove the sincerity of your religion (fails all 3 tests – 1:26-27)
      - (1) Abuses the tongue
      - (2) Is stained by the world’s thinking
      - (3) Insults the poor
  3. Favoritism doesn’t even make sense.
    - a) One reason for showing favoritism is thinking that the rich will treat you better in return.
    - b) But the rich are not these Christians’ friends! They won’t treat them better.
  4. Favoritism violates the law.
    - a) It is the opposite of loving one’s neighbor
      - Quote is from Lev. 19:18 (context includes Lev. 19:15 against favoritism)
      - Royal law – law of the kingdom and law exemplified by the King.
    - b) There is no such thing as keeping part of the law, or obeying partially.
      - No such thing as a “little sin” (we think of favoritism as little)
      - Obedience is all or nothing: favoritism is one way we fail to keep the whole law and do it.
- D. CONCLUSION (vs. 12-13)
1. We must speak and act in such a way that is true to God’s law – aware of judgment to come.
    - Speak and act hearkens back to hear the word and do it (1:22-25).
  2. Avoiding favoritism is a matter of showing mercy.
  3. Favoritism is just one of God’s laws, so we must act and speak wisely in all we do – knowing judgment will fall on us if we don’t show mercy in everything.
  4. However, we will not speak and act as we should – always. We will fail in one point in our effort to keep the whole law, and so we will be guilty of all. What then?

5. Mercy Triumphs over judgment. This is our Gospel-centered answer. We can trust in God's goodness rather than revel in or be overcome by our sin./ "law that gives freedom" (v. 12)

## II. The Problem of Faith without Works (2:14-26)

### A. The PROBLEM stated (v. 14)

1. Keep in mind the context shows James is concerned that we have a faith that does more than just hear, a faith that does more than just go through religious motions – one that actually helps the poor (rather than show favoritism against them).
  - James is concerned about a faith that is dead (2:17, 2:26) or useless (2:20)
2. What good or what benefit is faith without works? [*saying* we have faith, but having no works]
3. Can such a faith (workless faith) save? (*literally no "such" or "that", just "the" – see #5 below*)
4. This is much harsher in Greek. The construction indicates a NO answer is expected. Literally we could put like this: "Faith can't save him [the person with no works] can it?" Answer: No. (Dorioni, p. 82).
5. James intentionally uses this language to jar his hearers – faith that doesn't save! Works that justify someone? He knows his hearers are familiar with Paul's gospel – but he needs to correct an error and a misappropriation of that gospel. Today we have a similar problem. We have many who know that faith alone saves, but then they are content with mere faith a "lite faith."
6. It's important to remember that James is being polemical and confronting a problem in his churches. He isn't contradicting Paul.
  - a) Paul focused on Gentiles who thought they had to earn God's favor, James focused on Jews who assumed they had God's favor.
  - b) Douglas Moo puts it this way: "Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works."
  - c) Martin Luther said "we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone."
  - d) Zwingli: "Where there is true faith, works necessarily result... as fire necessarily brings with it heat."

### B. CASE STUDIES presented (v. 15-26)

1. Case #1: The Faith that helps no one (v. 15-17). [cf. Matt. 25:36-40, 1 Jn. 3:16-18]
2. Case #2: Faith that doesn't get you to heaven (v. 18-20). [not like spiritual gifts {you have faith, I have works, you have discernment, I have helps} – both/and needed]
3. Case #3: Abraham's work that justified him (proved his faith was real) (v. 21-24). – without the works, his faith would be mere words.
4. Case #4: Rahab's work that justified her (proved her faith was real) (v. 25-26). [Josh. 2]