



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Book of James, Favoritism

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James 2:1-7

¹ My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 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. 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," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

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

My brothers...

James is filled with admonitions and mandates but always in the context of our Christian brotherhood. The phrase *my brothers* or *my dear brothers* is found in the epistle fifteen times.

... as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

Favoritism is disallowed for at least two reasons: First, it directly violates the teaching of Jesus and the Scriptures (John 7:24). Second, how can we think of favoring one over another if we compare ourselves to the Christ of glory? Beholding Him in His exaltation reminds us of our lowly condition. At the same time we are also reminded of our lofty place because of His redemptive work for us. Pondering these things makes human favoritism seem small and insignificant.

Showing favoritism is more than a social indiscretion. It is a sin for a Christian to do so. We know this because James' teaching on favoritism is a command. Mandates can be obeyed as a righteous act or disobeyed as a sinful act.

Luke 14:7-11 ⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

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

James is doing more than telling a story to make a point; undoubtedly he is recounting an ongoing problem in the Jerusalem church. The gathering he describes is likely the house meeting. Church buildings, as we know them now did not exist in the infant church. The customs of cultural hospitality were not fully suited for Christian society. The owner of a home would want to honor the more prestigious guest, but this had no place when the gathering was for common worship and teaching.

The mention of the gold ring has a historical significance. Only wealthy people were able to afford gold jewelry. One custom of the time was to wear many gold rings all at once. The more rings one flaunted the wealthier he was. The rings were not worn only for fashion but to show off personal treasures that were carried around in public as displays of importance.

Two biblical principles are apparent. First, we are not to fawn over the well-dressed rich person. Second, we are to dress modestly regardless of our ability to adorn our bodies with expensive items.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425

STAFF: MONDAYS, 12:00 NOON, CHAPEL

North Carolina

James

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," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

The typical meeting (synagogue) was mostly an empty room with a few choice seats or benches near the front. The more prominent members of the assembly would sit in these up front places. Some might find a footstool to sit upon. The NIV translation of *by my feet* literally reads by my footstool. Persons of lower standing would not have a chair, bench, or footstool to use. They would typically remain standing for the meeting, or sit on the floor if necessary. Differences in status were apparent by where a person would be permitted to sit or stand and the quality of the clothing would also demonstrate a class distinction.

It would be easy to dismiss the idea of becoming *judges with evil thoughts* as an overstatement in the translation except for this important detail. In this epistle James uses three different Greek terms to express the idea of evil. In 1:21 he uses the word *kakias*. Later, in 3:16 we will find the word *evil* which is *phaulon* in the original. Here, he uses the strongest word *ponerown*. James, therefore, is saying to discriminate among rich and poor is to have evil thoughts, not merely ill-conceived thoughts, or mildly wrong thoughts.

Listen, my dear brothers...

James weaves the idea of *quick to hear* back into his message.

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?

Anyone, regardless of social standing, can be gifted in faith. It may actually be easier for the poor person to possess a rich faith than for a wealthy person. The poor man may be more open to faith as he has few of the world's distractions to occupy his mind or his time, and he has a greater dependence

on God for basic necessities. In terms of *Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth* (Matthew 6:19), the poor person may prove to be wealthier in the things that matter—the spiritual blessings in Christ. Who would give up their salvation for any amount of wealth or prestige? He who would do so is a fool.

Mark 8:36 *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?*

Philippians 3:8 *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*

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

James warns us not to insult the poor. The less prosperous person does not deserve our derision, and we have overlooked the spiritual to the regard of the outward appearance.

The rich are accused of two infractions. First, they might drag a person into court for their own gain. This was a customary practice of those who had influence and means. The rich would prey upon the poor to wring out any concession possible. Second, the rich were slandering the name of Jesus! It seems that the rich here are those outside of the fellowship of believers, but James is warning not to use them as role models.

We find similar issues in the church today. One study found that our contemporary younger Christians desired celebrity more than any other quality. People want to be a favorite and they try to flatter and draw close to those who are favorites in the eyes of the world.

Ponder this...

1. What is the favor that matters eternally?
2. Where should our treasure be?
3. Why is anyone worthy our respect?