

## **James' First Theme: Riches and Poverty**

James 2:1-26

### **1. The Sin of Favoritism (vs. 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. Not just any kind of favoritism – but that focusing on the rich and poor.
  - 3. In our society we show favoritism as well – but with some of the poor we see their potential.
  - 4. But to truly obey James command we need to respect all of the poor:
    - a) Poor in personality – dull/complaining
    - b) Poor in mind – slow/uneducated
    - c) Poor in body – wrinkled/bald/overweight
  - 5. Church is not a club, favoritism has no place. It is a family.
- B. The ILLUSTRATION of favoritism (vs. 2-4)
- C. The REASONING for the warning (vs. 5-11)
  - 1. Favoritism is the antithesis of true religion.
    - It seems trivial – but is something that can prove the sincerity of your religion.
    - a) True religion helps the poor, but favoritism insults them.
    - b) Favoritism is worldly – following the pattern of the world.
    - c) Favoritism uses the tongue to harm the poor.
    - d) In this way, favoritism fails all three tests of true religion (1:26-27)
      - (1) Abuses the tongue (2) Is stained by the world (3) Insults the poor
  - 2. 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.
  - 3. Favoritism violates the law.
    - a) It is the opposite of loving one's neighbor (a 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. Obedience is all or nothing, and favoritism is one way we fail to keep the whole law and do it.
    - c) Favoritism is not just a neglect of doing the entire law. It actually violates the whole law.
      - (1) 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Favoritism prefers the rich man because it covets the riches that the rich can bestow.
      - (2) 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment: It bears false witness because it implies that a poor man has less worth.
      - (3) 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: It robs the poor of the dignity they deserve.
      - (4) 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: To favor the rich is a kind of unfaithfulness to the bond of Christian fellowship.
      - (5) 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: It kills the spirit of the poor by demeaning them, even in the church.
      - (6) 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Favoritism dishonors the poor, but we must honor all who deserve honor, including one another.
      - (7) 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment: If we show favoritism in church, we defile our worship, hence the Lord's Day.
      - (8) 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment: Every believer is a representative of God. If we favor the rich over the poor, we misrepresent God and his name, for he does not play favorites.

- (9) 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandments: God gave this command. All disobedience is a kind of denial of God's lordship.

--Daniel Doriani, *James (Reformed Expository Commentary)*, P&R Press, p. 72-73.

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.

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

A. The PROBLEM stated (v. 14)

1. What good or what benefit is faith without works? [*saying* we have faith, but not having any works]
2. Can such a faith (workless faith) save?
3. 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).
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. (Doriani, 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."

Cartoon in a church leadership magazine pictured a church with a large billboard that said:

The Lite Church: 24% Fewer Commitments, Home of the 7.5% tithe, 15-minute sermons, 45-minute worship services. We have only 8 commandments – your choice. We use just 3 spiritual laws. Everything you've wanted in a church... and less!

--R. Kent Hughes, *James (Preaching the Word Commentary)*, Crossway, p. 107.

6. It's important to remember that James is being polemical and confronting a problem in his churches. He isn't contradicting Paul.
  - a) 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."
  - b) Martin Luther said "we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone."
  - c) Zwingli: "Where there is true faith, works necessarily result... as fire necessarily brings with it heat."
  - d) Doriani points out Paul ministered to pagans (who think they have to earn God's favor), James to Jews (who assumed they believed in God and were moral by what they didn't do).

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 – 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]