

James

Lesson 2 Faith and Society James 2

Memorize the TRUTH!

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.
James 1:8

Favoritism Forbidden – James 2:1-4

Day 1

1. What is James' command in verse 1?
2. What is favoritism?
3. a. List things that we use to decide our "favorites" among people.

b. How do God and man view people differently? 1 Samuel 16:7

Learn the TRUTH!

Favoritism is usually based on worldly values such as appearance, possessions, or position. Showing favoritism toward one person means treating another poorly. But God loves and values everyone. As you study this week, ask God to help you value people the way He does.

God's Favorites – James 2:5-7

Day 2

4. How does God view the artificial reasons we use to show favoritism?
Proverbs 22:1-2

Galatians 3:28
5. When have you shown favoritism toward certain people? What caused you to do that?
6. How does God view people who are poor in the eyes of the world?

Commentary James Lesson 2

A careful study of Scripture reveals that Jesus' primary concern was for the life that lasts forever rather than the one that is temporal. He ministered to people who were poor in spirit, blind to truth, and bound by sin. Jesus consistently identified Himself with the poor and the outcast of society. The Old Testament prophets made clear that one purpose of the Messiah's coming was to bring good news to the poor — to restore their sight, set free the oppressed, and heal the broken-hearted. (Compare Isaiah 61:1-2 with Luke 4:18-19.)

James was concerned that some first-century Christians were not ministering as Jesus had done to the physically needy in their society. He challenged those who practiced discrimination in the church, accusing them of creating distinctions among their fellow Christians. He condemned them for making judgments based on evil motives. He reminded them of God's sovereign grace toward the poor — that God has chosen them to be rich in faith and content in the promise of their eternal future. James's concern is still relevant today.

The apostle warns Christians to beware of the rich people who have exploited some and dragged others into court. He asks if they realize how hurtful those actions were to the reputations of believers as well as to Jesus. The Bible does not condemn wealth. Many mighty men of God were rich: King Solomon "was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth" (1 Kings 10:23); "blameless and upright" Job was the "greatest man among all the people of the East" in wealth (Job 1:1, 3); even Abraham, the great man of faith, was "very wealthy" (Genesis 13:2). But, the Bible does warn of the seduction of riches (1 Timothy 6:10) and the temptation to trust one's possessions for security in life instead of trusting God (Matthew 6:33). The early church in 1st-century society wanted real integration and cooperation by abolishing economic, social and racial distinctions. The first congregation in Jerusalem; though not perfect, was a model for equality and integrity (Acts 2:43-47).

To show partiality breaks God's law. When our behavior contradicts the Lord's standard, we fail to keep the "royal law": "Love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8). Christians must not observe God's moral law selectively. We cannot excuse our failure to keep one part of the law by saying we keep the rest. We can't claim to be righteous because we keep some of God's laws. Our failure to obey God's law totally makes it necessary for our salvation to depend not on our own righteousness but on the righteousness of Jesus. Christians are to speak and act as people who will be "judged by the law that gives freedom" (v. 12). Christ's work is the law that sets us free from the bondage and penalties of sin. He provides us with the power through the Holy Spirit to obey Him. His mercy toward us causes us to show mercy to others.

Within a few years, the disciples of Jesus were called Christians (Acts 11:26) because they lived in a way that distinguished them from the rest of society. Today, Christians should be "living Bibles." The world must learn about God by "reading us like a book." James challenges his readers to fulfill God's law to "love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 8). Such love witnesses to an unbelieving world.

Check It Out:

Think about how the world views the poor. Often we see the poor as "throwaways" of society, less than human, or we don't see them at all. Do you look the other way when walking by a homeless person? We may see the problem as so enormous that it overwhelms us. Be open to God's love for all people and let Him draw you towards involvement. Each of us whom God has blessed has the ability to do something. What are you doing?

Think about what mercy means: having compassion and forgiveness toward those who are hard to get along with. Being merciful to those who acknowledge their problems and seek forgiveness and help is not hard. But to be merciful to those who resent or ignore our attempts to give forgiveness and help is impossible unless we rely on God's help. We can't force anyone to accept our mercy — but we can still freely offer it. God has done this for us and will help us offer mercy to others.

Starting with verse 14, James demonstrates that when loving action is absent, real faith is also absent. Notice his words carefully: "if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds" This is different from saying, "If a man has faith" Simply professing one's faith but totally lacking any tangible results is worthless. Genuine faith joins us to Jesus so that our thoughts and actions come under the power of the Holy Spirit. "Words only" faith has no saving power.

To emphasize his point, James gives an illustration of a half-naked, hungry person who asks for help and is dismissed with verbal blessings only. What is the benefit of that? Is Jesus Christ honored? James develops this thought further. Do not boast of your doctrine. Knowing truth is not enough. Even demons have that kind of faith, but it does not save them; it terrifies them.

The contrast between a true believer and a "words only" believer is clear. A genuine disciple of Christ lives according to the teachings of the Master. The other believer is like a barren tree that produces many leaves but no fruit. James gave two vivid historical illustrations:

Abraham trusted the Lord and was declared righteous when he offered his only son on the altar. Faith in God made him righteous (Genesis 15:6). His actions furnished evidence of his belief.

In the same manner, Rahab the prostitute (Joshua 2 and 6:22-25) was declared righteous because of her daring action when she received the Israelite spies (v. 25). She acted on her faith despite the danger involved because she believed in the God of Israel and decided to trust Him.



In one of the lessons Jesus gave, He told of a future judgment when He would separate people, placing some at His left hand and others at His right hand. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me'" (Matthew 25:34-36). Those at His left were sent to eternal fire. They had not seen or helped the Lord by caring for those in need. Has the Lord benefited from your tender care to those around you? No one is too young to reach out and help someone in need of a kind word or deed.