

Let's Be Fair About It
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I don't know about you, but I don't really struggle with quote unquote BIG SINS: murder; theft; adultery. It's the "little sins" that cause me a lot of trouble.

- Is looking down your nose at someone just rude --- or is it sin? Why?
- For what reasons might a person think he or she is more important than another person?

Without showing favoritism to anyone, Christians are to love EVERYONE.

James 2:1-13 (New International Version)

James 2

Favoritism Forbidden

¹My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.
²Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³If 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," ⁴have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵Listen, 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?
⁶But 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? ⁷Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

⁸If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"^[a] you are doing right. ⁹But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹For he who said, "Do not commit adultery,"^[b] also said, "Do not murder."^[c] If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹²Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,
¹³because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

- In verse 1 James sums it all up: "Believers in Christ, don't show favoritism."

- Look at the “comma” after the word Christ. That makes it an imperative statement; a guideline; and since these words were inspired by God...a COMMAND.
 - What if we took the comma away? It would read like a statement of fact: “Believers in Christ DON’T SHOW FAVORITISM.
 - That’s the goal of this study...taking away the comma and making it a FACT.
- What does the word “favoritism” mean to you?
 - What’s another word we use that speaks to the same issue? Prejudice.

Our lesson commentary says: “The word favoritism expresses the idea of arbitrarily assigning more worth to some people than to others and extending preferential treatment to individuals deemed more worthy.”

- Have you ever found yourself the victim of favoritism? How did it make you feel?
- In verses 2 and 3 what illustration did James use to describe favoritism?
 - Giving a rich man a good seat in church and a poor man the “cheap seats”
 - By the way, the word “poor” here doesn’t mean someone who is just struggling to “make ends meet.” It conveys the sense of one who just has the clothes on his back --- in other words: homeless...street people.
 - How would you and I respond if a “street person” cozied up next to us at the 9:30 service this morning?
 - Story: The guy with hygiene issues on my recent flight to Orlando.
 - Confession: I know Jesus loves him...but I was glad he didn’t sit next to me for that flight!

Haddon Robinson tells this story: “ In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India.

So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned.

"If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu."

That usher's prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior.

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- Let’s talk about the rich man in James’ illustration

- Humanly speaking: What reasons could we have for showing someone preferential treatment?
 - We like being with people who are “like us”
 - Sidebar: James didn’t say we had to be “best friends” with everyone we come in contact with...we just have to show them compassion and respect.
 - We like being with people we “aspire” to be “like”
 - We might just have an agenda...something we want from them

A statement from my own experience: Nothing gives a sense of freedom in a relationship like having NO HIDDEN AGENDA. If I want nothing from you, I approach our relationship with complete freedom!

A truth: Salvation in Christ puts us all on equal footing. Jesus died for this person just as much as He did for me! The ground is level at the foot of the cross!

- Did you ever get to sit in a “sky box” at a ball game? How about the “cheap seats”? What was that like?
- Did you ever visit a church and feel like you sat in “someone’s seat?”

A statement: Churches shouldn’t have “sky boxes” and “cheap seats”!

A truth: When we go to Heaven, only believers in Christ get to board. But no one will be flying “coach” EVERYONE FLIES FIRST CLASS. (A good place for “amen”!)

- In verse 4, what does James say we have become if we practice this kind of favoritism?
 - “judges with evil thoughts”
- Look at verse 5, what does he say about the poor?
 - How did Jesus treat the poor and the unclean?
 - What did Jesus say about the poor?

Luke 6:20

²⁰Looking at his disciples, he said:
 "Blessed are you who are poor,
 for yours is the kingdom of God."

Matthew 5:3 (another version of the same teaching...the Beatitudes)

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Luke 4:18a

¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
 because he has anointed me
 to preach good news to the poor."

(All - NIV)

James 4:6b

⁶That is why Scripture says:

"God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble."^[a] (Prov 3:34)

- Look at verses 6 & 7, what does James say about how some rich people treat poor people and Christ?
 - Oppress the poor; drag them into court; blaspheme the name of Christ.
 - Ever had to help your son or daughter deal with a high school “clique”?
 - Phenomenon in any “clique”: The leader of the pack is abusive to the followers yet they still follow.

- Rosalind Wiseman wrote the book: “Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and Other Realities of Adolescence” it was later adapted by Tina Fey into the movie “Mean Girls”
 - I’ve never read the book or seen the movie. But I have “seen the movie” played out in real life.
 - Wiseman has some pretty good descriptions of the “players” in a high school girl “clique” (I list them all in the notes but I’m highlighting three of them):
 - ***The Queen Bee: A combination of the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland and Barbie, she is a mixture of charisma, force, money, looks, strong will and manipulation. She reigns supreme, can silence other girls and boys with a look, and her popularity is based on fear and control. Nice? Not!***
 - ***The Sidekick: A combination of willing servant and humble handmaid, the sidekick does everything the Queen Bee tells her to do. Though she considers the Queen Bee her best friend, the manipulative monarch looks down on her subject, who idolizes her nonetheless. Think sycophant!***
 - ***The Banker: A combination of con artist and stool pigeon, the banker lures girls in, gathers their trust and gets them to divulge information about themselves, which she then banks like currency to be spent - or spilled - later for her own benefit. She's almost as powerful as the Queen Bee in her manipulative abilities, and her casual droppings of gossip only strengthen her status as the girl in the know. Be careful of the banker's wake...it's full of innocent casualties who had the misfortune of trusting her.***
 - ***The Wannabe: She aims to please the Queen Bee and will do anything to get in her good graces. But she tries too hard - a big no-no in Girl World - and is often merely seen as pathetic. Even as the Queen Bee gets her to do her dirty work - like passing a note to someone that will surely destroy that someone's world (at least for the day) - the calculating Queen only pretends to take the wannabe under her wing until the dirty deed is done. After all, she's nobody!***

- *The Target: Worse than the wannabe, the target is the victim set up by the Queen Bee and the popular clique - set up to be humiliated, made fun of or excluded. Usually someone who once challenged the Bee and her bunch, the target is at the bottom of the totem pole, kicked down there often simply because she tried to climb up.*
 - *The Torn Bystander: Constantly in conflict because she knows the Queen Bee is wrong, but won't stand up to her - why, she wouldn't want to become a target! - the torn bystander usually feels damned if she does and damned if she doesn't. As she desperately tries to accommodate everyone, she doesn't have the self-confidence to align herself with what she really wants. And just what is it that she really wants? The poor torn bystander is too ripped apart to know.*
 - *The Floater: Self-confident, full of self-esteem and one of the few girls who doesn't base her self-worth on what others think. Aligning herself with no single clique, the floater is comfortable and welcome in almost all groups - and those that don't accept her, she wouldn't have wanted to associate with anyway. Willing to actually stand up to the Queen Bee if backed into a corner, the floater does have power, but not the same impact or influence as the Queen Bee because the floater is interested in friendship not idol worship. She is truly the silver lining in the dark cloud hanging over Girl World.*
- James saw how the rich and arrogant treated people in the church and he wanted believers to see that all believers are EQUAL IN GOD'S SIGHT.
 - Which of Jesus' teachings does verse 8 refer to?
 - Love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31; also Leviticus 19:18).
 - What kind of "law" does James say this is?
 - The "royal law" Why?
 - Comes from our King
 - It "rules" the other laws

Matthew 22:38-40

³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Romans 13:10

¹⁰Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

- Now we come down to the real issue on FAVORITISM and PREJUDICE: Is it just being rude and insensitive or is it a SIN?
- Look at verse 9. What does it say?
 - If you show favoritism you SIN and are a TRANSGRESSOR
 - Are you saying that if I look “down my nose” at someone I’ve SINNED?
 - I didn’t say it...James the half brother of Jesus said it.
- Verse 10. What does it say?
 - Whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point is guilty of breaking it all.
 - Question: Are there BIG SINS and little sins?
 - Question: Is showing FAVORITISM on par with murder or adultery?
 - Think about it in the context of our system of laws which came out of the Ten Commandments – Laws are laws, but there are degrees of punishment based on the severity of the law broken:
 - If you murder someone you broke what? A law. And that makes you a TRANSGRESSOR. And if convicted it could be death row or life in prison
 - If your son or daughter needs a number two pencil for a test tomorrow and you take a handful from the supply closet at work what is that? Stealing. And that makes you a TRANSGRESSOR. But you won’t be going to jail for that.
 - If you embezzle \$100,000 to send that son or daughter to college...guess what? Jail time.

Several weeks ago in our pulpit we heard a great statement from Stan Frye: “Partial disobedience is STILL disobedience.”

- If you sing in a quartet and sing just one bad note you’ve turned harmony into disharmony.
- If one link in a chain is weak; the whole chain is weak.
- If you have a spot of leprosy on one hand and nowhere else what are you? A leper.
- If you get a speeding ticket what are you? A law breaker.
- If you show FAVORITISM and PREJUDICE what are you? A sinner.

Truth: Though the consequences may be different...SIN IS SIN. And whenever we “WINK” at “LITTLE SINS” it’s still DISOBEDIENCE. Furthermore, a pattern of “LITTLE SINS” adds up to a LIFESTYLE of DISOBEDIENCE.

- Here’s one more way to look at it:
 - When I decide that someone isn’t as good as someone else for any reason I’ve decided to OVERRULE how God feels about them. Right?
 - When I decide to OVERRULE how God feels about someone what have I just started playing? God.
 - Think that’s dangerous?

John MacArthur said: "...how we react to people is a test. And if we are like God we will not be favoring certain people because of their status, education, money, fame, prestige, looks or whatever. There's no place for favoritism in the heart of God and there's no place for favoritism in the heart of His people and therefore there's no place for favoritism in the church."

What about YOU and ME?

1. We need to ignore external differences between people and look on them using God's standards.
2. Since God honors His people so much, we need to honor them too.
3. Since showing partiality is sinful, we need to treat people in ways that express love and mercy.

Here's the Take Away:

- Back in verse 1 James said it plainly: "Believers in Christ, don't show favoritism."
 - Remember what I said about the "comma" after the word Christ? That makes it an imperative statement; a guideline; and since these words were inspired by God...a COMMAND.
 - What if we took the comma away? It would read like a statement of fact: "Believers in Christ DON'T SHOW FAVORITISM.
 - What can you and I do THIS WEEK/TODAY to remove the comma from that sentence and make it a FACT?

Next week: What good is it if you have FAITH but NO DEEDS?