

“Favoritism: The Sin of Kissing Up”

James – Doing Church Right #3

INTRODUCTION

In last week’s study of James chapter 1, James challenged us to take not a glancing look, but a gazing look at ourselves in the light of Scripture. In that chapter he promised that we would be blessed if we do so. This week we will apply that lesson with regard to the practice of favoritism. We will consider our own partiality, in light of God’s standards.

Ice Breaker (Optional):

What sports team would you call your favorite?

Study Questions (45 MIN)

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

Q1. Read James 2:1; Matthew 22:15-16;

If we claim to have faith in Christ, our lives should be a reflection of His character (James 2:1.) What did the Pharisees recognize concerning how Jesus regarded the appearance of others? (Matthew 22:15-16)

EXAMINE THE EVIDENCE

Q2. Read James 2:2-3; 1 Samuel 16:7

James gives an example of showing favoritism based on wealth in James 2:2-3. What are some of the other areas where favoritism is commonly shown? How have you personally experienced favoritism, either positively or negatively? If you are being totally honest, what groups do you tend to show partiality toward? What are some sources of those “voices” that encourage favoritism?

DETERMINE THE CAUSE

Q3. Read James 2:4; Matthew 15:19

In verse 4 James asks if we have made “distinctions¹” among ourselves. This word means to separate, discriminate, or withdraw from. What does James credit as the underlying cause of this judgment? How did Jesus define evil thoughts in Matthew 15:19? How do you believe favoritism (discrimination) is related to the other sins Jesus refers to in this verse?

¹*diakrinō*

FACE THE INCONSISTENCIES

Q4 Read Isaiah 55:8; James 2:5-7; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

God tells us, in Isaiah 55:8, that His ways are not our ways. How does James' example, that we choose to honor the rich over the poor, confirm that our choices lack God's wisdom (James 2:6-7)? How are God's choices in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 counterintuitive to our choices? What connection do you see between pride, or boasting, and our tendency to show favoritism?

CONFESS THE SIN and CHANGE YOUR BEHAVIOR

Q5 Read James 2:8-13; 1 John 1:9; Matthew 5:7, 7:1-2

Partiality is contrary to God's character, it flows from evil thoughts of the heart, it is linked to boasting and it opposes God's ways. What does James call this in James 2:9? Rather than arguing the point, or trying to justify our actions, what should we do about our favoritism (1 John 1:9)? Luckily, James also gives us guidance for proper action regarding how we view and treat others in verses 12 and 13. When rendering an opinion or making a decision about someone, what should we always be willing to extend to them? How do you determine that your opinions are out of line with God?

Wrap-Up

As James observed, we have a human tendency to show favoritism, evaluating others on the basis of appearance, wealth or other factors we consider important. However, favoritism is contrary to God's nature and springs from evil thoughts. We must recognize that favoritism is sin, confess it as such, and choose instead to extend mercy towards others, as God has shown mercy on us. Indeed, mercy triumphs over judgment!

Memory Verse

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.
-James 2:1 NIV

Prayer (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members' needs:

Challenge: Be alert to the voices that prod you toward favoritism this week, and choose to extend mercy instead.

Q1

James 2:1 NIV - 1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

Matthew 22:15-16 ESV - 15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. 16 And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.

Q2

James 2:2-3 NIV - 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old 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,"

1 Samuel 16:7 NIV - 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Q3

James 2:4 ESV - 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Matthew 15:19 ESV - 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Q4

Isaiah 55:8 ESV - 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

James 2:5-7 ESV - 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

