8-14 September 2024 Favouritism forbidden

James2:1-10, (11-13), 14-17

### Favoritism Forbidden

**2**My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. **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,” **4**have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

**5**Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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 dishonored 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 blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

**8**If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%202%3A1-17&version=NIV#fen-NIV-30302a)] you are doing right. **9**But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. **10**For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it…

… **13**because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

### Faith and Deeds

**14**What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? **15**Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. **16**If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? **17**In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

**Bible notes**James continues his moral teaching in the Old Testament wisdom literature tradition. Believing that Jesus is the crucified, resurrected and ascended Lord is the central tenet of the Jewish (and Gentile) Christians. It is what sets them free from the guilt of the Law. Yet James is not convinced that their pattern of behaviour, especially their judgement about others, matches their beliefs. Favouritism is a sin. It’s neither hospitality, respect nor honour. Preferential treatment sets the culture within the assembly; it treats the unjust and their injustices as acceptable and righteous, while treating the poor, who are rich in faith and custodians of the kingdom, with disrespect and disregard. This is the opposite of Christ’s intention.

James’ readers understood the problem with the Law – when one element is broken, the whole system falls down. There is credit for obeying the royal law (as expressed in Mark 12:30-31), but since favouritism and prejudice are sins, they undermine the good deed. The corrosiveness and impact of favouritism and bias make them no lesser sins than adultery and murder. Therefore, they must speak and act as being accountable to God.

These verses are a test of genuine faith. James’ ambition for the Church is to see tangible evidence of God working through the believer and with the poor. Therefore, he challenges Paul’s counsel (Galatians 3:1-9). Faith without works achieves nothing, it is dead. If we believe in Christ, we must show it through our lives.

### ****Reflection****

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

‘We welcome all’. It’s easy to say but do we really? James’ teaching is a judgement call on all who show favouritism within the Christian community. God’s kingdom is for all peoples. Are there people we knowingly exclude or have we become a clique? What barriers to others do we create as a Christian community? Consider physical obstacles, actions, language, the structure and tradition of worship. Encourage the congregation to put themselves in the shoes of others. What would they see and feel if they were walking into church for the first time today? What barriers would they face? What would make the church more welcoming?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What kinds of people do you tend to ignore?
* Is your head ever turned by riches or beauty?
* What one thing could you do today to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

Generous God, thank you for the blessings of each day,  
for friends and neighbours, work and leisure, nature and beauty.  
Merciful God, thank you that you set prisoners free and bring  
about justice for the oppressed.   
You watch over strangers and uphold the vulnerable.   
All praise to your glorious name.   
**Amen.**

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

Let us go and share God’s love  
in the care of our neighbours,   
building up community (place one fist on top of the other)   
in the words we speak,  
building up new friendships (swap fists)  
by showing care,  
building up God’s kingdom here on earth. (move your arms round in a circle)   
**Amen.**