

My 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," 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," also said, "Do not murder." 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! (NIV84)

Theme: Show Favor to All

1. God showed no favoritism.
2. God showed mercy.

Lately, Noah has been asking the same type of question over and over again. "What's your favorite color? What's your favorite food? What's your favorite animal?" You get the picture. It's natural for us to have favorites—in pretty much everything. But at times playing favorites isn't a good thing. We have the tendency to show favor to someone because of their money or power. We may tend to favor the one who can somehow benefit us down the line.

Today God warns us against showing favoritism based on social status, power, fame, or wealth. Instead God wants us to show favor to all people. For he showed no favoritism and he showed mercy to us.

James wrote this letter to Jewish Christians who were spread throughout the world. As the leader of the Church in Jerusalem, he knew these people well. And he knew their sins. One sin that particularly tempted these Jewish Christians was the sin of favoritism. James brought up a common situation. When visitors came to them, whether it was for a worship service at one of their synagogues or for some other reason, they often showed partiality to the rich. They would bend over backwards for someone who had fancy clothes or gold jewelry. They would give them the best seats in the house. And that would have been fine by itself. It would have been great if they showed that much hospitality to everyone.

But they didn't. They treated the poor in the exact opposite manner. They didn't have nice clothes or fine jewelry. They didn't have a lot of money. They probably smelled bad, and didn't have the best manners. And so the Jewish Christians didn't want to associate with them. They treated them like dirt. They would give the rich the best seats while to the poor they might say, **You stand there Or, Sit on the floor by my feet.**

Despicable, right? But don't we do the same thing at times? Now, it's not a sin to be friends with those you get along with, or to hang out with those who share your same interests. But that doesn't give us an excuse to treat some better than others. But whether we try to or not, that is what we sometimes do. You're willing to do a favor for those you like—you'll often bend over backwards for some people. But for others, you don't even want to lift a finger. You look forward to seeing some at church or some other place and you go over and talk to them. But at others you roll your eyes and try to avoid them, or get out of the conversation as soon as possible.

Often our favoritism isn't just based on likes and interests. At times it's based on social status. This person has a lot of money. He dresses nice, has good manners, and is a pleasure to talk to. But not him. His house is a mess, he drives a beater, he smells funny. We think that our lives will be better if we associate with some over others. We may

choose our friends based on social status and how much money we have. You think that you are too good for them. You simply cannot lower yourself and associate with those type of people. Often you don't want anything to do with those who bring you down. If they can't benefit you, you just blow them off or mistreat them.

We often do the same thing that the Jews were doing at James' time. And James gave them a number of reasons not to show favoritism. **Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?** In a little bit of irony, the Jewish Christians were treating the poor the way they were being treated by others. Apparently some of the rich people around them were abusing them. They were taking them to court. I'm sure the Jewish Christians didn't like being mistreated by the rich. But then they were turning around and doing the same thing to the poor. It's like when your bigger brother picked on you when you were younger—you hated it. But then what did you do—you went and picked on someone smaller than you. In the same way when we show favoritism we are sinning against others the way others have sinned against us.

Favoritism also goes against the golden rule recorded in Leviticus 19:18. **Love your neighbor as yourself.** This is a summary of the second table of the 10 commandments. If we would always love our neighbor we would never steal from them, sleep with them outside of marriage, or think evil thoughts about them. If we would always love our neighbor we would never show favoritism. We would never choose someone at the expense of another. Rather we would befriend all. We would be kind to everyone regardless of wealth, social status, or common interests. But we often fail to treat others how we want to be treated. We fail to love them as ourselves.

And so we deserve to be punished. The rich people who took the Jewish Christians to court blasphemed or mocked Christ. For they were doing harm to his children. And at times so do we by playing favorites. We may tell ourselves that we do a pretty good job of not playing favorites. And perhaps you are. But what if you fail—just once? **Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.** And if we are guilty of breaking the law we deserve to be punished. God said so in verse 13, **judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.**

When we show favoritism God's wrath and punishment will come upon us. And we will deserve to die for our sins.

We may show favoritism, but God doesn't. As James asked in verse 5, **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?** God chose you to be his own. He chose you to be saved over many others. Why? It's not because you are cool, or smart, or rich. It's not because you do good things, because you are generally a good person, or even because he knew you would believe. You were dead in your transgressions in sins. You were born as enemies of God, hostile to him and his Word. Yet God chose you. You are poor, weak, and dumb in the eyes of the world. Yet God did not play favorites, or choose the best—he chose you. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians, **God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are.**

God even chose you over his Son. Well, God chose his Son for you. God chose his Son to die for you. God sent his one and only Son to become guilty of all our wicked acts. Jesus became guilty of every time we favored someone at the expense of someone else. God said judgment would come upon those who didn't show mercy. And since Jesus took our sin upon himself God punished him. God chose to forsake his son. So Jesus suffered through hell so we wouldn't have to be punished. And Christ gave us his holy life. So that we may live with him in heaven forever. Because of Christ we will inherit eternal life. We have been given the free gift of heaven.

What is the major motivation for not showing favoritism? God didn't show favoritism when it came to us. But he sent his son to suffer and die for his enemies. But God didn't just not show favoritism. He also showed us mercy.

Our text ends with some of the most comforting words of this letter. **Mercy triumphs over judgment.** We pass judgment on others. From time to time, we must admit, that we do judge others based on their wealth, social status, and so on. We do play favorites. And so we deserve God's wrath and punishment. We deserve to have the hammer

of his law come down heavy upon us. So we close our eyes and wait. But it never comes. The hammer never hits. God's mercy falls instead. **Mercy triumphs over judgment.**

God has mercy on those who believe. He has compassion and pity on us sinners. In pity for us helpless sinners facing judgment, our sins are paid for and removed. He has compassion on us who cannot save ourselves. For he did not count our sins against us. He didn't treat us as we deserved. He didn't do to us as we often do to him. He took away what we couldn't have. And he gave us what we needed to have. Those who show mercy to others through faith in Christ have mercy shown to them by Christ. Life in heaven is now ours. And there people from all nations, from all walks of life, the rich the poor, the young the old, the popular and the no so popular, will live forever.

We learn all of this through his Word. Through the law and the gospel we see who we are and what God has done for us. We see how poor and wretched we are. And how gracious God is to us. God's mercy is our motivation. It is why we show mercy on others and refuse to show favoritism. Through the Word, which is at times, simply referred to as the law, we have freedom. That is why James can say in verse 12, **Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.**

So let us refuse to show favoritism. As Christians, we don't choose the rich, the powerful, and the popular over those that aren't. We have mercy and love for all. It may hurt our own reputation. We may not be "in" with the cool crowd. It's humbling. And we may face some reproductions. But it's what we as Christians do. For it is what God did for us.

And God promises us eternal life. As he says in our gospel, **everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.** We make ourselves low. We humble ourselves and treat everyone equally. Mercy comes to all. And God will have mercy on us. He will exalt the humble in faith. He will lift us up and give us glory. For those who have mercy on others through faith in Christ will have Christ's mercy rest upon them. And they will enjoy the glories of heaven forever.

It's natural for us to have favorites—favorite color, food, animal and so on. But don't be tempted to play favorites with people at the

expense of others. God didn't. He chose his enemies and sent his Son to suffer and die. We show mercy to others since God showed mercy to us. And in the end we'll inherit the kingdom of heaven that has been promised to us. Amen.