

Favouritism Forbidden

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[0 : 00] Alright, I'm going to read from James chapter 2. We're going to read verses 1 through 13. My brothers show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place while you say to the poor man, you stand over there or sit down at my feet. Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

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? But you have dishonored the poor man.

Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you're doing well.

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

[1 : 26] For he who said, do not commit adultery also said, do not murder. If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

This is the word of the Lord. Now, James is doing what he does best. He's not menacing words.

James is an abstract. James is practical.

And so he's just getting straight to the point. He says, do you really love your neighbor as yourself? Or are you a hearer of the word but not a doer?

So he makes us ask ourselves, what sort of people do we spend our resources on? We all tend to invest our time, our money, our emotional energy on some people and not on others. And frankly, we can be a bit mercenary about it.

Now, I sat down earlier today and prayerfully made a list of all the ways that I could think of that I show partiality to people in my life.

[2 : 46] It was not a pretty sight. I didn't realize how deep that problem went in my own heart. It's not something you think of that often, is it partiality?

So, you know, we may not obviously mock the poor and honor the rich, but at the heart level, we're all indicted by this passage. And so one of us measures up to God's amazing standard of love and mercy.

So we're a bit mercenary. We invest in people who can do something for us, right? Some people make us feel important. So if you were to go to say Tim Keller's church in Manhattan when he was the preacher there, after the service, you'd probably see a line of people waiting, hoping to meet Tim Keller.

Why? Because we feel important when we're associated with important people. We like to get in the right social spheres, so we feel good about ourselves.

That's just one example. We tend to invest in people who can do something for us, and that's called showing partiality. James is telling us that showing partiality is being a hearer only and not a doer of the word.

[4 : 07] So let's look at James 2, the first verse, verse 1. This is the thesis statement of this section of the book of James. My brothers show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

So the thesis is that faith is incompatible with partiality. You can't have both. Now, if you replace the word partiality with the word sin, then we start to get it, don't we?

My brothers do not sin as you hold faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We say, well, of course, yeah, people of faith shouldn't be marked by sin. That makes sense to us. We think of the obvious sins like adultery, murder, theft, sexual immorality, and we would say, yeah, of course.

But partiality kind of slips in under the radar in our lives. You know, it's not in the Ten Commandments necessarily. It's not something that we are constantly talking about or thinking about.

But James is showing us that Jesus is actually really concerned with the sin of partiality. To Jesus, it's a really big deal. So put it another way. If we have faith in Jesus, then we have to have open doors and open hearts, not just to the people who are popular, respectable, easy to love, but to the unpopular, the lowly, and the poor.

[5 : 38] We cannot have faith in one hand and partiality in the other. So we have to ask ourselves, and this is kind of the question we're going to hover around tonight, how can we become, how can we, like this group, St. Columbus, become the kind of community that shows God's love and mercy to the unpopular, to the lowly, and to the frankly difficult to love.

And our hearts go from mercenary to merciful. So to answer that question, we're going to walk through just the logic of this chapter of James with four whys and one how.

Okay, four whys, one how. The first why, we must not show partiality because God does not show partiality.

And the chapter of chapter 10 verses 17 to 18 says, for the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.

He executes justice for the fatherless in the widow and loves the sojourner giving him food and clothing. That's what God's like. So that's what we should be like. It's simple, isn't it? The law is meant to conform us to the image of God, the law of God reflects the character of God and it's so that we can start to look like God and show the world what God is like.

[7 : 14] A community that lives according to the law of liberty is a powerful force for evangelism. In the early church, it was the unwavering commitment to Christ like generosity in the face of persecution that made the church grow so rapidly and made it so unbelievable to the surrounding communities.

So that's the first why. The second why we must not show partiality because it is God's wisdom to honor and lift the lonely and the poor.

It's God's wisdom. Look at verse five, James two five. 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 those who love him.

That's the wisdom of God. James is thinking about. He's meditating on and really teaching from the sermon on the mount. So when Jesus sat down Matthew five, what did he say, what were his first words out of his mouth?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, not blessed are the rich and advantageous. Not, you know, blessed are the proud or the hotty blessed are the poor in spirit. That's the wisdom of God.

[8 : 36] Jesus taught a lot about the dangers of wealth. Didn't he. Look, well in three of the Gospels, a man comes up to Jesus and says how must, what must they do to be saved and Jesus says, well, you know, follow the law and he goes, okay, I've done that what what now.

And Jesus says, sell everything you have and give it to the poor. And it says the man went away, sad, for he was extremely rich. Why is it so hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Because they have no sense of their need. It's our own sense of need that drives us to accept charity. Isn't it.

So we can only accept God's charity of salvation in Jesus, if we know our own need our own poverty. So that leads us to the third why.

The third why is we must not show partiality, because we are poor and lonely. In James two five what we just saw is that God chose the poor to be rich in faith.

[9 : 50] Then in James two seven he says that the rich are the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called. You see that God chose the poor and God chose you. What does that make you God's eyes we are poor.

We have no riches to make ourselves valuable, useful or advantageous to God. He chose us when we had nothing to offer him.

Let's go back to Deuteronomy 10 for just a minute we read verses 17 and 18. Now I'm going to add on verse 19. The God of gods and Lord of lords the great, the mighty and the awesome God who is not partial and takes no bribe.

He executes justice for the fatherless in the widow and loves the sojourner giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

We see ourselves with God's eyes will understand that we have no right at all to mistreat or look down on anyone because we're just like them.

[11 : 05] Excuse me. So that's the first three wise right because God shows no partiality. God's wisdom is to lift the lowly and because we are poor and lowly.

The fourth why we must not show partiality because Jesus not only loved the poor. He became poor. Now follow me on this one.

James two one. There's a little word that's really important. My brother is shown a partiality as you hold the faith and our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Jesus is the Lord of glory capital G glory. God's glory. What is the glory of God.

Now remember in Exodus 34. This is one of the most important passages in all of the Bible, Exodus 34. Moses says to God, show me your glory. And God says, I will make all my goodness pass before you and he proclaimed his name.

[12 : 11] He said, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding instead fast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.

How is that possible. How can God on the one hand forgive all sin. And on the other hand, clear the guilty, or not never clear the guilty I mean right how can he clear the guilty of all sin and not clear the guilty how is that possible.

That is the crux of the glory of God. That was when Moses had shown your glory. That's what God showed him. That's Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus Christ made to be sin so that we could be the righteousness of God. That's the glory of God. That's how God can forgive sin without clearing the guilty. Jesus made a way for God as Paul says to be just and justifier.

In other words, In that one little word glory. We have the amazing fact that Jesus, the most important, important, marvelous person in the universe came down so that he could lift us up.

[13 : 39] His poverty made us rich in faith in poor so that we could inherit the Kingdom of God. That's the glory.

So those are the four how's. There's really only one why. No, that is the four why's there's really only one how you follow George gets it.

The how is gospel transformation. The gospel transformation is the way that this can actually happen in people like us who can make lists of all the ways that we show partiality and don't measure up to God's standard of love and mercy.

When we hear the gospel with the ears of faith. It transforms our hearts to do or to live out the gospel by giving us a new heart with new desires. By the way, that renewal of the heart is not a one time thing that happens when you become a Christian.

It renews our heart constantly. When we ask him to when we approach him in prayer when we fellowship together around the word of God. That is the means we call them the means of grace and the grace is that heart renewal.

[15 : 02] It's gospel transformation. The James calls this the law of liberty did you catch that this is the law is not the thing that makes us free. The laws for people who are free.

It's for people who've been freed in other words, we do the word we do the law we love our neighbor as ourselves not because we have to. But now because we want to we've been given new desires renewed by God.

Hearing the gospel with faith is what transforms us from mercenary to merciful. Instead of approaching people as means to an end, which is what we all do sometimes as you know a way of networking or getting ahead and you know getting social status.

Now we can have an approach to people shaped by gratitude to God for seeing and loving us in our low state. We can offer him. And we can have an approach to people shaped by the joy of

participating with Jesus and showing love and mercy to people just like us.

We need Jesus to transform our hearts from mercenary to merciful that's the only way we're going to become that kind of community. The transformation is the gift of Jesus through the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit makes the gospel real to our hearts, makes the gospel beautiful to our hearts.

[16:38] And the Holy Spirit brings us face to face with the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That's what he does. Think of Moses when Moses came face to face with the glory of God on Mount Sinai. What happened to him.

He glowed. He was radiant because when we really see God's glory, it changes us. We actually begin to reflect it.

Let's think about a couple new Testament examples. Think about Peter. Now, before the resurrection of Jesus, Peter was kind of full of hot air and he was a coward.

And he said, no, I'll never deny you Jesus. I will go with you even to death. And then he denied him three times. What could transform that kind of man.

He was a bold leader of the church performing miracles by the power of the spirit, carrying on the mission to the Gentiles. When Peter was martyred for the faith, history tells us that he was crucified upside down, because he asked to not, he didn't think he was worthy to die in the same way as his Lord.

[17:57] What could account for that kind of transformation in a person. He was the author of the book of James. The author of this letter is Jesus's half brother. He grew up with Jesus. And James was probably one of the strongest skeptics.

He didn't just naturally go, yeah, my big brother is totally the Messiah. He didn't jump on board. He was cynical. He didn't even have an account for the kind of transformation in the life of James that would take him from being a skeptic to being the leader of the church in Jerusalem and the chief voice among the apostles at the Council of the church in acts 15.

Peter and James were transformed deeply. When they encountered the glory of God in the risen Jesus.

When we encounter the risen Christ, we will be changed. We must be here as endures of the word. But as we hear and as we do it's God himself by his spirit who's opening our deaf ears and changing our hearts so that we can obey with joy.

We come back to our opening question then. How can we become the kind of community? How can I become the kind of person that shows God's love and mercy to the unpopular, the lowly and the difficult by hearing and doing and asking God as we do to give us new hearts and new desires so that we can obey with joy. And listen, when we ask God for that, he is no miser.

[19:45] God is generous and gives wisdom like that to all who ask without reproach. Remember that's James one. In other words, if you confess to God and say, Lord, I've been mercenary and how I deal with people, I've been self serving, and I'm sorry, will you help me?

God's not going to say, shame on you. I'm so fed up with you. That is not God's reproach. God gives wisdom generously to all who ask without reproach. So he'll say something more like, I love that you want to honor me and honor people like that. And of course I'm going to help you.

Let's go. Amen.