

Faith Without Favoritism

By David Feddes

We continue our study of the book of James, and we're now in the first half of chapter 2. Our theme is faith without favoritism.

James writes, “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, 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 prepared for those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are not they the ones who are dragging you into court? Are not they the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For 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. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the perfect law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:1-13).

James is practical. James deals with real life. So he begins by talking about what happens when you have a visitor at your gathering—what happens when you have a visitor at church. If one of them is dressed well, has a gold ring, fine clothes, maybe a very expensive watch, and he looks great and looks important, and somebody else comes in and he doesn’t look so great and isn’t so well dressed, what are you going to do? If you’re fawning all over the person who looks rich and important and if you’re shoving the poor guy over to the side, says James, then you are committing a very serious sin. If you go by appearances and if you go by wealth, you’re playing favorites.

The phrase “don’t show favoritism” literally means “don’t go by the face.” Don’t just look at the surface. Favoritism, of course, is treating one person as more valuable or more important than another, and James says don’t do it. You have a visitor to your assembly, to your gathering. The original word is synagogue—the word for a gathering of worshipers. Sometimes it was a worship gathering, sometimes it was a gathering of the assembly to decide on a legal matter. If you were deciding on a legal matter and you favored the rich person in your judgment, that was a terrible form of discrimination. But here he’s probably referring to visitors to their gathering for worship.

Even then, if you’re telling one guy to sit on the floor and another, “Here’s the best seat in the house,” just based on how they look, that is a very serious problem. Favoritism has a lot of different flavors. Sometimes we look at clothes. We look at jewelry—rings, watches, various kinds of jewelry. We go over how they look by their grooming, by whether someone is handsome or beautiful, and that’s how we relate to them. We relate to people on the basis of their

social class—how rich they are, how important they are, how much clout they have, how much good they might be able to do us if we cozy up to them.

We sometimes look at their ability in this or that area—how much success they’ve had, what their status is, whether they’re popular, whether they’re the kind of people everybody wants to be like. Another kind of favoritism or discrimination is looking at a person’s color or their racial background, or what kind of neighborhood they come from, and making your judgments based on that. Every form of favoritism is a way of judging—and a wrong way of judging. James says don’t do it.

In particular, he says don’t do it because it doesn’t fit together with faith in Jesus Christ. Chapter 2 verse 1 literally says, “My brothers, not in favoritism have faith in Jesus Christ our Lord of glory.” If you’re having faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, then it doesn’t belong together with this kind of favoritism. He addresses his listeners, his readers, as brothers and sisters—“my brothers.” We’re family in Christ. Act like it.

We belong to Jesus Christ, our Lord of glory. We have faith in him. And who was he? When he was on earth, he was a poor, despised peasant, and yet he’s the one who is the Lord of glory—the one who came from heaven to earth, sent from the Father, the Father’s only Son, radiant with the glory of the Father. And he showed up as a baby in a manger. He lived in poverty, and if you judged him just by what you looked at, you might not be impressed. So James says, think of yourselves as family in Christ and remember who the Lord of glory is and what he looked like when he came to earth.

Jesus often called his disciples brothers. Sometimes they would bicker over who was going to be the most important or who should get the most favors, and Jesus said don’t be like the people in society who like the feeling of looking down on others or like to judge people or like to have big titles for themselves. You’re all brothers. The greatest among you will be your servant.

Jesus says that at the final judgment he’s going to say to people that they will either inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world or be sent away into eternal fire based on what they did for one of the least of the brothers. He says, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). Jesus said, “When you have a banquet or a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:13). Treat them as family. Treat them as brothers.

So when James again and again says “my brothers” or “my dear brothers,” he’s echoing his half-brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, and including all who belong to God as brothers. When he says that this kind of favoritism is a danger to God’s people, he says it’s totally out of line with faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Lord of glory

When Jesus came to earth, he was seen as a bastard—a child of sinful parents who had committed fornication. He spent time as a refugee in a foreign land when his family had to flee to Egypt to escape a murderous king. He grew up in a poor family, a peasant family. Jesus was

nothing special to look at. Sometimes the artists portray him to look like a movie star, but the Bible itself says that he had “nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). He was not taught by certified teachers. When he spoke, some of his opponents said, “Where did this man get this wisdom? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son?” (Mark 6:2-3).

His hometown of Nazareth was viewed as a filthy hole. It was said, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46). That’s how Jesus appeared. So if you judged by surface appearance—if you went by favoritism—you’d go down the list and, on one thing after another, say, loser, loser, loser, loser, loser. And this “loser” was the Lord of glory. This “loser” was the one who had all of God’s fullness dwelling in him, but you wouldn’t guess it if you were someone who liked to show favoritism.

We read in Scripture, “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:17-18). This has always been God’s character. He is great and glorious, and the lowliest people are those he cares very much about.

God does not show favoritism. Peter said that when he was crossing racial boundaries to spend time with Cornelius and lead this man of another nationality to the Lord. Peter said, “God does not show favoritism” (Acts 10:34). Paul wrote, “God does not show favoritism” (Romans 2:11). Paul later wrote, “There is no favoritism with him” (Ephesians 6:9). He also said, “Do nothing out of favoritism” (1 Timothy 5:21). James says, “Do not show favoritism” (James 2:1). Are you beginning to get the message that God does not like favoritism one bit?

Favoritism’s flaws

- Wavers between Jesus and world
- Insults God’s chosen heirs
- Panders to power of bullies
- Breaks God’s royal law of love

We’ve seen some of the flavors of favoritism and God’s opposition to it. What are some of the really serious flaws of favoritism that James talks about? He says don’t do it. He gives the example of the rich man with the gold ring and fine clothes and a poor man in shabby clothes, and then he goes on to explain that there are several problems with favoritism. One is that it wavers between Jesus and the world. Another is that it insults God’s chosen heirs. Another is that it panders to bullies. And finally, it breaks God’s royal law of love. Let’s explore each of those in more detail.

Worldly wavering

James says, “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism” (James 2:1). Then he says, “Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (James 2:4). The Greek word translated “discriminated” is *diakrithēte*,

which can mean “wavered” or “doubted.” It’s the same word James used in chapter 1 when he said that when you pray for wisdom, you must believe and not doubt. And we saw that “not doubt” often means not being double-minded. It’s not just having weak faith; it’s having two different minds, wavering between two different things.

That’s the problem with favoritism: you’re wavering between who Jesus is and what the world values. You’re wavering between faith in the Lord of glory and becoming a judge with evil thoughts. If Jesus, the Lord of glory, came in such humble form, and you look at humble people and write them off, you’re torn between worldly thinking and thinking in tune with Jesus. You’re double-minded. You’re torn between Jesus’ way and worldly ways.

And by the way, you’re also failing three tests of religion that James gave at the end of chapter 1. One is that you must manage your tongue. Yet you say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit by my feet.” You’re not speaking with the respect you ought to be showing him. Another test is that you act rightly. James gave two examples of acting rightly: you help the helpless—you’re kind to the widow and the fatherless—and you keep yourself from being polluted by the world.

When you treat the poor man in shabby clothes as though he doesn’t count, you’re not helping the helpless. You’re not showing compassion. You’re thinking in very worldly ways—going by the quality of someone’s watch, their fine clothes, their color, or the neighborhood they came from. Whatever flavor of favoritism you use, you’re not rejecting the world’s values. So James says that true religion is to help the helpless and to reject worldly ways. False religion is when you can’t manage your tongue and when you show favoritism. When you talk and act this way, you’re wavering badly between the faith you profess in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ and the way you treat the people whom Jesus calls his brothers.

Insulting God’s heirs

You’re also insulting God’s heirs—that’s the second problem with showing favoritism. Besides wavering between the way of Jesus and the way of the world, you’re insulting those whom God treasures. James says, “Listen, 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? But you have insulted the poor” (James 2:5-6).

The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28, “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But 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 chose the lowly things—that’s what Paul says. And James says the very same thing: God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom.

Jesus himself, when he gave his first sermon in his hometown, said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18, quoting Isaiah

61:1). Jesus said, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied” (Luke 6:20-21).

Jesus announces blessings on the poor. He preaches good news to the poor. When his followers treat the poor as though Jesus doesn’t bless them, as though Jesus doesn’t have good news for them, and instead show favoritism, that is totally at odds with our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. It ignores who he chose to bless. Yes, he chose some rich people too—but when we treat the rich or the important as though they are superior, we are out of line with Jesus’ way of thinking.

God is devoted to the poor. He chose the poor. He made them his children. He made them heirs of his kingdom. He’s devoted to them. And not only that, James says, they are devoted to God. God chose them to be rich in faith, and they love him. Now, do you want to mistreat people whom God chose—people who are rich in faith and who love him? If you do that, you’re insulting them and insulting the God who loves them, and the God whom they love.

So favoritism has some serious flaws. It wavers between Jesus and the world. It insults God’s chosen heirs. And it’s just plain foolish—it panders to bullies.

Pandering to power

- Why flatter and favor snotty snobs who rip you off?
- Why side with bullies who rig the system against you?
- Why admire and envy those who mock and curse Christ?

James says, “Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?” (James 2:6-7).

James can’t believe they’re being so foolish. If you’re going to favor anybody, why favor the very people who seem to be doing you the most harm? Under Roman law, the rich and important were literally favored by the legal system. People of a lower class could not bring accusations against people of higher class. If two people committed the same kind of crime, but one was from the upper class and the other from a lower class, there was a much harsher penalty for the lower-class person. This wasn’t just a matter of having a better lawyer; it was officially part of the law that the more important people got better treatment.

In Jewish culture, which claimed to be following God’s law, they didn’t have that kind of official legal favoritism between rich and poor, but unofficially, very often, those who had the best lawyers and the greatest wealth were the ones who won cases. They were the ones ripping others off, taking advantage of the poor in court who couldn’t afford good lawyers. Both big-shot Roman officials and big-shot Jewish officials slandered the name of Jesus Christ. They spoke against him and against his followers.

James says, what are you doing if you have a visitor who comes in and the first thing you do is favor the richest one? Why? The rich people, overall, haven’t been your best buddies. You shouldn’t discriminate against them, but you certainly shouldn’t discriminate in favor of them.

Why would you flatter and favor snotty snobs who rip you off? They're the ones exploiting you. They're the ones dragging you into court. So why side with bullies who rig the system against you? Why admire and envy those who mock and curse Christ even now?

You don't even have to be part of that kind of society or be a grown-up to fall into this trap. It's very common among kids and teenagers to favor those who can afford the more expensive clothes—those who dress with brand names instead of “no names.” Why do you do that? Are those popular kids wearing pricey clothes so much kinder and better? Very often, they're meaner, nastier. The popular hotshot is the very one who sometimes makes your life miserable. If you would refuse to discriminate and actually befriend people who don't have such a high opinion of themselves, you might have closer friendships.

At any rate, there's something kind of pathetic about pandering to power—about kissing up to the very people who are most likely to be harming you, and if you're a Christian, the very people who are most likely to be opposing the Lord Jesus Christ. The elites, the wealthy, those who are great in the eyes of the world—now, that doesn't mean you should hate them. But please, please, please stop kissing up. Stop thinking that the one who's most popular is the one you have to treat with more respect than the one who's less popular.

Favoritism wavers between Jesus and the world. It insults God's chosen heirs. It panders to the power of bullies. And it breaks God's royal law of love.

Breaking God's law

“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers” (James 2:8-9). You're going against the divine law—the law of God himself—when you fail to love your neighbor as yourself and instead show favoritism.

“Love your neighbor as yourself”—where does that come from? It comes from Leviticus 19:18. But let's look at a couple of verses earlier: “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:15,18). So the very passage that gives that great command, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” also says, “Don't show favoritism either to the poor or to the great.” Be fair.

Jesus told the story of a man who was traveling down the road between Jerusalem and Jericho and was mugged and beaten terribly. They stripped him of his clothes, took all his money, and left him for dead. Then along came a very religious person, a priest. He went to the other side of the road and ignored him. Along came another, a Levite—someone who had important duties at the temple—and he too passed by on the other side.

But then along came a Samaritan. Samaritans and Jews were sharply separated and did not think highly of each other. They favored their own kind and avoided the others. Yet the Samaritan stopped. He helped the man who had been beaten up. Then, Jesus says, he took him to an inn and paid money so the man, who had no money because it had been stolen, could be taken care of.

When Jesus told this story, he was answering the question, “Who is my neighbor?” because someone had come to him after he said, “Love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself,” and the man wanted to wriggle out of it. So he said, “Who is my neighbor?” He was a person who preferred to show favoritism and ignore certain kinds of people.

Jesus told a story in which the very kind of person that man hated—a Samaritan—turned out to be the good guy, the one who showed mercy and helped someone who was in deep trouble, even though that person was from a group he didn’t get along with. The good Samaritan did not show favoritism; he showed mercy and kindness. Jesus said, that’s how you love your neighbor. That’s how you keep the royal law that gives freedom.

James goes on: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For 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” (James 2:10-11). James is saying that the law is one. There aren’t commandments that don’t matter and others that matter a lot, so that if you’re keeping the one that matters most, it doesn’t matter if you neglect another.

He’s dealing with people who needed to understand that principle. Some of them may literally have been thinking this way. They put more emphasis on “Do not commit adultery” than “Do not murder.” There was rivalry between rich and poor. The rich often had legal advantages. In Judea, where Jesus lived, and where James was living when he wrote this letter and led the Jerusalem church, there was a lot of social unrest. That unrest would eventually lead to a full-blown revolution a few decades later.

There were rich people who not only had advantages in court but also rented land to others, and when they got into disputes, the rich sometimes had hit squads who went out and killed tenants who weren’t good in their eyes. The poor sometimes returned the favor, hiring assassins to kill rich aristocrats. Eventually, it blew up into a huge revolt—a revolt against the Romans but also against the Jewish people of power who were in league with the Romans—and many were massacred.

Now James is saying, you’re a lawbreaker if you stumble at just one point. Some of the poor people, very devout in some areas, would have thought it terrible to commit adultery but not thought much of slipping a knife between the ribs of one of those rich people. It was okay to assassinate someone, but not to commit adultery. And some of the rich men with their hit squads were the same way. They were doing “business,” but would have thought it terrible to commit adultery.

You could have people literally committing murder who prided themselves on being law-keeping people. Remember when Jesus himself was on trial? The people accusing him—those about to murder him—wouldn’t go into Pilate’s court because they wanted to keep the law. They wanted to eat the Passover that day and couldn’t enter the court of a Gentile without becoming unclean. So that day, they committed murder but stayed “pure” by keeping another law.

The law comes from God, the great divine Lawgiver. If you break one command, you've rebelled against him. That's a very serious matter. James is saying, if you think racial discrimination is no big deal, if you think looking down on the poor is no big deal, if you think neglecting the disabled is no big deal—just remember this: if you break one command, you've broken them all. And by the way, that's why Jesus had to die for everybody—those who broke this command or that one, those who broke many or few.

We sometimes comfort ourselves by saying, “Well, at least I don't do that, and I don't do that. Nobody's perfect, of course, but at least I'm not doing the really bad things.”

Mercy or judgment?

James says if you stumble at one point and break the law, then you've broken the whole thing, and you have rebelled against the Lawgiver. You need mercy—really, really badly. And so he continues, “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:12-13).

When you act on a policy of mercy, you don't judge based on appearances. You don't discriminate. You don't show favoritism. You show mercy, as that Samaritan showed mercy simply because somebody needed it. Love is labor, and your neighbor is anybody who needs your love. So, speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. When people need our help, we need to show mercy to them.

Of course, there's another level at which we need to show mercy as well as receive mercy. We need to be forgiving, and we need to forgive. What do we want—do we want judgment to be the main thing? That's what favoritism does. Or do we want mercy to be the main thing—where you show kindness and where you extend forgiveness?

Again, Jesus himself has a story about that. He tells of a man who owed an enormous, enormous amount. The ruler ordered that he be sold into slavery and imprisoned until he could pay it all off—but he could never pay it off; the debt was far too great. The man begged, “Have mercy, and I'll pay it all.” He was never going to pay it all, but the ruler simply wiped the debt out: “I won't punish you. I won't even make you pay anything back.”

Then he left, very grateful, of course—but the moment he left, he found someone who owed him just a little bit. He grabbed him by the throat and said, “Pay me what you owe!” The man pleaded, “Be patient with me, and I'll pay you back.” But he would not show any mercy. He had the man thrown into prison, even though the debt was small.

The ruler found out about it and hauled that man back in again. “I forgave you that huge debt,” he said. “I had mercy on you, but you didn't have any mercy on the one who owed you. You demanded payment and had him thrown into prison. Well then, if you want judgment and not mercy, you've got it. Take him away until he pays every last penny. Hand him over to the torturers.”

That's a scary story for those who want judgment as the standard for dealing with others, because Jesus says you can't have judgment as your standard for others—refusing to show mercy, kindness, and forgiveness—and then expect God to show you mercy. Mercy needs to triumph over judgment.

We sometimes think, “Well, there's law and then there's love.” No, there is the law of love. We sometimes think, “There's law and then there's mercy.” No, there is the law of mercy. In the Bible, God the Lord Almighty says, “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another” (Zechariah 7:9).

Jesus himself spoke of various requirements of the law and said, “You've kept some of the little ones, but you've neglected the more important matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23). So, speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.

James keeps coming back to how we use our mouths—“speak” like someone who's going to be judged by the law that gives freedom and mercy. And “act” like someone who's going to be judged by that same law of freedom and mercy. Your words and your deeds—your speech and your actions—need to have mercy as their dominant power and force, because that's how God deals with you in Jesus Christ when you belong to him by faith.

As James said at the beginning, you can't have favoritism and have Jesus as the Lord of glory at the same time. Mercy has to triumph over judgment. Those are four huge flaws of favoritism: wavering between Jesus and the world, insulting God's chosen heirs, pandering to the power of bullies, and breaking God's royal law of love and mercy.

Liberating law of love

- Birth through the word of truth (1:18)
- Implanted word can save you (1:21)
- Perfect law that gives freedom (1:25)
- Royal law found in Scripture (2:8)
- Law that gives freedom (2:12)

And in all this, hear again how James speaks of God's Word. It's a liberating law of love. Earlier in chapter 1, he says that God gave you birth through the word of truth. He implanted that word in you, and that word saves you. It's the perfect law that gives freedom. It's the royal law—the law of the King—found in Scripture. It is the law that gives freedom, the law of liberty.

The Word of God is so wonderful. It's not a law of legalism or slavery, but a law that liberates and gives freedom. Because God has given that kind of word—because you belong to him, because you put your faith in Jesus—his Word came into your heart and bears fruit. That Word cannot comfortably live side by side with favoritism.

So again, “My brothers, not in favoritism have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.” We're family in Christ; we're brothers and sisters. Act like it. Treat others as family members.

And remember who Jesus is—the one who came poor and despised from the armpit of Israel, Nazareth, in a country under the boot of a foreign oppressor; the one who was himself poor, despised, and rejected of men; and the one who now reigns in glory, so dazzling and brilliant that angels hide their faces in his presence.

If that is who he is—though he lived among us as a despised peasant—imagine who else you might be seeing soon. Are you going to treat with favoritism someone whom God chose to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he prepared for those who love him? Remember that everyone you meet who belongs to the Lord is someone who, if you could see them now as they someday will be, you'd be tempted to fall down and worship them because they, too, will be radiant with the glory of Christ.

Even though that glory is hidden a little bit now—maybe under shabbier clothes, maybe under a handicap, maybe under some limitation—treat them already now as royalty, because God has chosen them as his children, as his heirs. Have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and have that faith without favoritism.

Prayer

Thank you, Father, that you chose people who didn't have anything very impressive, who didn't do great things to earn your favor. But you chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom that you promised to those who love you. And we do love you, Father. We confess that we belong to you. We ask, Father, that you help us to have more and more of the mind of Christ our Savior living in us day by day, controlling all we do and all we say, so that we may speak and act as those who have been saved, who live by the perfect law that gives liberty, who are those in whom mercy triumphs over judgment. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Favoritism's flavors

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- Ability, success, status
- Color, race, neighborhood

Faith without favoritism

My brothers, not in favoritism have faith in Jesus Christ our Lord of glory.

- We're family in Christ. Act like it!
- A poor, despised peasant's divine glory outshines worldly status.

My brothers

You are all brothers... The greatest among you will be your servant. (Matthew 23:8, 11)

Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. (Matthew 25:40)

Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. (Luke 14:13)

Lord of glory?

- Seen as bastard child of sin
- Time as refugee in foreign land
- Grew up in poor peasant family
- Nothing special to look at
- Not taught by certified teachers
- Hometown viewed as filthy hole

Lord of glory

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:17-18)

No favoritism

God does not show favoritism. (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11)

There is no favoritism with him. (Ephesians 6:9)

Do nothing out of favoritism. (1 Timothy 5:21)

Favoritism's flaws

- Wavers between Jesus and world
- Insults God's chosen heirs
- Panders to power of bullies
- Breaks God's royal law of love

Worldly wavering

¹ My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism... ⁴ have you not discriminated [διακρίθητε wavered, doubted] among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Worldly wavering

Double-minded: torn between Jesus' way and worldly way (1:8; 4:4, 8)

Fails three tests of religion (1:26-27)

- Manage your tongue
- Help the helpless
- Reject worldly ways

Insulting God's heirs

⁵ Listen, 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? ⁶ But you have insulted the poor.

Inherit the kingdom

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor... Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. (Luke 4:18; 6:20-21)

Insulting God's heirs

- **God is devoted to them:** he chose the poor and made them his children and heirs of his kingdom.
- **They are devoted to God:** "rich in faith... love him."
- **You insult them—and God!**

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Pandering to power

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 slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

Pandering to power

- Why flatter and favor snotty snobs who rip you off?
- Why side with bullies who rig the system against you?
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- Breaks God's royal law of love

Breaking God's law

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

Love, not favoritism

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly... love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:15, 18)

Lawbreaker

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For 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.

Mercy or judgment?

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

Law of mercy

The LORD Almighty says: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.” (Zechariah 7:9)

But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. (Matthew 23:23)

Mercy triumphs!

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

Favoritism’s flaws

- Wavers between Jesus and world
- Insults God’s chosen heirs
- Panders to power of bullies
- Breaks God’s royal law of love

Liberating law of love

- Birth through the word of truth (1:18)
- Implanted word can save you (1:21)
- Perfect law that gives freedom (1:25)
- Royal law found in Scripture (2:8)
- Law that gives freedom (2:12)

Faith without favoritism

My brothers, not in favoritism have faith in Jesus Christ our Lord of glory.

- We’re family in Christ. Act like it!
- A poor, despised peasant’s divine glory outshines worldly status.