

Sermon or Lesson: James 2:1-3 (NIV based)

[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Favoritism - Contrary To Proper Religious Practice

INTRO: Remember what it was like when your parents showed favoritism to your sibling and not to you. Or your boss has been extending favoritism to one of your co-workers. How does that make you feel, even now perhaps months or years later? Did you spend a lot of sleepless nights futilely trying to figure out why your parents or your boss showed favoritism, why your sibling or co-worker deserved so much preferential treatment and you did not?

Let's study God's Word to see what He has to say about showing favoritism.

READ: James 2:1, with 1:26-27 for context

The author James is addressing his audience here, "My brothers".

[Lesson Question: What type of address is James making to his audience?]

- - With the address of "My brothers", the author James is making: an exhortation to the audience, an appeal to fellow believers like him, and is giving a command from God - for us today.

[Lesson Question: What is the main assertion of this verse in its context?]

SECTION POINT: Because we are true believers in Jesus, we are not to be involved in showing favoritism.

- - The main assertion of this verse in its context is: as fellow true believers in Jesus, whom we hold to be the "glorious" divine "Lord" God and "Christ" the Anointed One, we should not be involved in showing favoritism, which is an example of being polluted by the world (v.1:27) and contrary to the nature, character, and proper religious practice of a true believer (v.1:27).

[Lesson Question: Exactly what is "favoritism"?)

SECTION POINT: Favoritism is giving a person preferential treatment over other people, or disfavor-able preferential treatment under other people.

"favoritism" = Strong's #4382 "respects of persons; partiality", i.e. differential regard and treatment

'favoritism' = (AHD) "A display of partiality toward a favored person or group; the state of being held in special favor"; 'partiality' = (AHD) "Favorable prejudice or bias; a special fondness"

v.2:1 (AMP) = "My brethren, pay no servile regard to people - show no prejudice, no partiality. Do not [attempt to] hold and practice the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ [the Lord] of glory together with -snobbery!"; Note: "Servile" means to be a slave or servant to. (AHD)

- - Favoritism is giving special or preferential attention and/or treatment to someone over and above what everyone else is getting; slang = 'kissing up to'.
 - - Also, favoritism is choosing to make an unwarranted exception to the norm, breaking the rules to make or grant an exception based upon judgment of preference.
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READ: James 2:2-3

[Lesson Question: What is the action that is being taken in the scenario example cited in verses 2-3?]

- - The action that is being taken in the scenario example cited in verses 2-3 is: holding a meeting within which a nicely dressed man is "shown special attention" (v.3) and given honorary verbal and accommodations treatment while a "poor man in shabby clothes" is given dishonorable verbal and accommodations treatment.
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[Lesson Question: How does the action of seating at a meeting play a role in showing favoritism?]

The action of seating at a meeting plays a role in showing favoritism because:

- - the action of seating can reflect or distinguish a recognized position of prominence, or of commonness, or of un-wanted-ness;
 - - and the action of seating can determine comfort level: sitting, in contrast to standing, in contrast to sitting on the floor below others.
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[Lesson Question: How does the verbal interaction in this scenario play a role in showing favoritism?]

The verbal interaction in this scenario plays a role in showing favoritism because:

- - "'Here's a good seat for you'" (v.3) - reflects hospitable welcome, courtesy, and desire in taking initiative to please, to honor, and to make comfortable;
 - - and conversely, "'You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet"' (v.3) reflect superiority ordering, haughtiness, disrespect, rudeness, annoyance, obligated minimal accommodating, and no concern for comfort.
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[Lesson Question: By our nature, how do we tend to think and behave in this kind of scenario?]

SECTION POINT: We naturally tend to judge people and their character by how they look.

- - This judgment involves taking a visual measurement, assessing it, and then making a determination based only on that visual data, which is insufficient; this judgment is thereby prone to being faulty and prone to being inappropriately influenced by notions, premises, assumptions, or preconceptions.
- - This insufficiently-derived judgment is then acted upon accordingly.

In modern vernacular, this judgment is in fact 'stereotyping discrimination':

- - We assume a finely clothed man with a gold ring is neat, clean, intelligent, educated, hard-working, disciplined, influential, socially esteemed, resourceful, a good money manager, rich, and generous - all desirable qualities to be acquired.
 - - In a similar way, we assume a shabbily clothed poor man is dirty, unkept, stupid, uneducated, lazy, undisciplined, inconsequential, socially outcast, a poor money manager, perpetually needy, and a beggar - all undesirable qualities to be avoided.
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SECTION POINT: We naturally tend to engage in favoritism both individually on a personal level and corporately as a group.

- - We tend to engage in agreeable favoritism when we perceive the visitor exceeds our expectations and standards for the group's norms.
 - - And conversely, we tend to engage in disagreeable favoritism when we perceive the visitor falls significantly below our expectations and standards for the group's norms.
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BIG IDEA: Showing any favoritism is inappropriate and contrary to proper religious practice of true believers.

APPLICATIONS:

- - Are you aware when you are showing favoritism? Do others around you bring this to your attention but you outright reject and dismiss their concerns? Why?
- - Do you try to rationalize or justify your favoritism attitudes and actions?
- - What are all the areas in which you show favoritism? With your children? With your customers? With your co-workers? With your classmates? With your students? With visitors? In your ministry?
- - What specific steps can you take to terminate your showing favoritism in these areas?
- - Do you now realize and appreciate that God is displeased when you show favoritism? And that God disagrees with your rationalizations and opposes you in this regard?

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