

## Putting Faith to Work: A Series in James “Love Your Neighbors”

(James 2:1-13)

06/28/20 **Main idea:** As true believers, our behavior should reflect what we really believe. We are not to show partiality, but to show love for one another. This is an evidence of true faith.

### Introduction

During the past month, I am sure you, like me, have watched the tragic news out of Minneapolis, where George Floyd was killed through indefensible aggression by a policeman. We have seen racial injustice taking place against African-Americans. As a result, it caused protests on the streets around the globe against discrimination. I was deeply saddened by the injustice and troubled by watching the abuse of authority that was taken. Although there were peaceful protests, I was also appalled by the violence, riots, looting of properties and the senseless murder of police officers that followed. It demonstrated the depravity of man.

Prejudice does not only take place out there, but it also takes place in our own hearts also. What has transpired caused me to examine myself to see how I have shown favoritism to certain people and despised others. What does the Bible has to say about prejudice? Why does it not make any sense to practice prejudices? How are we to treat one another? As a follower of Christ, how do we treat someone that is different from us? How do we view someone that has less education than we do? How do we talk to someone that makes much less money than we do? How do we handle those that have very different thinking from us? What does true faith looks like?

The Book of James’ theme is about “Christian Faith and how it should be lived out.” What does true faith looks like? In chapter 1, we see how true faith is demonstrated in trials with endurance and how true faith handles the Word of God by being a doer. Last week, we learned that fake faith is claiming certain beliefs, but not acting upon it. While true faith backed up their belief by their actions. Immature believers only talk about their belief, but the mature believers live out their belief. James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” Words are cheap, true faith involves doing God’s Word. James saw there was inconsistency among the believers he was writing to. Believers were being influenced by the world. James calls for consistency in living out our faith. In James 2, it shows two ways to live out our faith. First, show no partiality and second, show good deeds. Today, we will look at the first evidence of true faith and next week, we will look at the second evidence of true faith.

James scolded the believers about their inappropriate attitude and action. James was disgusted with the readers’ favoritism or partiality. That was totally incompatible to their faith in Christ. Prejudice has no place in Christianity. Right off the bat, James commanded the believers to show no partiality, but instead to show love to your neighbors. Let us read v.1, “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

### A. Show No Partiality

#### 1. The command to not show partiality (2:1)

James commands us to show no partiality. James was addressing believers. James calls the recipients, “my brothers”. James did not waste any time as he confronted them with their wrongful attitude of partiality. It is inconsistent to their belief as followers of Christ. One cannot hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and at the same time show

partiality. That is totally incompatible. It is like mixing water with oil. In Rom 2:11, it states that “God does not show favoritism. As followers of Christ, we are to emulate God by not showing favoritism also. In other words, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? That does not make sense. Our behavior should coincide with our belief. If it is inconsistent, then it hinders others from wanting to follow Jesus. [James goes on to illustrate by showing an example of how partiality was demonstrated as it is recorded in verses 2-4. “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?” In this example, we see whether the believers really practice what they believe. Is it going to be fake faith or true faith? ]

## 2. The illustration of partiality (2:2-4)

There were two groups of people that came and the usher treated them very differently just based on their external appearance. One person dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry received special treatment by being given a good seat closer to the front where the Law was located. The other person who dressed in shabby clothing was looked down upon because he was poor. He was given two choices: 1) either to stand in the back or 2) sit on the floor. The possible reason why the usher catered to the rich was so that he could get something in return from him. The usher did not show partiality to the poor because the usher did not think he could get anything from the poor person. Various times, we are motivated to be nice out of selfish purpose so that we can get something in return. The way we treat others is a clear demonstration of what we really believe. Too often we tend to stereotype someone from their external appearance. In 1 Sam. 16:7, we are told to not look at the outward appearance, but to look at the heart. When we meet someone for the first time, we tend to judge them on what we see outwardly rather than inwardly. ILLUSTRATION: What brand of clothing he is wearing, what school he attended, what neighborhood he lives in, what area is he studying, what kind of job he has, what position he has and what color is his skin? We base our judgment strictly on external appearance. That is just not right.

We all know that it is improper to show partiality. However, do we really believe that? How do we live out what we believe? Do we claim one thing, but do another? If that is the case, that is fake faith.

ILLUSTRATION: One of the highlights of the year is to participate in the Father/Son Camp. Actually, we alternate one year with the Father/Son Camp and the following year with the Father/Daughter Camp. Since fathers are very busy and they do not in general spend as much time as the mother with the kids, the church has set up this weekend retreat for the dads to spend extended time with their child, who is in middle school. I have the privilege to teach the dads to guide their child before they go off to college. I asked them to identify a list of values that they would like their child to possess when they leave home in 4-6 years. The fathers were able to provide that list pretty quickly. However, when I asked them what they were doing to reinforce those values, many of the fathers had to think twice. It is one thing is to claim what we believe. It is another is to actually practice it. I told the dads that they need to constantly look for opportunity for them to teach and affirm those values. But most important, they must

model it to their child. May we practice what we claim we believe. May our behavior match our belief.

Instead of showing preference, we as believers are to accept others regardless of their status or class or ethnicity or gender. Discrimination shows that one makes judgment on preconceived bias. One has already made a conclusion without knowing all the facts. We already categorized them and decided that they are not worthy of being treated like everyone else. We can discriminate by elevating some group of people as it is seen here or we can discriminate by degrading some group of people. That is just wrong. That demonstrates evil thoughts or evil motives. To elevate certain people based on their status, class, ethnicity or gender in order to get something is wrong. To degrade certain people base on their status, class, ethnicity or gender is wrong. All people are created in the image of God. They are all precious in the sight of God. James condemned prejudice and preferential treatment.

**APPLICATION:** May we examine our hearts to see if there is preferential treatment we give to others that we admire and degraded treatment to those that are very different from us, particularly if they are of different race? As Asians, we sometimes express our superiority over other races because we have better education and jobs. As a result, we put on our self-righteous attitude as we condemn others. We say, "If they work harder, then they can be where we are." We call them names; we avoid them; it is not just about work ethic alone. We need to take time to understand their background more thoroughly and not just make assumptions and judge harshly. The whole issue of racism is complex, but for some of us, it is a blind spot that we cover up. We close our eyes to what is going on out there. We say, "If it does not affect me, I don't need to worry about it." We become passive. James is also talking to us to show no partiality. Partiality is contrary to God's plan and threatens others to following Christ. That is incompatible with our belief.

James goes on in the passage to explain the reasons why partiality is unacceptable in verses 5-11. There are two major reasons: 1) because it is foolish as recorded in vv. 5-7 and the second reason is 2) because it is unlawful as recorded in vv. 8-11. Let us look at the first reason because it is foolish as we read vv. 5-7 first, "Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?"

3. The reasons why partiality is unacceptable (5-11)
  - a. Because it is foolish (2:5-7)

James explained that God has chosen those who are poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom because they love the Lord. One can be poor or rich in this world and still be poor in the next. It all depends on what they do with Christ. God did not choose the poor because they are poor, but because they are poor, they recognize they are powerless and tend to depend more on the Lord. As a result, they choose to love God. It is more difficult for the rich to depend on the Lord because the rich tend to be self-reliant. They are tempted not to trust God. This does not mean that the rich cannot love God and be heirs of the kingdom. God values the poor's attitude toward God. Likewise, we are to value the poor also. However, James is not

suggesting that we reverse discrimination by treating the poor well and the rich poorly. James is teaching that we should remove discrimination all together.

In verse 6, James claims that the believers were discriminating and they were dishonoring the poor. That is foolish. James is basically saying, “When you despise the poor man, you are behaving like the unsaved rich people, who mistreat the poor by exploiting and oppressing them as they drag them to court. These rich people are slandering Jesus. They are the ones who speak evil of that good name which has been given to the believers. The rich are showing favoritism and you should not follow their inappropriate practices. Instead of seeing them as objects that you can manipulate, you are to value them because we are like them, sinners saved by grace.

So the first reason why partiality is unacceptable is because it is foolish. It does not make any sense. The second reason why partiality is unacceptable is because it is unlawful. We will see this in vv.8-11, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are 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 falls in one point has become accountable for all of it. 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.”

b. Because it is unlawful (2:8-11)

According to the royal law, which refers back to Lev. 19:18, we are commanded to “love your neighbor as yourself.” When we do that we are doing well. However, on the other hand, if we show partiality, then we commit sin. It is pretty clear. James used the description “royal law” because Christ is the true king, who established the law. If the readers show favoritism, then they have committed sin against the law. From Lev. 19:15, it warns us against favoritism toward the poor as well as toward the rich. We are to treat our neighbors fairly regardless of their status, ethnicity, religious background, or gender.

**ILLUSTRATION:** About a year ago, a devout Turkish Muslim family moved across the street from me. Sometimes, people stereotype devout Muslim as being militant and violent. I had a choice to discriminate against them and mistreat them or take advantage of the opportunity to love my neighbors. When they were moving in, I went over to introduce myself and helped them moved some of their belongings in. The following week, Ellie baked a cake and we brought it over to welcome them to our neighborhood. Although we have very different religious backgrounds, I felt it was an opportunity to build relationship with them. During Christmas last year, I invited them over to my home.

The Jews had many laws. At times, they justified themselves of keeping the important ones and letting a few go. One might claim that they have never committed murder, adultery or robbery. Therefore, they are okay. However, James makes it clear that violating one command makes a person a lawbreaker. It only takes one sin to make a person a sinner. We would deceive ourselves if we think our obedience to God’s command can compensate for the acts of disobedience.

## B. Show Love to Our Neighbor (2:12-13)

Instead of showing preference, we are to show love to our neighbors, which is the royal law as stated in vv.8-9. James appeals to the readers to follow the royal law by loving and caring for their neighbors. They need to practice what they claim to believe. Faith and obedience goes hand in hand. True faith must be demonstrated in action.

To love your neighbor as yourself is an Old Testament command. The Jews were commanded to love their neighbors, which refers to loving other Jews. Surely, they despise Gentiles. However, Jesus gave it new meaning by broadening the meaning of neighbor to include even enemies or those that are different from us. We are to show love to our neighbor. Favoritism is sin and it is not keeping the law of love.

ILLUSTRATION: Back in the early 1990's in LA, there was undue police brutality on Rodney King, who was an African American. These white police officers were acquitted for their actions. As a result, the Black community erupted with anger as they rioted and burned down stores and properties. David Ho and others in his church had a heavy heart. For the next couple of weeks, they went out to help clean up all the debris in the streets. There he met Pastor Charles, who pastors a black church and a Caucasian Christian. These believers from three different churches decided to partner together to show love to the community in Compton. They went to grocery stores on Saturdays where they were getting rid of food that they could not sell, but still edible. They got a truckload of food and they put it in bags to give out to the people in need, out of Pastor Charles' church as he shared the gospel to the needy. Every Saturday for three years, Brother David and other believers in Christ distributed bags of food as the gospel was preached. That is an example of showing love to your neighbors. We need to first acknowledge that there is a problem before us in the African American community. There is discrimination that is going on. Discrimination is wrong; it is a sin. It is displeasing to the Lord. Instead, we are to love our neighbors. This is much easier said than doing it. We need the Lord to change our hearts toward those that are different from us. May we not prejudice them by condemning them. May we seek to listen to their story. Surely, there are shortcomings in others. We also have shortcomings.

### 1. Show love through speech and action (2:12)

We are all accountable toward God's royal law no matter if we are believers or non-believers. The royal law is described another way in verse 12. "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty." It is the law of liberty. When we show love to our neighbors through speech and action, that is what we will be judged upon. I do believe that when we show love for our neighbors, it can set us free from prejudice. We are God's children. May we act as children of God. When our behavior does not coincide with our belief, then it becomes a hindrance to others to follow Jesus. Those who obey God's Word by faith find freedom from any fear of future judgment. Faith in our Lord provides freedom from hatred and self-righteousness toward those that are different from us and enables us to truly love our neighbors.

Application: We started a mercy ministry earlier this year to minister to the poor and marginalized in our community. Some of you have helped out in starting our food pantry ministry. Others have reached out to care for the homeless under the overpass. May we show love through speech and action.

### 2. Show mercy instead of critical judgment (2:13)

Just as Christ demonstrated his mercy toward us, we ought to demonstrate mercy toward others. The gospel basically teaches us that we all need mercy. In spite of our shortcomings, God showed us mercy to us. He loved us although we are so different from Him. We rebelled and disobeyed God, yet He shows us mercy by paying the penalty of sin on our behalf so that we can be adopted as children of God when we place our faith in Him. Mercy is not getting something that we desire. God values us so much that Jesus died for us. This is the mercy that triumphs over judgment, as recorded in v.13, “For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Just as we have received mercy, we are to extend mercy to others that might be different from us. May we be motivated to forgive others because God has forgiven us. If we do not extend mercy, we demonstrate that we have not received mercy. If we have received mercy, it should be natural for us to show mercy to others because we have been changed inside out. We live out what we believe. Our behavior should complement our belief. We need to be careful not to misunderstand that this is saying that we need to be merciful to others in order to earn mercy before God. We cannot earn mercy. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. If a believer demonstrates mercy, it is evidence that he has received mercy from God. However, if one does not demonstrate mercy toward others, then there may be reason to wonder whether Christ by His mercy is within that person.

As we stated in the beginning of the sermon, our behavior should match our belief. Authentic religion or faith must be evident in our practice. In James 2, authentic religion or faith can be demonstrated by not showing partiality, but by showing love to our neighbors. It can be seen through demonstrating mercy toward others, particularly toward those that are very different from us. May we show the life-giving mercy of Christ, which changes the way we act and speak toward others. Faith always demonstrates itself through love.