

Two Visitors in Church

In the closing verses of chapter one James gives us three distinguishing marks of true spirituality (James 1:26-27). These marks now become the themes that James will explore throughout his letter. With the heart of a loving pastor he unfolds their meaning to us through practical illustrations, examples, rhetorical questions and well-reasoned arguments.

Prepare Your Heart: Lord, You tell us that Your Word is “living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword ... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” We invite You to do Your work in us, O God.

It seems that James always knows how to get his readers' attention and make his point. The opening verses of chapter two are no exception.

1. **Read** James 2:1-13 several times. Note any questions you have about this passage.

Thoughtfully consider each phrase in James 2:1

2. a. What standard is set?

b. What is the meaning of “favoritism?” A dictionary may be useful.

c. What significance could there be in the title “glorious Lord Jesus Christ” being mentioned in the context of favoritism?

In his typical style James explains his statement in 2:1 by sketching a scene with circumstances that were undoubtedly a real life scenario for most of them. **Reread** James 2:2-3.

3. How is favoritism portrayed and exposed?

While most Christians consider impartiality to be an admirable quality, James considered it one of the signposts of our faith.

4. In essence, when we show favoritism, we become _____ (2:4).

It is worth noting that the Greek word for *personal favoritism* is found only in Christian writings. One author suggests that perhaps this is because favoritism was such an accepted part of most ancient societies that it was assumed and not even identified. This still is the case in many cultures today.

A Closer Look

Starting with verse five James begins to set up his case against favoritism. **Reread** James 2:5-7 from several translations.

5. a. What is James' first reason for prohibiting discrimination against the poor (verse 5)?

b. Why does God especially delight to shower His grace on those whom the world has discarded (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)?

6. Describe the sharp contrast between God's attitude towards the poor (James 2:5) with the way James' audience had treated them (James 2:6a).

7. a. Such treatment is underscored by the use of several pointed questions (James 2:6b-7). **Reread** these verses and summarize James' continuing argument in your own words.

b. Discuss the irony of extending privileged treatment to the wealthy in light of James 2:2-7.

8. What additional argument does James draw upon in 2:8 to refute the practice of showing favoritism?

The passage quoted by James from Leviticus 19:18 was well known to these Jewish Christians as was the passage in Matthew 22:37-39. They would also have known that on the evening before Jesus was crucified, He gave new meaning to this verse in the upper-room discourse with His disciples. *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13:34).*

Ponder why *love* overlooks superficial distinctions such as wealth and distasteful qualities.

9. Look up Luke 5:27-32; 14:12-14 and 15:1-7 for examples. Ask yourself, “How can this be a model for me? How can I apply it to my life?” Write your thoughts below.

10. James sums up his argument about favoritism in 2:8-9 by contrasting two conditional statements:

If you really keep the royal law you _____

But if you show favoritism you _____
(Partiality NASB)

11. In verses 10-11 James explains how an act of favoritism makes a person a lawbreaker. Why does breaking one of God's laws make us guilty of breaking the whole law? **Reread** these verses carefully. (In your answer consider what these verses tell us about God Himself—His impartiality toward the Law and His holy character.)

12. In what ways does favoritism violate the marks of true faith as outlined in James 1:26-27?

James concludes the section in 2:1-13 with an urgent appeal and warning to the early Christians and to us. (See James 2:12-13.) The verbs “speak and act” are stronger in the Greek text than in the English. The *present tense* in both verbs calls for continuing action.

Here James sums up the laws under which we will be judged as “the law that gives freedom” (2:12b NIV). How often do we hear the words *law* and *freedom* put together like this?!

13. What does James mean when he uses this seemingly paradoxical phrase? How does the law contribute to our freedom? See Galatians 3:24 and Matthew 5:17.

James 2:13 offers the reason and motivation for responding to the admonition in verse 12. **Reread** James 2:12-13 with this thought in mind.

14. a. State the basic principles of judgment and mercy from James 2:12-13.

b. How do these verses challenge you? How do they comfort you?

In this passage James confronted us “head on” with the sin of partiality—a sin that can be hidden beneath the surface of our lives and not easily detected. This common and all-but invisible sin has large consequences however. *One way to begin to root this sin from our hearts is to align our thinking more with God’s thinking—to make His thoughts our thoughts. An attribute of God that is not often thought about is His impartiality. Yet this is a recurring theme throughout Scripture.*

15. Draw near to God and meditate on the verses below—verses that speak about this wonderful characteristic of God’s nature and heart.

Deuteronomy 10:17

2 Chronicles 19:7

Job 3:19

Job 36:5

Matthew 5:45

Acts 10:34

Romans 2:6 & 11

Romans 10:12

Galatians 2:6

Ephesians 6:9

Colossians 3:25

1 Peter 1:17

God’s impartiality is reflected even in the genealogies of His Son Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-37).

16. Is there someone in your life you discriminate against, judge or reject? In what specific ways can you begin to reach out to that person with God’s unbiased love?