James 2:1-7 “God Shows No Partiality, How About Us?”

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 Good morning. Please open your Scriptures to the Epistle of James chapter 2. Today we will be looking at verses 1-7 and the title of the message is “God Shows No Partiality. How About Us?” As we begin to look at the topic of partiality I would like to start with a question. In the culture today who are the people who seem to get the most attention of seem to be treated in the most favorable way? The groups that come to mind are the wealthy, celebrities or intellectuals who propose the newest ideas of the age. What kinds of problems does partiality or favoritism cause in the culture today?

 Now that we have laid the foundation for today’s topic let us read together James chapter 2 verses 1-7. The main idea of today’s message is that in the kingdom of God there is no room for partiality or favoritism due to the fact that all people have been created in the image of God, it causes people to treat each other different which results in anger and chaos and finally partiality is a blasphemy against God since He is the only One who is qualified to make judgments regarding created beings. After we read the Scripture together we will analyze each of the verses and then conclude with 3 applications showing us how this passage impacts our lives today.

**1 My brothers *and sisters*, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. 2For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring *and is dressed* in bright clothes, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in, 3and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good *place*,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” 4have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5Listen, my beloved brothers *and sisters*: did God not choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7Do they not blaspheme the good name by which you have been called?**

Verse 1: **1 My brothers *and sisters*, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism.**

* ‘’Favoritism’ is a descriptive word for showing partiality; it literally means to receive someone according to their face” (Blomberg & Kamell, p. 106).
* The first point James makes is that it is human nature to show favoritism to those who seem to be more attractive to the eye.
* It is impossible for someone to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ while at the same time practice partiality amongst members of the church family.
* We need to note that this situation is taking place among the members of the church, not those outside of the church.

**2For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring *and is dressed* in bright clothes, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in,**

* This verse discusses the differences that exist between different classes of people. As Jesus replies to Judas when he scolds Martha for anointing Jesus’ feet with the perfume, there will always be those who are poor in this world.
* The eye is always attracted to things that are bright and colorful.
* The setting James is speaking of is an assembly. This is not necessarily a worship service, but it could be any kind of gathering that took place in the early church. It is possible that this gathering may be a legal assembly such as a court where disputes are settled. This may be because showing favoritism in court because of appearance is not appropriate.
* What is being used to differentiate the people in this situation is their outer appearance.
* The choosing of David to replace Saul as King of Israel establishes how God looks at people “7 But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God does not see as man sees, since man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:7).

**3and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good *place*,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,”**

* As we already say expressed in verse 1, James is making it clear that discriminating against someone based upon their outer appearance is not appropriate in God’s kingdom.
* The proof that there is discrimination comes in the seating of the rich person in the better seat while making the poor person stand in the back or sit on the floor.
* The use of the word footstool shows that the intent is for the poor person to sit below and in subjection to the speaker.
* When someone comes into the house of the Lord they are to be welcomed as an honored guest no matter who they may be. Every person who wants to learn of God and be with His people deserve to be welcomed with equal excitement because they are an image bearer of God with full dignity and worth.
* What we must also address here is the attitude of the rich who accept such treatment because they feel they deserve it. Jesus taught that when attending a banquet, a person should always take the seat of least importance because it is at that point where they may be exalted by the host. “Now He began telling a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, “Whenever you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and the one who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then in disgrace you will proceed to occupy the last place. But whenever you are invited, go and take the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are dining at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Now He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “Whenever you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor wealthy neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you to a meal in return, and that will be your repayment. But whenever you give a [m]banquet, invite people who are poor, who have disabilities, who are limping, and people who are blind; and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:7-14).

**4have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?**

* The distinction here is based upon evil motives. The question that many people ask themselves when being approached by a rich person is ‘What can I get this person to do for me?” This evil selfish motive is what James is warning his readers to resist.
* The word distinction in this verse carries the same meaning as discrimination. To discriminate someone must give one object the approval and the other disapproval.
* The assumption or judgment based upon the outer appearance is also an attack on God because when people make judgments they are playing the role that belongs to God alone. We cannot and should not judge others since we are in the same situation as them. Only God the righteous judge can or should be the final judge over others.

**5Listen, my beloved brothers *and sisters*: did God not choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?**

* The question James is asking of his readers is meant to be answered in the affirmative because he is making the point that the poor have just as an important position in the kingdom of God as do those who are wealthy.
* This Scripture speaks clearly in opposition to the view that financial prosperity in this world automatically results in the approval of God. The life of Jesus as a poor carpenter from a very small town of Nazareth also supports this conclusion.
* Also, the absence of physical wealth in this life can also have its benefits. Not having as much material wealth can allow the person to better focus on the promises of God.

**6But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?**

* Why are the poor so quickly dishonored and treated so harshly when it is the rich who drag people into court trying to make money at the expense of the poor?
* The point here is that treating a wealthy person better just because of their wealth makes no sense because it is the wealthy that many times take advantage of the poor.
* This does not mean that being wealthy is a sin. It is not money that is the root of all evil, rather it is the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10).
* To dishonor the poor man could be equated to dishonoring God since that poor man is an image bearer of God.

**7Do they not blaspheme the good name by which you have been called?**

* Showing such a discriminating attitude through action is a way of speaking or acting evil while also professing faith in God.
* James has made it clear in chapter 1 that faith in God, if it is to be known as legit, must be accompanied by works.
* All of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ have been called to act in ways that honors the name of God. Showing favoritism is not the way to do that.
* Another way that we might be guilty of favoritism is by only focusing on our fellow believers in Christ and refusing to interact with believers of other congregations. There is certainly a comfort level in being with familiar people, but let us be known as those who love all believers in Christ despite some differences we may have with them. “John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Mark 9:38-41).

**Applications**

1. Christians must not engage in the action of favoritism. There is no reason why any created man or woman should think of themselves as being better than anyone else. The world we live in loves to place certain individuals on a pedestal and become enamored with their lives as if they are so much better than their own. Super Bowl Sunday showed us such an example. There is nothing wrong with enjoying a sport because of the enjoyment of competition and the determination that is shown by the participants. This does become a problem, however, when the athletes, who they are dating or when a singer becomes an idol of worship becomes the focus of other people’s lives. The only One who deserves such high praise and adoration is God who has created us, given His Son to show us the way to Him and has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us in His ways. No other person or created thing should replace God as the ultimate joy in our lives. This is why God commands in His first two commandments for Israel to acknowledge Him as the One and only Holy God and to not make any images to worship other than Him alone. When we acknowledge God as our ultimate hope and joy we cannot and will not be disappointed. Other people may let us down, but God never will!
2. In our relationships with others in the church we are being challenged not to make judgments regarding those people based upon outer appearances or the wealth status of that person. James warns his readers that doing so results in nothing but trouble. The reason that people make such distinctions is because the goal is for the rich to do something for that person. This is selfish and when such selfish desires are the goal of such partiality then this will result in disappointment. Katie’s favorite Christmas movie is The Bishop’s Wife. The bishop in the story wants to build a new cathedral and to raise funds he had to do a lot of worshiping of the rich people in his congregation. His ultimate desire was to get money. That desire became an obsession that caused him to neglect his wife and child. Treating the rich differently in that story resulted in nothing but stress and chaos. When he finally lets go of that desire and allows God to work things out on His timing the bishop is able to stand back and see what was important in his life. Let us not become so enamored with wealth and status that we miss the most important message of the gospel which is to love God with our whole heart and love our neighbor as ourselves.
3. Treating people differently based upon their wealth also blasphemes the name of the Lord which we say we believe in. If we claim that we are Christians and that we love everyone who is made in the image of God, what possible role can favoritism play in that profession? No role at all. In the Old Testament book of the Law Leviticus God commanded Moses not to allow for the showing of partiality in settling legal disputes. “You shall not do injustice in judgment; you shall not show partiality to the poor nor give preference to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly” (19:15). This establishes the fact that God is not a respecter of persons meaning that He shows no partiality. God does however bless those who follow His commands.

**Conclusion**

 In today’s Scripture we are being challenged by James to live in a way that honors God without allowing our selfish desires to deter the way we think. If we treat others good or bad based upon what they can do for us this is not in line with the gospel. Jesus Christ died for all those who would place their trust in Him for salvation. He did not give up His life only for the nation of Israel, He sacrificed Himself for the salvation of the elect. The Apostle Paul reminds us that Jesus Christ died for us while we were yet sinners and when we could do nothing but rebel against Him. Such love must be responded to in kind. The love we show others in the kingdom of God as well as in the world reflects the faith we have in God. May our reputation be that we treat all people with respect and dignity regardless of what they may or not be able to do for us financially. Let us not be distracted by bright and colorful dress but let us look at the heart and without partiality share the good news of the gospel with a dying world that so badly needs to hear it. Please join me in a word of prayer.