

“Playin’ Favorites”  
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It’s a series of tests to find out if your faith is genuine. That’s his purpose. He’s trying to test the people—the Jewish people in this church in Jerusalem. Are you truly, genuinely believers? Are you truly Christians?


So, he starts out the test—the first test he gives us is trials. *We go through trials of many kinds*. The testing of our faith develops perseverance, it says. So, he throws a test into your life, and then the question that helps you determine whether your faith is genuine is: did I trust God through the trial? Did I grow in perseverance? Did I persevere through the trial, or did I just immediately fall down and give in to whatever the trial was? You learn about the genuineness of your faith by what you do when a trial comes.

Then the next time, it talked about temptation, remember that? When a temptation comes, do you blame God and say, “Well, I’m only tempted, I’m only sinning because God tempted me”? Or are you growing through it and saying, “No, wait a second. I was dragged away by my own sinful desires”? Do I take responsibility for my sin? Do I repent from my sin? Do I turn from it? Or do I just say, “Well, this is just how it’s going to be”? That’s a sign that we’re not genuinely in faith. Right? So, following and fighting sin, repenting, and being in the battle is a sign of genuine faith.

Okay. Now, the third thing—we talked about this last week—is that we’re tested by how we respond to the Word of God. Remember that? So, we read the Word of God, but the test to see whether you’re really in it is: *do you do what it says*? Do you just sit here and listen and then immediately leave and forget what you looked like? You looked into the mirror of God’s Word—and then did you just walk away? And I think I referred to a booger or something last week in reference to that. But how do you respond? *Do you do what the Word of God says*?

And so today, we’re going to jump into another test—because that’s what James is doing. We’re going to be looking at this. So, jump into chapter two. We’ve actually, finally made it to the second chapter of the book—because we’re just flying super-fast through James. This is what, week five? And we’re in the second chapter.

Here’s what it says in the very first verse:

*“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.”*  (James 2:1)

So, he’s talking to who we assume are believers. He says, “Brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ”—*must not show favoritism*. That’s one of the tests—not showing favoritism. What does that mean?

Because I know I show favoritism all the time. Like when I go to the store, if I have a choice—I know this is going to bother Penny—but when I go to the store, I’d rather get a Coke than a Pepsi. Because I prefer that. I favor a Coke. Well, the reason I’m favoring Coke

is because it's cheaper right now, right? But I prefer Snickers over an Almond Joy. I prefer playing with musicians that are kind of good at playing music. So, it's not like I don't have any preferences. You have preferences. This isn't talking about preferences. If I didn't prefer my wife over other women, my woman would beat me! Right? So, I prefer Julie. That's just the way it is. So, preference is good. There should be preference—but not favoritism. We shouldn't be favoring people.

So, James gives us an example of what he's talking about, so we can really make heads or tails of this. *"Suppose a man comes into your meeting..."* 📖 (James 2:2) Now that word for "meeting" is actually the word *synagogue*.

I'll just give you this for free, okay—I'm not going to charge you extra for this bit of info. The word *synagogue* is used here, which is interesting because this is a church. You might wonder, "Why are they calling the church the synagogue?" Well, this is a church in Jerusalem. And this is evidence for us that this book of the Bible was written *really early*. That's good evidence—because they're still calling their church "synagogue," not *ekklesia*. They're still referring to it as the synagogue, the meeting of people.

So:

*"Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes..."* So—Mr. Goldfingers. *"...and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in."* 📖 (James 2:2) *"If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' 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?"* 📖 (James 2:3–4)

So, let's just think about this in practical terms. We show up to SonRise. You've got some dude that comes in—maybe he's kind of semi-famous, I don't know. But people know who he is. He's got a lot of money. He shows up. He's looking good. He's looking pretty fly. He comes in, and he's doing his thing, right? Everybody's looking at him—"Oh! That's so-and-so! You know who that is? That's so-and-so!"


"Oh, really? Make sure you get him a cup of coffee. Make sure you get him a burrito. Make sure you take care of that guy. Sit him up front—we want him to..." Right?

Then another dude comes in the same Sunday—can hardly walk, stinks real bad, obviously doesn't have much. Looks like he slept in those clothes the last five nights. And you say, "You know what... we want to stay clear of that guy." You say, "Well, why would that be wrong?" Because **people with genuine faith shouldn't treat that person with the rings and the fancy clothes as superior to everyone else**. Why is that? Because *God doesn't*.

Let's be clear: the reason we don't show favoritism is not just that it's a social issue. The reason is *God doesn't*. God is not impressed by our money, and He is not repulsed by our poverty. So, Sunday morning, a guy walks in. He looks like he slept in his clothes. His breath stinks. He hasn't showered. He looks broke. **People with genuine faith shouldn't consider or treat that person as inferior to anybody else**. Why? Because *God doesn't*.

You see, this isn't about preference. This is about *discriminating against people based on outward appearance*, which is *antithetical* to the way God judges people. And God is our judge. We are supposed to judge the way God judges.

Now, people say the Bible says, "Don't judge." But the Bible *doesn't* say, "Thou shalt not judge." What it says is that when we judge, we can't judge *hypocritically*. We can't use *one* standard for ourselves and a *different* one for others.

*"For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*  (Matthew 7:2)

So, we *are* supposed to make judgments. But when someone comes in—maybe someone most people wouldn't take care of—we as the church need to step up. That's one of the *signs* of genuine faith. So, if you're in a church where everybody is dressed to the nines—fancy clothes, put-together people—and there's no one living in poverty, no one in pain, no one struggling, something's off.

Because I talked to someone a week and a half ago—right outside our building. I'm going to be very honest. I was out painting the handicapped parking spots. Why? I don't know. We needed them. This guy walks by—I'd seen him before. I started talking him up a little and invited him to church. He said, "I've never seen a pastor like you, painting lines in the parking lot. Aren't you supposed to be inside?" I said, "Well, I've got to do a little bit of everything around this place."

He looks me up and down. I had a shirt that said "Secret Agent" on it, cut off sleeves, my armpits were out. I think I got sunburned right here 'cause my pants were falling down. He said, "I've never seen a pastor look like you. Why aren't you wearing your fancy stuff?" I said, "I don't think it's important. I don't think God cares what I look like." If He did, He wouldn't have made me look like *this*.

I invited him to come to church, and he said, "I can't. I don't have anything to wear." I said, "What do you mean you don't have anything to wear? Just wear what you're wearing now." He said, "I can't dress like this. That would be disrespectful." I said, "Would it be disrespectful if I dressed like this?" He said, "Well, I was just raised that way. You have to dress nice to show respect." I said, "I appreciate that. But I don't think God cares."

It's clear—He's not a God who favors someone who dresses nice over someone who doesn't. If your heart is in it and you *want* to dress nice as a way of honoring God, okay. But that's not going to get you any extra points with Him. I told him, "Come in your sweatpants." I thought he was going to fall over. I said, "Yeah. Just come as you are."

So, to *really* understand what it means to not show favoritism, we've got to go back and look at how *God* sees people—and what this phrase actually means. How many of you have a King James Bible? Yours doesn't say "favoritism," does it? It says, "respector of persons."

*“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.”* 📖 (James 2:1, KJV)

That’s hard to understand. “Respect of persons”? Modern versions translate that as *favoritism*.

The Greek word used here is *prosōpolēmpsia*. It comes from two words:

- *prosōpon* – meaning “face” or “appearance”
- *lambanō* – meaning “to take” or “to receive”

So, it literally means *to receive someone based on appearance*. God does *not* receive people based on how they look—based on what’s on the face or outward appearance.

Let me show you this in *Romans 2*, King James:

*“For there is no respect of persons with God.”* 📖 (Romans 2:11, KJV) And in the NIV: *“For God does not show favoritism. All who sin apart from the law will perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.”* 📖 (Romans 2:11–12)

So, the verse means God doesn’t give preferential treatment based on whether you were Jewish (with the law) or Gentile (without the law). He treats everyone the same. Let’s keep going—James continues and gives us *another reason* why giving special treatment to some people over others is wrong.

*“Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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 dishonored the poor.”* 📖 (James 2:5–6)

James is saying that if you choose the rich over the poor, you’re *in opposition* to God—because *God chose the poor*.

Now you might say, “Hold the phone, Dustin. Are you saying that God shows preferential treatment to poor people? That He favors the poor?” No—that’s not what he’s saying. He’s not saying God prefers the poor. He’s saying *don’t dishonor them*. Don’t discriminate against them. Don’t treat them as lesser. Why? Because when Jesus was on earth, He could’ve chosen anything. He could’ve been born into *any* situation. He could have been royalty. He could’ve been born rich. He could’ve been born extremely good-looking, powerful, favored—anything. But He *chose* to be born poor. His parents couldn’t even afford the proper sacrifice at the temple. He chose to be born in Bethlehem—nowhere fancy. And then He chose to return and grow up in *Nazareth*.

And it wasn’t like Nazareth was a great place. In *John 1:45–46*, Philip finds Nathanael and tells him: *“We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”* And Nathanael says:

*“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?”* 📖 (John 1:46) So, Jesus chose the very people and places that others looked down on.

Let's go back to James:

*"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 dishonored the poor."*

He's saying: discriminating against those the world looks down on is wrong. It's a sign your faith isn't genuine, because it's contrary to the way *God* views people. So, if that's how you are—and you claim to be a Christian—then hold the phone. We need to take a serious look at that.

Now James gives us a *second reason* why we shouldn't show favoritism. The first was: **God doesn't show favoritism**. The second is: **God has chosen the poor in the eyes of the world**.

Let's keep going: *"Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of Him to whom you belong?"* 📖 (James 2:6–7) Now, the vast majority of people who were converting to Christianity in that day were *poor*. That's not necessarily the case today, but back then, it was. You see a few wealthy believers—like Joseph of Arimathea, who took Jesus' body and had money—but for the most part, Jesus picked poor fishermen to be His disciples. The only one who might've had money was Matthew. Judas was all about money, but we don't know how much he had.

The rich were *not* flocking to Jesus. They weren't the ones saying, "Yes, I'll follow You." And John MacArthur points this out—when you read material outside the Bible, you see the early church being *mocked*. The secular world, the rulers, even some Jewish leaders—mocked Christians, and a lot of that mocking was tied to how *poor* they were. It was a common insult: "That's a *poor person's* religion."

Paul even said it—1 Corinthians 1:26: *"Brothers and sisters, 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."* He continues: *"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. God chose the lowly things of this world—and the despised things—and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."* 📖 (1 Corinthians 1:27–29)

The people in the church *knew* how the rich had treated them. They'd seen how they were looked down on. The rich exploited the poor. They still do today. The rich use their wealth and power to take advantage of others. It's always been that way. So, James is speaking to the poor, who were being exploited—and mocked—for their faith.

He says: *"Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of Him to whom you belong?"* Why would you give *special treatment* to people who are treating you that way? That's the third reason we don't show favoritism: **the rich exploit the poor and blaspheme God**.

*“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)

Now we hear something called *the royal law*. And it equates to this: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” Let me read you a quote from Warren Wiersbe—he puts this really well:

*“Christian love does not mean that I must like a person and agree with him on everything. I may not like his vocabulary or his habits, and I may not want him for an intimate friend. Christian love means treating others the way God has treated me. It is an act of the will, not an emotion that I try to manufacture. The motive is to glorify God. The means is the power of the Spirit within—for the fruit of the Spirit is love. As I act in love toward one another, I may find myself drawn more and more to him, and I may see in him through Christ qualities that before were hidden to me. Also, Christian love does not leave a person where it finds him. Love should help the poor man do better. Love should help the rich man make better use of his God-given resources. Love always builds up ( 1 Corinthians 8:1). Hatred always tears down. We only believe as much of the Bible as we practice. If we fail to obey the most important word, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ then we will not do any good with the lesser matters of the Word.”*

That’s a powerful statement about how we treat each other.

*Love your neighbor as yourself.* So, one of the reasons we don’t show favoritism—it’s not just about preference—it’s about *love*. If you begin to love your neighbor—and I’ve seen this over and over—when you begin to love people you normally wouldn’t prefer, when you stop showing favoritism and begin to serve, to care, to be present with people who are different than you...

You know what happens? *You begin to actually love them.* You change. God works in you. He loves someone through you. And that love becomes genuine. For instance, maybe you say, “I don’t really care about poor children. I don’t have a heart for poor kids, so I’m not going to help.” Okay—but try this: start giving a little money. Start showing up and volunteering. Spend some time with those kids. And *you* will change. You’ll start seeing all kinds of beauty in those children. And your heart will grow softer.

Go up to the hospital. Spend some time with kids struggling with cancer. Maybe you’ve never thought about that—maybe it’s never hit your radar. But talk to their parents. Sit with them. Your heart will change. Why? Because you’re *loving your neighbor as yourself*. And God transforms your heart in the process.

This is not about *manufacturing* emotions. God doesn’t want you to fake it. He wants you to *obey*—and then He’ll change your heart. We are to be *genuine people* who really care. And God helps us become that.

Here’s the **fourth reason** not to show favoritism:

**You cannot love your neighbor as yourself and show favoritism. You can’t.**



*“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For He who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.”* 📖  
(James 2:10–11)

Now James doesn’t want people thinking that favoritism is just a minor issue—a misdemeanor—compared to murder or adultery, which feel like spiritual felonies. What he’s saying is: they *all* make you a *lawbreaker*. Favoritism makes you a lawbreaker just like murder or adultery does. Are they the same in impact? No. But in terms of breaking God’s law—they land you in the same category. They give you the same *label*: *lawbreaker*.

That’s the fifth point: **Favoritism makes you a lawbreaker—just like murder and adultery do.**

*“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)

Here’s what that means—and I’m going to close with this: **You and I are going to be judged by the way we speak and act toward people.** That’s one of the *tests* of whether your faith is genuine or not. When you encounter someone who is poor, or tattooed, or pierced, or needy, or struggling—and you feel yourself recoil... The sign that your faith is genuine is that you treat that person with *mercy*. That you *don’t* show favoritism. That you *don’t* discriminate. That you don’t treat them worse, or different, or beneath you—but that you see them as God sees them.

Because *God is not a respecter of persons*. He doesn’t show favoritism. You see that person with His eyes. You tune your heart to theirs. And you *love your neighbor as yourself*.

That’s the point. Jesus said: *“The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”* 📖 (Matthew 19:30, 20:16) What does that mean? Well, people like to say, “We’re all created equal.” But honestly—that’s not completely true. You know that’s not true. Some people are born with money. Some people are born in poverty. Some are born in war zones. Some are born with disabilities. Some are born where there’s no food for tomorrow.

Equal in value to God? Yes. But do we all *start* equally? No. And that’s why God says, “The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.” If you take the person who starts first and move them to the back, and take the person who started last and move them to the front, what do you get? You get everyone in the same place.

That’s what He’s saying. If you’re first, you’ll be last. If you’re last, you’ll be first. And the one who was first—who is now last—is now equal with the one who was last and is now first. They’re at the same place. And I have no idea what I’m talking about anymore—but we’re *all at the same place*.

That’s His point. That’s His point.

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🎵 *(Band is invited to come forward for closing worship)*

“Did my band leave? You’re there—come on up here. We’re going to do a last song.”

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**[Closing Prayer]**

God, I thank You so much. We are trying to prove ourselves genuine. We want to know if our faith is real. We want to go through our trials and be victorious in those trials. We want to consider them pure joy. When we’re done with those, we want more endurance—more perseverance—so that we finish this race to the end. When we face temptations, God, we’re not going to blame You. We want to be victorious. And if we do fall into sin, we will repent. Because we are active in our faith. When we open God’s Word, we want to be people who *do what it says*. Because that’s evidence of our faith. And God, we don’t want to disqualify ourselves— Or show that we are not genuine— By treating some people differently than others. By showing favoritism to those with money or treating others poorly because they don’t look a certain way. God, we want to see people as You see them. And if we are seeing as You see, and doing as You do. That shows the genuineness of our faith. We do love You. We do trust You. Confirm that within our hearts. In Jesus’ name—Amen.