

# WHICH ROAD WILL YOU TAKE?

## A STUDY IN JAMES

### *“Receiving the Face”*

Today’s study in James is a warning from God’s Word to not show favoritism or partiality. The word partiality literally means ‘to receive the face’ and describes the favoritism that was being shown to the wealthy in James’ day. When Charles Evans Hughes was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States in 1930, he moved to Washington and transferred his membership to a Baptist church there. His father had been a Baptist minister, and Hughes had been a lifelong witness to his own faith in Christ. It was the custom in that Baptist church to have all new members come forward during the morning service and be introduced to the congregation. On this particular day, the first to be called was a Chinese laundryman, Ah Sing, who had moved to Washington from San Francisco and kept a laundry near the church. He stood at the far side of the pulpit. As others were called, they took positions at the extreme opposite side. When a dozen people had gathered, Ah Sing still stood alone. Then Chief Justice Hughes was called, and he significantly stood next to the laundryman. A Christian who only associates with people of the same intellectual, academic, or professional interests is not living up to what Scripture mandates.

God’s Word highlights the speech of the wicked in ***Jude 1:16 (ESV)***<sup>16</sup> *These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.*

Be warned: showing favoritism/partiality hurts the advancement of the Kingdom of God. When he was a student, the famous Indian leader, Mahatma Gandhi, considered becoming a Christian. He read the Gospels and was moved by them. It seemed to him that Christianity offered a solution to the caste system that plagued the people of India. One Sunday, he went to a local church. He had decided to see the pastor and ask for instruction on the way of salvation. But when he entered the church, which consisted of white people, the ushers refused to give him a seat. They told him to go and worship with his own people. He left and never went back. “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu” (from “Our Daily Bread,” Feb., 1979).

Ghandi’s experience illustrates harm that comes from the sin of favoritism – preferring one person over another. The sin of partiality applies to all types of prejudice, whether it is based on economic status, race, or anything else. To favor some people and to disregard others based on outward factors is a terrible sin that plagued the early church in James’ day. It has plagued the church in every generation, because it stems from pride, which is prevalent in our fallen hearts.

One way to reach one person or 100 for Christ is to refuse to show favoritism within the church and demonstrate God’s love instead. In the process we will be touching lives that are NOT like ours but they are souls who are loved by the Lord the same as He loves us!

If you have been on the wrong end of favoritism, you know the emptiness and hurt it brings. Good parents are wounded in their hearts when they see their children discriminated against by a teacher, other children,

or a church group. How it must grieve our Heavenly Father to see us practice favoritism within the family of God. In this lesson we are reminded how seriously wrong it is for us to show partiality.

### The Deity of Christ

**Read James 2:1-4 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.* <sup>2</sup> *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,* <sup>3</sup> *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,”* <sup>4</sup> *have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

Whenever James uses the term *my brothers*, he is about to point out something that his brothers and sisters in Christ needed to change in their lives – in this instance picking ‘favorites’.

Calling Jesus the Lord of Glory is James’ declaration of the deity of Christ. We are not to profess our faith in Christ and then turn around and act like a ‘spiritual snob’. James addresses the total community of believers: the rich, the poor, the common people, the high, the low. No matter who we are, we can be guilty of the sin of showing partiality. We need to remember that as Christians, we are all one in the body of Christ and the Lord Jesus Christ is the common denominator among us.

Showing favoritism is totally contrary to real faith in Jesus. ‘Church people’ are often the quickest to make snap judgments and it should not be. The Apostle Peter says in **1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> ... *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

If we are going to be impartial people on behalf of the kingdom of God, we may need to work at not showing favoritism. For some it may come natural as it did for Dan Hiser. For others, it may not be as natural. I don’t believe that showing favoritism is always intentional. Sometimes we are just ‘caught up’ in our own little world. For example, don’t get so caught up talking to friends at church that a visitor slips right by you unnoticed and unwelcomed. Practice treating every face you see with the same love. Look for someone who is not smiling or is walking with their head down. His or her heart may be breaking.

Remember, the Greek term translated partiality or favoritism as a verb literally means “to receive someone’s face” that is to show partiality. Different churches often “target” different groups as mission focuses. In many ways, this can be helpful to the kingdom of God; however, we must never allow targeting a particular group for Christ to allow us to forget others. Jesus said in **Luke 19:10** *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*”

Our personal ‘mission field’ is whoever we meet who does not know Jesus as Savior. We need to be aware that the rich may find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. In fact, favoritism can be reversed – meaning we care for the poor and have no concern for the wealthy. Those of us, especially in the “middle class” can look at those with wealth and position and have a heart and mindset that resists sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them. We need to apply an attitude of impartiality to

all whom we meet. **Romans 10:14 (ESV)** <sup>14</sup> *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*

We are prone to judge people by their past, not their future. As we see those walking in darkness, we should focus on seeing them in the Light of who they can be when they experience the Lord's great salvation and His sweet forgiveness.

And by the way, there are times even after the Lord has long forgiven us of our own sins, we can't seem to forgive ourselves. Don't look back. Look forward to Jesus. Jesus when He walked this earth was the Friend of Sinners, though He disapproved of their sins. It was not compromise, but compassion, that caused Him to welcome them, and when they trusted Him, He forgave them. If the Lord of Heaven can forgive a person, why can't we be 'forgivers' of ourselves as well as others?

### The Grace of God

**Read James 2:5-7 (ESV)** <sup>5</sup> *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?* <sup>6</sup> *But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?* <sup>7</sup> *Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

Preferential treatment of the rich stands in stark contrast to the attitude of God, who has chosen the poor to be 'rich in faith'. James states that when the church makes distinctions based on outward factors, the church dishonors the poor man. Then he asks two rhetorical questions in verses 6 and 7 to show that by aligning themselves with the rich against the poor, they were siding with God's enemies, who were also their own enemies. Again, we must keep in mind that James is speaking here in general terms. There were, no doubt, honest, considerate men of wealth, just as there were poor scoundrels.

William Barclay said in his Daily Study Bible, "If a creditor met a debtor on the street, he could seize him by the neck of his robe, nearly throttling him and drag him into the law courts," "This type of behavior is what James is condemning. James did not condemn riches but he did condemn a lack of compassion and understanding on the part of the wealthy towards the poor.

### The Word of God

**Read James 2:8-11 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.* <sup>9</sup> *But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.* <sup>10</sup> *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.* <sup>11</sup> *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.*

James quoted the royal law from the Old Testament. **Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)** <sup>18</sup> *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as*

*yourself: I am the LORD.* This passage is famous because Jesus quoted it as a part of His response to the question regarding what is the greatest commandment. (*Matthew 22:36-39*)

For me, I think the thing that separates me the most from individuals is not economics or race – it is whether that individual shares my faith in the Lord. I find that I do not have much in common with those who do not trust in Jesus. However, if I am to reach people with the gospel of Christ I must associate with lost people

Jesus commanded us to love one another. He did not command us to do something that can only happen by accident. Eros, a Greek word referring to erotic love, happens by accident. Boy meets girl biological sparks fly. Philos, a Greek word referring to brotherly love or affection may happen unconsciously. We love our brothers and sisters and close friends, just naturally. But, another word agape describes God's kind of love that is an act of our wills. Agape love is our choice. We must choose to love the stranger off the street who smells badly and the rich smart aleck who insults Christians. Jesus loved us enough to die for us.

### **The Judgment of God**

**Read James 2:12-13 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.*  
<sup>13</sup> *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

The law of liberty is a law of freedom that comes through the Spirit of God within us. Nothing in our sin nature could produce a godly life. Indeed, it is opposed to righteousness. It is void of all power to do what pleases God. We do not have in ourselves the ability to meet the Law's righteous demands. All the Law can do under such circumstances is to demand death as a penalty. But the law of liberty in Christ gives us life.

When we think of the old hymn – Just As I Am – we understand that we come to Christ just as we are. However, many times after we have freely come to Christ ourselves and been accepted – we forget that Christ is still open for all others to come to Him just as they are. Only God in his mercy can forgive our sins. We can't earn forgiveness by forgiving others. But when we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, we show that we don't understand or appreciate God's mercy toward us.

Mercy rejoices in the face of judgment. The reason it does is because mercy knows that judgment cannot condemn. Let me illustrate. There was a group of travelers in the early days of our nation heading west in a wagon train. As they traveled, they were horrified to see smoke on the horizon from a prairie fire. The wagon master quickly picked a spot and burned off a huge circle. Then he pulled the wagons into the burned circle. When the fire finally arrived, the settlers were safe because the fire could not burn that which had already been burnt. This is why mercy triumphs over judgment. Christ took our judgment for us on the cross so that we can live in the circle of His mercy and grace. Help others to know they too can be in the Lord's circle of mercy and grace.