

Sincere Faith:

An Exposition of the Book of James

Sermon Seven: Sincere Unity [James 2:1-9]

July 11, 2021

Opening ILL: Does anybody like feeling left out? Marginalized? Overlooked? Does anybody like to be treated like a second-class citizen? No. We all want to be big shots. We all want to feel important. The desire to feel important or appreciated isn't necessarily good or bad. My point is simply that nobody likes to feel like they are excluded or overlooked. **ILL:** Honeymoon restaurant story. We all like to feel important...like we matter. Today we will ask what happens in our lives and in the church when only a certain kind of person matters...or, at least, when a certain kind of person matters more than another.

Quote: [For Christians] the ground is level at the foot of the cross. This being so, it is absurd to be partial toward anyone. All should be treated equally – as beings created in the image of God. Rich and poor should be accorded equal honor and cordiality. Discrimination or favoritism is spiritually irrational.¹

I. Introduction:

A. Remember our theme for the year: “Love and Good Deeds”

1. We spent quite a while on 1 Corinthians 13
2. We are now focusing on the book of James, with its emphasis upon good works.

B. What will we talk about today?

1. We must be careful to be sincere in our commitment to unity and equity in the Church.

II. The Inconsistency of Favoritism (James 2:1)

A. Who is commanded? “My brothers”

1. This would include males and females.
2. This reminds us that James is assuming the best here.
 - a. James seems to be assuming that their faith was a sincere faith. That is, at least generally.
 - b. At bare minimum, he is referring to the people in the church as “brothers” in the sense that they are fellow Jews.
 - c. It is interesting, though, is it not, that he is addressing everyone on the same level?

B. What is commanded?

1. Don't try to hold faith in Jesus while at the same time exalting some people over others.
 - a. What does this mean?
 - i. This means that if we sincerely believe the gospel, and apply it to ourselves and to everyone else, there is no way we can reconcile discrimination with discipleship.

ILL: You cannot hold 3 paper bags full of groceries and hug somebody. You either have to refuse to hug them or you must first put down the groceries. Similarly, we cannot “hold to” a sincere faith while at the same time holding a partiality with reference to people. Lay down your partiality or lay down your supposed faith. It is sheer madness to try to create a situation in your heart in which discipleship and discrimination coexist consistently.

III. An Illustration of Favoritism (James 2:2-4)

A. The seating arrangement

1. Rich people...sit here!
2. Poor people...go stand over there!

B. The sinful adjudication *Notice that this is a rhetorical question:*

¹ Kent Hughes <https://gracequotes.org/topic/favoritism/>. Taken from James by Kent Hughes, copyright 1991, Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton Illinois 60187, p. 94, www.crosswaybooks.org.

Point: Interestingly, James will ask 4 rhetorical questions in vv. 4-7. It is a very powerful way to make a point!

1. Haven't you made distinctions? (and isn't that WRONG?!)
2. Haven't you become judges instead of heralds? (and isn't that WRONG?!)

ILL: Numbered pews. Jen and I have an old, Welsh pew that we bought at an antique store. It is so great! One of the interesting things about this pew, though, is that it is numbered. Why would they number pews? Well, in the old days many churches made you pay for your pew. The most expensive were right up front, while the cheap seats were further away. How did the people possibly miss how such a practice flies right in the face of texts like this? In essence, this practice gave the best seats to the richest people.

IV. The Irrationality of Favoritism (James 2:5-7)

A. Didn't God choose the poor to be the billboards of His glory?

1. God honors the poor...you dishonor the poor.
 - a. **Luke 4:18-19** "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."
 - b. **Luke 1:53** "HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed.
2. God also cautions the rich
 - a. **Luke 6:24** But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.

B. Aren't the rich the ones who are making you miserable?

1. The situation
 - a. James says here that the rich are the ones oppressing them.
 - b. James says here that the rich are the ones dragging them into court.
2. The point: Why are you pandering to the ones who treat you so poorly?
 - a. Be very careful about the desire to be rich!
 - i. The deceitfulness of riches can choke out the word's influence on your mind.
 - ii. **Mark 4:19** but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

ILL: The Grand Hotel and the quick journey from irritated to snobby!!

A word of caution: Let's be careful here not to overcorrect here. It would be just as wrong to say, "All rich people are evil" as it would be to say, "All poor people are cursed." It is not as though being rich bars you from Heaven.

V. The Inescapable Conclusion (James 2:8-9)

A. There is a right way—the golden rule

1. What is this right way? Love
 - a. **Matthew 7:12** In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.
2. If you follow this way, you are doing well.
 - a. **Galatians 5:14** For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."
3. If you don't, you are a sinner.

B. There is a wrong way—the way of favoritism

1. If you practice favoritism you are committing sin.
2. If you practice religious favoritism you are convicted as a sinner.

C. God shows no partiality:

1. He is not impressed or intimidated by the rich.

2. He is not repulsed by the poor.
3. All who call on His name will be saved.
 - a. **Romans 10:12-13** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; ¹³for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."