

The latest edition of *Thrive* from our Fellowship National family about stewardship of our lives. We all like to receive a warm “welcome aboard”! Today we are going to consider what that means for church.

Proposition

Our series is “**Navigating Faith: A journey through the book of James**”. James’ letter aids believers to walk by **faith** in Christ and do good **works**. In chapter one we were introduced to James and his audience. Then we considered being patient under trials and how we can avoid temptation.

We also learned that **proximity** to the Word of God does not guarantee **practice**. In *Renovation of the Heart* (NavPress, 2002, 88), Dallas Willard wrote, “*Gandhi, who had looked closely at Christianity as practiced around him in Great Britain, remarked that if only Christians would live according to their belief in the teachings of Jesus, ‘we all would become Christians’.*”

Today we begin chapter two by considering “**The Sin of Partiality**”. We may use the phrase “I’m partial to” – in modern vernacular, “I can get behind...I’m a big fan of...I’m a sucker for”. These all speak of what we **prefer** or **favor**. This is the challenge of showing favoritism in the first century Church that James addressed in our text – let’s read [James 2:1-13](#). Three main ideas will help us apply this text to today.

[1] Favoritism Described – vv. 1-4

We must be honest: those who **profess** faith in Christ can be **prejudiced** against Christians – having “*respect of persons*” (v.1; προσωποληψια; “receiving of one’s face”). But “*there is no partiality with God*” wrote Paul about Jews–Gentiles ([Romans 2:8-11](#)). Jesus “*is our peace*” and “*destroyed the barrier*” ([Ephesians 2:14-15](#)). But James addressed a situation with **two people** (v.2) entering the “synagogue” (photo of [Kafr Bir'im](#) synagogue, Galilee). The rich man had a gold ring (lit. “gold-fingered”) and luxurious clothes (lit. “shining”). The poor man was in shabby (ρυπαρος – “filthy”) clothing. The Romans called white togas a *sordida* but those which were dirty and shabby were called *sordidati*.

There were also **two places** (v.3). The rich man received “favor” (επιβλεφητε) and was seated near the entrance and center of activity. The poor man was seated on a low footstool (υποποδιον) for the better seats. James identified **two problems** (v.4). First, *disunity by discrimination* – by making “distinctions” (lit. “judge between two; face both ways”). Second, *malicious motivation* (lit. “reasoning of evil”). Favoritism in the Church exposes disunity and sinful attitudes that believers may harbor in their hearts.

[2] Favoritism Defined – vv. 5-7

How would you define favoritism? In the context of the church, James identified two wrong conclusions.

a. Confusing poverty and spirituality – vv. 5-6a

“*Listen up!*” (v.5) James urged recognition that God values and blesses the poor ([Matthew 5:3](#)). Poverty does not equal impoverished spirituality – those without worldly wealth may well be very wealthy in faith! These believers betrayed Kingdom values “dishonored” (ητιμασατε, v.6a) the poor – consider Hannah’s prayer ([1 Samuel 2:7-8](#)).

b. Confusing plenty and integrity – vv. 6b-7

Ironically, the very people being honored **exploited** fellow Christians. Just because they were blessed did not mean they lived with integrity. Prejudice looks so promising (kindness towards the one favored) but amounts to hypocrisy! As Paul taught, riches can hinder Christian character ([1 Timothy 6:9-11](#)).

Where do we face partiality, favoritism, or elitism in the Church today? We may not have “luxury suites” and “cheap seats” in our church. We must not kid ourselves – we think about wealth or lack of it! Our society goes to great lengths to address favoritism. In fact, the UN has designated May 17 as the “International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, & Biphobia”. How do we reconcile the command not to show favoritism, yet uphold God’s righteous standards in an morally relative context? Two thoughts:

- **Favoritism is forbidden** – James wrote to fellow believers about non-moral distinctions. In Christ, we are called to “the above things” and to separate from “earthly things”. This precludes prejudice against a different race, culture, or socio-economic group. We are defined in Christ! ([Colossians 3:1-11](#)).
- **Avoidance is appropriate** – In the Church, we must not “associate” (συναναμιγνυσθαι) with ungodly, unrepenting believers ([1 Corinthians 5:9-12](#)). This includes immorality, greed, idolatry, slander, drunkenness, and swindling. We do not solve the problem of prejudice by compromising on impurity.

[3] Favoritism Discouraged – vv. 8-13

Finally, James more pointedly discouraged prejudice in the Church. These are expressed in **four paradoxes**. Notice how these truths reflect the teaching which Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching He gave. James highlighted a **confession– conduct conundrum** (v.10). You may say that you obey the Word of God, but your confession will be revealed in your conduct!

a. Two examples – vv. 8-11

The first example pits **love against partiality** (vv.8-9). Note the reference to the “Royal Law” which we find in [Matthew 22:34-40](#).

Second, is a contrast of **adultery with murder** (vv.10-11). Bearing in mind standards from the Sermon on the Mount, James urged a *diligent not deceived heart* (cf. 1:22,26): “you may not nurture **lust** in your heart, but if you harbor the **hatred** of prejudice, you disobey all the Law!”

b. Two expectations – vv. 12-13

First, the believer’s **speech and actions** must be congruent. This is what it means to live with grace. We must allow the law of liberty (cf. 1:25) to determine our lifestyle. Rather than a performance mentality, we walk in the freedom of forgiveness and extend that grace to others.

Second, we must be **merciful rather than judgmental** – the opposite of favoritism! The merciful will be blessed ([Matthew 5:7](#))! In the parable of the unforgiving servant, judgment was on the unmerciful ([Matthew 18:23-35](#)). To discriminate, is to judge and this is contrary to our confession of faith in Jesus.

Conclusion – see “Digging Deeper”

We do not shed prejudices ourselves. The Word of God implanted saves us from our prejudices (1:25)!

Let’s remember that when faith in Jesus is the hub of our life, it must express itself in a godly, ethical lifestyle. One of those will be **authentic acceptance** of others who are in Christ or on their way to Christ. At the hub of faith, we are united around the ultimate purpose of **living and sharing the life of Jesus**.

Born in 1759, he became a philanthropist and a MP Yorkshire for 28 years. In 1785 he was converted to Christ which sparked a major lifestyle change and passion for reform. He is best known for his tireless efforts to abolish slavery in the British Empire. Who was this man? William Wilberforce. He said, “*If to be feelingly alive to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures is to be a fanatic, I am one of the most incurable fanatics ever permitted to be at large.*” Will we be passive or passionate about eliminating prejudice?