

Session 2

September 11, 2022

FAITH ON DISPLAY IN RELATIONSHIPS

James 2:1-13

I often recall a particular potluck dinner at a rural church I knew rather well (that shall remain nameless!). The fellowship hall was set up with those eight-foot folding tables we all know and love. There was a podium set up at one end of the room for the guest speaker and a long set of tables set end-to-end at the other for serving. Those tables were covered with the usual array of country casserole dishes, serving platters, Tupperware containers, and tin foil. There was seating for about sixty, but a dozen or so of the folding chairs near the front podium were folded and propped up around the front few tables. Assuming someone setting up had been interrupted in their task, I made the mistake of unfolding those chairs and putting them in place. In no time, I was assaulted by an irate deacon who brusquely informed me that those seats were “reserved for his friends.” I was a young and inexperienced local pastor back then, but even then, I knew that church had a problem. They were “respecters of persons.” What should have been a *fellowship dinner* turned out to be simply...a *dinner*. Apparently, James knew this type of church...and he addressed the issue head-on.

Stop showing favoritism based on appearance! (vv. 1-4). It’s interesting that James names the name of our Lord only twice in his five chapters. The first is in the salutation, where James submits to Him as *Lord* (1:1). Here, he emphasizes His *glory*. The effect is to set the backdrop: how can anyone set himself up to judge others with the *Lord of Glory* looking on? The first condemnation James issues is against the most common form of pre-determinate judging: one’s appearance. Obviously, our grandparents had it right! “You can’t judge a book by its cover.” And yet we are all guilty of it at some time or other. Those dressed nicely are preferred over those dressed shoddily. Those who are clean and tidy are preferred over those who are dirty or smell bad. Those who “fit in” are preferred to those who “aren’t our type.” James points out that when churches offer preferential treatment based on outward appearance, they have become divisive, setting themselves up not as righteous judges, but as selfish, corrupt ones (v. 4). For reflection: *Have you seen this kind of discrimination in your own congregation? What should we do about it when it happens?*

Stop showing favoritism based on money! (vv. 5-7). Again, how many churches are guilty of trying to lure in the wealthy? James reminds his readers of the utter hypocrisy. Believers scattered in gentile places were often mistreated, maligned, and abused by the wealthy powerbrokers. And yet when the same wealthy people stopped by the church, they received a red-carpet reception while the normal, everyday, ordinary (but faithful!) church member was ignored at best or mistreated at worst. For reflection: *Search the Bible for verses that compare the rich and the poor. How does God view them each? How does His view apply to our churches today?*

Stop showing favoritism based on anything! (vv. 8-13). After pointing out the flaws of favoritism, James gives the reasons why preferential treatment in any case is wrong. First, the law of God to *love your neighbor as yourself* (v. 8; Lev. 19:18; Luke 10:25 ff) applies to *all our neighbors*, regardless of their social status, race, or appearance. Second, showing favoritism sets

up artificial and evil divisions, regardless of how righteous one claims to be (v. 8). Third, showing favoritism automatically nullifies God's mercy. After all, aren't we all guilty of sin and deserving eternal damnation? Yet God chose us *while we were yet sinners* (Rom. 5:8). How then can we set ourselves up to judge others and exclude the very same mercy that God showed to us? (vv. 12-13). For reflection: *We have often heard it said, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." What does that mean? How might that apply in this discussion?*