

Session 2

September 9, 2018

## OPEN ARMS

James 2:1-10

When it was time to anoint a new king over Israel, even Samuel—God’s own spokesperson and prophet—was quick to jump to conclusions. In passing over the prime son of Jesse, God reminded Samuel, “The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). Most of us know that verse well enough to quote it...but applying it is another matter! If we were honest, we would have to admit that we make some sort of snap-decision about people the instant we lay eyes on them. While this is a selfish and arrogant attitude anywhere, it is particularly disturbing when evident in the church. In this text, James gives three reasons why playing favorites hurts our churches.

**Playing favorites divides the congregation (vv. 1-4).** We often say, “the ground is level at the foot of the cross.” The Lord Jesus exemplified His equal treatment of all people throughout His life and ministry. Yet a half-dozen times in the gospel of Luke alone, we read of the religious leaders ridiculing Jesus for socializing with the “wrong crowd,” specifically tax collectors and other “sinners;” ironically those whom Jesus specifically came to save! (see Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15). James’ example is also about judging people based on social status. In this case, it’s not their sinful condition, but rather their financial condition that becomes the litmus test of acceptability. Simply put, James condemns the practice of giving special treatment to the wealthy and especially inconsiderate treatment to the poor. Verse 4 explains the danger to the church: first, *discriminating among yourselves* means “distinguishing” (or “making divisions”) within your own body. And that means someone is making those judgements, and what’s worse, doing so based only on outward appearance. When all is said and done, such judgments demonstrate the selfish, manipulative thoughts within us.

**Playing favorites demonstrates hypocrisy (vv. 5-7).** James next reasons with those who are quick to embrace the rich while rejecting the poor. His reasoning is simple: generally speaking, God is on the side of the poor man, not because he is poor, but because of the humble dependence on God the poor must maintain. The Bible is full of examples of the poor honoring God and God in turn upholding the poor for their faith (for example, see the letter to the church at Smyrna in Rev. 2:8ff). In addition, there is an underlying insinuation that the believers James addresses are of humble means (see 1:9-11). So he confronts them sharply: why in the world do you cater to the rich? Aren’t they the ones who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren’t the rich the ones who curse the name of Jesus—that precious name under which you were baptized? Such hypocrisy!

**Playing favorites disregards God’s law (vv. 8- 10).** When Jesus was asked which law was most important, He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command.” Then Jesus added, “The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Then He summed it up this way, “All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands” (Matt. 22:37-40). In this response, Jesus linked the relationship we have with others as directly impacting the relationship we have with God. We must love God supremely, then love others as we love ourselves. Obviously, the only way to

avoid favoritism is to treat all people equally, loving them as we love ourselves. Failure to do so, then, is a violation of the commandment Jesus gave. How does that affect our relationship to God? James is clear: “For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all” (v. 10). To do something even as mundane as favoring some people over others shows our disregard for God’s law.