

Authentic Christians Must Not Show Favoritism

Message 3 of 6 in the series: "Authentic: Life Lessons from the Book of James"

A. James, an early Christian leader, wrote an open letter instructing believers fleeing religious persecution how to authentically live out their faith.

"This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am writing to the 'twelve tribes'—**Jewish believers scattered abroad**. Greetings!" James 1:1 (NLT)

1. Before they were driven out of Jerusalem, the recipients of James' letter had experienced loving/worshipping/praying/giving/serving/sharing in an authentic church family.

"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And **all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had**. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved." Acts 2:42-47 (NLT)

2. James reminded his readers that in order to carry out the assignment Jesus had given them, they were going to need to establish authentic loving/worshipping/praying/giving/serving/sharing church families wherever they ended up. James also reminded them to not go back to their old ways of thinking/acting.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And **you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere**—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8 (NLT)

"Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and **refusing to let the world corrupt you**." James 1:27 (NLT)

Life Application: Our love for each other in our church family authenticates the Good News of Jesus better than anything else. "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. **Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples**." John 13:34-35 (NLT)

B. James said authentic Christians must not show favoritism.

"My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" James 2:1-4 (NIV)

1. James' letter was sent to people scattered throughout the Roman Empire which was filled with prejudice and discrimination based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. People were permanently categorized because they were Jew/Gentile, slave/free, rich/poor, etc. It was shocking for unbelievers to see Christians worshipping, praying together, sharing meals, and serving each other irrespective of cultural norms.

"These who have **turned the world upside down** have come here too." Acts 17:6b (NKJV)

2. Believers should not show favoritism because God does not show favoritism.

"For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome **God, who shows no partiality** and cannot be bribed." Deuteronomy 10:17 (NLT)

"Then Peter replied, 'I see very clearly that **God shows no favoritism**. In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.'" Acts 10:34-35 (NLT)

3. Showing favoritism to some and discriminating against others is sin.

"Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' But **if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin**." James 2:8-9a (NLT) (*Leviticus 19:18*)

4. Jesus came into our world to pay the penalty for our sins and tear down the barriers that kept us from loving God and loving each other.

“We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” Romans 3:22-24 (NLT)

“For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, **he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us...** He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.” Ephesians 2:14-16 (NLT)

“There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For **you are all one in Christ Jesus.**” Galatians 3:28 (NLT)

5. We must not dishonor the poor. Jesus preached the Good News to rich and poor alike, and He warned that riches can be an obstacle to faith.

“Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: **Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?** But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?” James 2:5-7 (NIV)

“I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I’ll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!” Matthew 19:23-24 (NLT)

“Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.” 1 John 2:15-17 (NLT)

6. We must not show favoritism because of a person’s wealth, fame, or status because God often chooses to accomplish His work through people our world would overlook.

“Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that **few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.** Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.” 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NLT)

“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: **man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.**” 1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. How would you react if Taylor Swift, Nick Saban, or Charles Barkley showed up to worship with us one Sunday? How should we react?
2. Read Acts 2:42-47. What characteristics of the very first church in Jerusalem stand out to you? Why do you think God allowed religious persecution to scatter these early believers all over the place? (Acts 1:8 & 8:1-4, James 1:1)
3. What characteristics of the first church did James want his readers to incorporate into the new churches they started in their new locations? (James 1:27 & 2:1) What does it look like when a church gets corrupted by the world?

4. Discuss the following reasons why Christians must not show favoritism:
 - God doesn't show favoritism. (Deuteronomy 10:17, Acts 10:34-35)
 - Showing favoritism is sin. (James 2:8-9)
 - Jesus came into our world to pay the penalty for our sins and tear down the barriers that kept us from loving God and loving each other. (Romans 3:22-24, Ephesians 2:14-16, Galatians 3:28)
 - God often chooses to accomplish His work through people our world would overlook. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29, 1 Samuel 16:7)
5. Apparently, it's always been tempting to show partiality to wealthy people but discriminate against the poor even in church. Why is this? Why does it matter? (James 2:5-7, Matthew 19:23-24, 1 John 2:15-17)
6. How would you turn the following verses into a prayer for our church? Who are our neighbors? "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.**" Matthew 22:37-40 (NLT)