

Join us in being on mission with God!

OUR VISION

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

"The Danger of Favoritism"

James 2:1-13

Getting Started: Combating the Pull of Status

After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.

Photographs of groups of people tell a lot about the people in the group. Some of you may have pictures of elementary, junior high, or high school classes. You may have pictures of an athletic team or an extra-curricular club. Your albums might include pictures of extended family members, featuring an assortment of aunts, uncles, and cousins.

It's almost impossible to look at these pictures without comparing the individuals. This one is smart. That one is the most popular. This one is more successful. That one doesn't make wise choices. This one is more affluent. That one is struggling.

It's very difficult for us to think about people without wrestling with questions of status. We assign different levels of value to different individuals according to our internal comparison charts.

On the good side, this tendency can make us discerning. Our experience teaches us that one person can be freely trusted, but another does not have the character to warrant trust. On the bad side, we can fall into assigning value on superficial grounds not based on character, but linked to status.

Q: Name some of the indicators our culture uses to assign or withhold status that are not linked to character. (I've started the list for you.)

- Someone who works with their hands or works with their heads.
- Someone who is at ease speaking in front of a crowd rather than nervous
- Driving a new car rather than an older car

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Thinking about Status

Status is as old as the human race. In Genesis chapter 4 God responded differently to the actions of Cain and those of Abel. This caused tension which eventually lead to murder.

1. On what grounds did God treat Cain different from Abel? (See Genesis 4:2-5)

2. What does God call Cain to do in order for God to respond to him favorably? (See verses 6-7)



James 2:1-13

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.³ 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,"⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?⁵ Listen, my dear brothers: 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?⁶ But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?⁷ Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

3. Competition for status begins in family life. What was going on in the house of Isaac and Rebekah in Genesis 25:28? How do you think this impacted the two boys?

4. What kind of competition for status or recognition did you experience in your own home growing up? How did that impact your relationships later on in life?

God and favoritism

The word for *favoritism* in James 2:1 occurs three other places in the Bible.

1. What does the Bible say about God's own actions with regard to favoritism in Romans 2:11 and Ephesians 6:9?

2. How do you reconcile that statement with what God says in Malachi 1:2-3?

3. God does not show partiality. But he does not treat all people alike. Do you think that sets a pattern for how we should treat others, or is this a case of God playing by a set of rules that do not apply to us? Why?

4. The premise behind verse two says something about the composition of the early church. What does it imply about the people who came together to become disciples in the early church?

5. How does 1 Corinthians 11:21-22 describe some of the problems that arose because of the diversity in the early church?

Best seats in the house

Given a limited amount of primary space at an event, location becomes important. There are only so many seats near the 50-yard-line of a football game. There are only a certain number of tables at a wedding reception near the head table. There is only so much room in any given presidential inaugural ball. There are only a number of parking spaces for employ-

Combating the Pull of Status

ees adjacent to the building. The way in which such places are assigned or given usually reflects some measure of status. Even in a 'first-come, first-served' situation, the preference is given to those who have the ability to arrive earlier than others.

1. What kind of privileged position did the mother of the sons of Zebedee seek in Matthew 20:21? How did Jesus respond?

You may recall that the early church often met in homes. These homes did not have tables and chairs in the sense we see them in the Western world today. The seating was more like hosting a small group in your home without much furniture.

2. How do the previous facts help you understand the seating options given in the illustration in verse 3?

3. The word *you* that occurs twice in verse 3 is emphatic. You could print it in bold or underlined. What is the host telling the two different people in this verse?

4. James 2:4 states that the characters in the story have become judges with evil motives (NASB) or thoughts (NIV). What is the nature of the *evil* that is reflected in this action?

5. People tend to cater to the wealthy in every society. This is not about people with wealth buying more expensive stuff. That distinction is based on purchasing power. Is it wrong for goods or services to be too expensive for some, but not for others?

6. What James takes note of is that the host in the story treated the wealthy man different simply because he was wealthy, not because he had offered more for the same seat. What would motivate a decision of that kind?

7. James maintains that God has turned the status game on its head in the way he decided to populate the kingdom of heaven. What did God do according to verse 5?

8. In Matthew 19:24, Jesus makes a challenging statement about personal wealth and the kingdom of life. What does he say? What is there about wealth that can complicate the call to trust in Christ?



Reaching Up and Reaching Out

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Note: The kingdom is not shut to people with means. Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia, and the women of Acts 17:4 represent some of the upper class who responded to Jesus.

- 8. James points out that some who are wealthy actually cause injury to the church. What do some of them do that inflicts injury on the church according to verse 7?

- 9. It would be wrong to stereotype the rich as universally opposed to the gospel. Nevertheless, many of them opposed the early church. Why do you think this was true? (See Acts 9:26-27 for one reason.)

- 10. In order to prevent us from showing favoritism, James lays down a single guideline. What is the rule-of-thumb that helps us avoid showing favoritism? How might that have been applied in the seating arrangements in the early church?

- 11. Verses 9-10 remind us that the title of lawbreaker does not apply only to those who engage in extraordinarily bad behavior. What does it take in order to be a lawbreaker in the mind of God?

- 12. Verse 10 describes something we do to excuse ourselves from the charge of defying God and violating his commands. What do we tend to do to justify ourselves. Why does this tactic not work in God's sight?

- 13. Verse 12 tells us to "speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom." To what law does he refer? How does following this principle help us avoid even unintentional favoritism?

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