

## How Life Works: Show No Partiality

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Let's open our Bibles to James chapter two, James chapter two. As you're finding your place there, maybe you're here for the very first time and I want to welcome you to worship at Watkinsville. We're in a series of messages this fall called How Life Works and we're looking at James to see how eternal life works in everyday life. I'd love to be able to meet you today if you're here for the first time or maybe you've come for a long time and we've never met. I'll hang around here at the front after the service and I'd love for you to say hello and I know some of you are in the chapel right now and maybe you're a guest there in the chapel. It's a little bit of a walk but maybe we could meet up here, I'd love to say hello to you before you get off the property. And if we miss each other, the Sunday paper you received when you came in has a connect card that's a part of it. You can easily detach it and put some information there if you will, and then hand it to someone at the guest service desk. They want to put a gift in your hand and want to say hello to you, meet you. And it's great to have you here. We've got a group of folks from North Georgia, there are several churches represented here for conference this weekend called Cultivate. And you guys, where are you? Let me see a hand and wave at me right up here. Thank y'all. Y'all welcome them to Watkinsville and Athens and it's great to have you on our property and I look forward to being able to see you again along the way. I know several of you are students in high school and maybe the Lord will allow you to be here at UGA in the future. And you already know where to go to church. All right, so I hope this is one decision made for you.

We debate a lot of things that we say are right or wrong, and can get into some categories like Romans talks about that are disputable matters. And you'd say, well that's wrong for you, but it's not wrong for me, or that's right for you but it's not right for me. And sometimes it goes back and forth between friends, or it goes back and forth between spouses or parents and children. Children and parents will say something like this, they'll say, "Well, I can't give you chapter and verse, but I'm just telling you it's not right." And maybe a child or a friend will say back to us, "The Bible doesn't actually say that this is wrong", or, "Where does it really just spell it out that that's right?" There are some disputable matters and there are some things that really come down to whether they're wise or unwise in life, and how we make those choices on what we're going to do. But today when come to James chapter two, there is no lack of clarity on what is right and wrong in this passage of scripture. In fact, it's more clear perhaps than a lot of other pages that you would read in scripture. Pastor James, James, the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, writing to scattered believers, comes right out and he says, "If you do this, you are committing sin." That's really vague, isn't it? He doesn't say this, he actually puts the action in there. And we're going to read it and I want you to hear it, discover what goes in that blank. He says, if you practice this, you're committing sin, no debate. And so let's read the first 13 verses of James chapter two and let's see what he's so adamant about and what he, really, in a lot of ways, is worked up about.

James chapter two beginning in verse one,

My brothers,<sup>[a]</sup> show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. <sup>2</sup> For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," <sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

<sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. <sup>11</sup> For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James, with extreme clarity says in verse nine, "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin." If you show partiality, you're committing sin. When you hear a statement like that, our expectation would be as followers of Jesus Christ, we would immediately go to this place of asking, am I committing that sin? Am I committing partiality toward others? Maybe other questions that would come to mind as you hear that, if you show partiality, you're committing sin, not only would we ask, am I doing that? Is there some area of my life where I am showing partiality? Maybe we were to ask, well, before I go there, I want to know what partiality means. What does partiality mean? Maybe another question that would come to mind would be, why would that be a sin anyway? Why would partiality be a sin? Why would James be so alarmed, so vocal, so clear about this? And maybe you even picked up on this verse where he says that if you make distinctions among yourselves and become judges, you are judges with evil thoughts. Why would showing distinction or why would showing partiality mean that I have evil thoughts? There's a question before all of those that I want to answer first. We're going to answer some of those questions that I've just mentioned, but one question I want to answer from the very beginning is where James starts in verse one of chapter two, and it's this question. Do you hold faith in Jesus Christ?

Do you hold faith in Jesus Christ? That question needs to be answered, and my prayer is that it would be answered by every one of us here in this room. Everyone that's watching right now in the chapel, that we would be able to answer with joy, "Yes, I hold faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory". And there'd be great assurance. There would be great confidence, there would be great joy and declaring, "Yes, my faith is in Jesus Christ." It's critical here to call our attention to that very first phrase. When you see a title of a sermon series called How Life Works, it may come across as being, here's five chapters that just give us kind of a to do list of how to live better. Just some life hacks, a list of things that if I can check 9 out of 10 I'm doing pretty good and life's going to be all right. What we're talking about here when we say how life works, we recognize that James is writing to scattered believers in different cultures and different

countries and he saying to them, here's how eternal life works. And this is the third time in as many weeks that James has brought up the picture of salvation, the gospel, the good news. He's brought up what saves us. He's brought up that we have relationship with God before he ever gets to the working part. Before he drills down on doing good things, He makes sure he talks about salvation.

A couple of weeks ago, he spoke of God begetting us, or bringing us forth by the word of truth. Then last week, we saw that he spoke of the implanted word. The implanted word in us. Again, a picture of the implanted word, the implanted truth, is a picture again of salvation. Of who Jesus is and what he does, and that he comes to live within us. And now in verse one of chapter two he says, "Show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." Don't forget, James, the brother of Jesus, grew up with him not believing, but now 12 to 15 years later, he's writing this letter to scattered believers and he is in full gear. He is in full blown belief, truth. Not my brother, but Jesus Christ. Our Lord and the Lord of glory. He has come to this full place of just knowing that the Jesus Christ that he's talking about is the one that you have faith in, the one you recognize as the Messiah, the one you recognize is fully divine as well as fully human, and he is the Lord of glory. That's who our faith is in. That's what we're talking about and if you know him, you're going to live life in this way and particularly in this case by showing no partiality.

So I'd ask you, start right there. Do you hold faith in Jesus? Have you believed with your heart that Jesus died to pay for your sins? Have you confessed him as Lord? Do you believe that God raised him from the dead? He did it to pay for your sin, and you trust in him alone. You turn to him, you leave whatever you've been trusting in. You believe and cling to, surrender your life to Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Here's the deal right now. It may be the whole reason you're here. Nothing else that would be said would be for the purpose of anything else. Today, you came because God wants to save your soul. And right in this room or right in the chapel, you can say, "Lord Jesus, forgive me. Save me. I give you my life. I want to follow you as my Lord. I believe you're alive." You put it into words this call of faith, this call of belief that you want to be all his and he'll be all yours. Now, reality is, is that with the great majority, we've done that. And so what does that look like? It looks like us holding onto the faith of Jesus and as we hold onto the faith of Jesus, there's a way we live. And James addresses specifically here how we live when we relate to other people, how we live when we gather together, how we live when we go into this world, and it's to not show partiality.

So here's another question, I want to number this number one. What does partiality mean? Some Bible versions translate the word partiality, some Bible translations translate it as favoritism, to not show favoritism, to not show partiality. King James version translated this word as to be not a respecter of persons. The word, they are translated respecter of persons or partiality or favoritism has a very literal meaning, and the Greek word's most literal meaning means to receive the face, to receive the face. And just play with that a little bit. To receive the face, a word that means to receive the face. To receive, that has to do with like, welcoming fellowshiping, approaching them coming into your presence. You're going into them, to receive someone. The face speaks of how we look, what we see with our eyes how a person looks. And so he uses this word and most literal sense, to receive the face, to translate it to James making the point to not receive the face. Don't show partiality, don't show, in colloquial

language, it would be like this, it would be making judgment on face value. And he says, don't make a judgment about people on face value. You hear someone say, don't judge the book by the cover, you've heard that said before. I brought some books here, there are five books that I would consider my all time reads, these are two of them. You said, well, it looks like four from where I'm seated. There are four books, but they're two of the same type. All right, and they're just my favorite books. Here's one in a top five, called "Spiritual Leadership" by Oswald Sanders. Several of you've read this book before. If any of you ever seen this version? That's the very first copy that I received when I was a senior in college. So we're going back about 35 years ago. That's a treasure right there. Here's the new one. Look a little different. You see that? Here's the story. Both of these books have the same content. They just have a different cover. Same content, same thing on the inside, just a different cover. But if I laid these books before you and I said, Hey, I want you to read this book over the next month, take it. Some of you would walk up to this and just automatically, you would just go like this. "Alright, I'll read it. It's good." But others of you who really have an appreciation for antiques will be drawn to this book. And you would walk up to it, you said, well, I just liked the way, man, I just liked the smell of an old book. I just like it. You'd be drawn to the cover, to the look. Same content.

James is saying to us that when we relate to others, when we relate to people, the people sitting around you, the people coming in and out of these doors, people you eat with at the dining hall, the people you're in a dorm with, the people you work with, your neighborhood, your community. Look, don't receive the face. Don't show partiality, don't judge the book by the cover. Don't judge the person by the face. And he gives an example of how they do that when they gather. He says, here's an issue that I see, what you're doing is you look at the rich man that comes in, you look at the one adorned with jewelry all over his fingers, and you look at one that has owned this bright, shining, glowing clothing and you welcome and you receive him. "Hey, Hey, come right up here. Come here. Come in." And you see the poor one dressed shabby and you say, "We got a place for you right over here." James says that kind of partiality, no. No.

Why would partiality be a sin? Next question. Why would partiality be a sin? Number one, it's counter cultural to the kingdom of God. It's counter-cultural to the kingdom of God. It's not counter-cultural to the kingdom of the world. The kingdom of the world actually operates like this and a lot of environments where we do day to day work and day to day life, it operates in a system that shows partiality based on outward appearances and facial value and possessions and things like education, things like our wealth. The way we look, whether it's skin color or hairstyle, and James is saying, that's world culture, here's the kingdom of God culture.

Verse five, "Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?" Now, he doesn't say he's promised the kingdom to those that are poor financially, earthly. He says he's promised to kingdom to those who love him, but he points out to those, when you're making decisions, when you're making distinctions based in this case on wealth, do you not know that God chose poor? And that he didn't choose just the rich to have heaven, he looked at the poor and said, they will be rich in faith. It harkens back to Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus said, blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom. And he is taking earthly pictures of poverty and putting it together with spiritual pictures of poverty, and

he's showing that for us to have right relationship with God, there has to come a time where we see ourselves as spiritually poor, spiritually bankrupt, spiritually desperate. And James is pointing out, as Jesus pointed out, that earthly wealth has a way of getting in the way of recognizing our spiritual need. And when we have earthly wealth and earthly value and temporary possessions, those things can become great roadblocks to us seeing our need for faith and our need for a savior. James points out, he says, the poor can be rich by having faith and the rich have to become poor spiritually to have faith. And the culture of the kingdom of God is to come to him poor in need of eternal life and forgive.

Number two, why would partiality be a sin? Number two, it misrepresents the character of God. It misrepresents the character of God. It says, God's chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. Every time I read that verse, I think of a story that happened my first year out of college. I'm visiting in a local park in Auburn, Alabama that had hundreds of mobile homes. We're knocking on doors, and I'm with this lady this about 30, 40 years older than me, one of the most bold witnesses for Christ I've ever known. I'll just say her name to give her honor, her name was Shirley Chance. And Ms. Shirley needed someone to go visit with her, she's got a burden for this park of mobile homes and she wanted somebody to go with her. And so I was an intern, and Al said, go with Ms. Shirley and I went with Ms. Shirley. We parked and walked to that neighborhood. I remember one day, we knocked on one door and came running out from under this porch was this giant German Shepherd, full speed, teeth glowing. Just coming and barking, and I'm dying. I mean, he wasn't going to have to bite me, I would just die right in front of him. And Ms. Shirley's just standing there going, "In the name of Jesus, I rebuke you. You get back under that porch, you will not come out!" And I'm just like, preach sister, preach, preach. And I don't know if it was there, but a chain caught him before he got to me. And I praise Jesus. Hallelujah. We went to one door, and we knocked on the door and the door came open and the heat out of that mobile home hit us in the face. The smell of that mobile home hit us in the face. And this lady that filled up the whole door asked, can I help you with something? And we said, we've come to talk to you about Jesus. And she smiled with one tooth right there, one tooth, and she put both hands in the air and she said, "Oh, I may be poor in money, but I'm rich in Jesus. I'm rich in Jesus." Amen. I think of that story and how you read a verse like this, and how God had given her the riches of salvation, and it would not matter how rich she ever became on this earth, it would never be as valuable as the riches of faith.

The character of God is not to look on the outside. Fortunately for all of us, God looks at the heart, and first Samuel chapter 16 verse seven, you'd think it might be an old Testament verse, but revealing his character early on, God said, 1 Samuel 16:7, "For the Lord sees not as man sees, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." To show partiality misrepresents the character of God.

Number three, to show partiality ignores the actions of some. That's what James is saying. James is making the argument, he says, here's an exposition of your culture. So you've been scattered and in this scattered, dispersed cultures that you're living in, is this not your experience? And he exposes, he brings to their attention. He said, you're trying to honor those that have possessions, that are showing up in what they wear, and he says, verse six, "you've dishonored the poor man or not the rich, the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag

you into court, are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?" He's calling to their attention, what's been your experience as Jewish people that have believed Jesus to be the Messiah, and now you're scattered among unbelieving Gentiles and your scattered among unbelieving Jews, what is your experience? You're honoring those that have come against you and have brought the persecution on that I talked about in the first chapter. You're experiencing these trials and tribulations, and now you're welcoming those with wealth and riches, these outward things, you're making distinctions based on that. Why? They've dishonored you and the name of the one whom you follow. He's saying, get your eyes in the right place.

The fourth reason that partiality would be a sin is that it breaks the royal law. What is the Royal law? Jesus was asked, what is the greatest commandment? And he responded by saying, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second of these is to love your neighbor as yourself. And James identifies that as the royal law. He says, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You are doing well. When we show partiality toward one, that means we're leaving out another. And he's shown us already in Jesus when he taught the parable of the good Samaritan, who our neighbor is. Everyone. Our neighbor is not based on what they can do for us, our neighbor is not based on their ethnicity, our neighbor is not based on their religion. He's saying here, look, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You're doing well. But if you show partiality, you're committing sin. You break the royal law, to love your neighbor. You can't exalt one over the other. You can't prefer one over the other. You can't show favoritism, partiality over another without putting another back. He said, you just broke the royal law when you do that.

Third question, why does this equate with evil thoughts? Well, this is a check our motives. It's not me checking your motives. It's not your neighbor checking your motives. It's the Holy Spirit checking your motives. He says, when we make distinctions among others, we have evil thoughts and what could those evil thoughts be? One of them would be this, that we believe that some people are more valuable than others based on their earthly valuables. An evil thought would be to believe that some people are more valuable than others based on their earthly valuables. And James says, you're committing sin. Earthly valuables, what are they for us? Money, possessions we have, education. It can be our skin color. We may think that this is valuable, that's not as valuable, we may think that's really what's important, that's not as important. He said, check your thoughts, check your motives.

Number two, we selfishly believe that giving benefits to those who have benefits will benefit us. Stay with me for just a second. It's an everyday battle for all of us to base our conversations, to base our attention, in fact, James used verse three he says, "And if you pay attention to..." We have this battle going on with eternal life, with followers of Jesus, based on who we pay attention to. And we can fall into this trap or give into the temptation to pay attention to those who can benefit us because we see something that they have that's beneficial, we think. And we can make a celebrity out of a person. We may not have enough time or care for this person because we got to go toward this person, something's drawing us there, and just, Holy Spirit, check our motives.

Several years ago a pastor I knew in Nashville told me about a story and I was like, "I'm glad you did that, not me that did that." But this is what they did, one Sunday at their church building they had, when everybody arrived, a long black stretch limousine parked right beside the side entrance. Motor running, man standing outside of the stretch limousine, and just waiting. All the people came in, he started introducing and he said, "Hey, want you to know today that we we're here in Nashville and Taylor Swift is going to be coming in in just a moment, she's going to be with us this morning." He starting telling about her, and the more he told, the people starting to move, talking, cameras came up, phones started going, the side door opened and when the side door opened, the church stood up and started clapping, cheering, whistling. And the door just stayed open. She never walked in and he said, "look, she's not here." All right. I said, "brother, do you need a job? That probably didn't go over real well." What does it do? It hits hard at the fact that we can begin to really make a big deal out of people. And James is saying to us that when it comes to followers of Christ, there are no big deals. Don't show partiality.

11 years ago I preached from this passage of scripture and when I finished, that following week, I got a letter in the mail from a man in our church. He's still here and apart of our church, and the letter in the mail came and inside of it he said, I wanted to share this poem with you. It's called the Cold Within. I stuck it away 11 years ago. Listen to how it goes. The Cold Within,

Six humans trapped by happenstance  
In bleak and bitter cold.  
Each one possessed a stick of wood  
Or so the story's told.  
Their dying fire in need of logs  
The first man held his back  
For of the faces round the fire  
He noticed one was black.  
The next man looking 'cross the way  
Saw one not of his church  
And couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire his stick of birch.  
The third one sat in tattered clothes.  
He gave his coat a hitch.  
Why should his log be put to use  
To warm the idle rich?  
The rich man just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store  
And how to keep what he had earned  
From the lazy shiftless poor.  
The black man's face bespoke revenge  
As the fire passed from his sight.  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.

The last man of this forlorn group  
Did nought except for gain.  
Giving only to those who gave  
Was how he played the game.  
Their logs held tight in death's still hands  
Was proof of human sin.  
They didn't die from the cold without  
They died from the cold within.

Who wins? The only ones that win are those that show mercy. And the reason that's the case is that every single one of us finds the ground level at the cross. All needing a Savior because of what's inside, not because of what's outside. And we've been given the mercy of God. And James is saying, therefore, if we've received mercy, then our practice ought to be to everyone else, to give mercy. Because here's what wins when it comes to judgment: mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. We have to live by faith's value, not face value.

Father, we bow before you today and, please, in this room, in the chapel, would you search our hearts and show us where we are wrong and committing sin. Would you take some time, both rooms right now, just to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any ways, maybe, you show partiality or favoritism. Ask the Holy Spirit to forgive you. Confess it. Repent of it. Take some time. I want to ask you, as a church, corporately, from individual hearts that come together as a body of Christ, as followers of Jesus, would you resolve with me, would you commit with me, by God's grace and by his mercy, to be a church that doesn't show partiality and doesn't show favoritism? And would you ask the Father in heaven to make us a merciful people?

Lord, I believe that you've told us that show impartiality is sin because you know even 2000 years later it'd still be something we would be battling with. I want to ask you, God, to convict, change, and transform us. Kill sin in us. Lord, I pray that you would help us to love our neighbors, our self, help us to be merciful toward others. Lord, we thank you for your grace and your mercy, the hope we have in you. Lord, would you use our church, based on this word, to bring you great glory, to be a right reflection of your character and who you are in the kingdom of heaven. We pray these things in the name of King Jesus. Amen.