

# The Rotten Heart of Favouritism

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[ 0 : 00 ] The word we translate as favoritism literally means to receive the face. It's not really that far from our expression, the face fits, is it?

It's the same idea, the idea of the rotten heart of favoritism at work in, of all places, the church. The early Christians to whom James was writing had a problem.

They were dirt poor, but there were rich people in their churches and the relationships between the two groups could sometimes be strained. Some of the rich Christians lorded it over their poorer brothers and expected preferential treatment.

And some of the poor Christians were, to use another term, toadying up to the rich in the hope that an important association may serve to help them climb out of poverty.

It was, shall we say, a church with complicated economic dynamics. For many Christians, the face didn't fit.

[ 1 : 11 ] For others, the face fitted too well. They were given preferential treatment. They were given the best seats at church meetings. In matters of church discipline, because they were rich, they always got off a left smelling of roses.

By contrast, the poorer Christians didn't get any kind of seat at all, other than the floor. And if they faced church discipline, the verdict was a foregone conclusion.

In many ways, the church scene into which James is writing had become little more than a pale reflection of the world, where face fits thinking has always run rampant.

Over the next couple of weeks, as we're going to work our way through James chapter 2, we're going to learn more and more about what happens and what lies at the rotten heart of favoritism. But this evening from verse 1, I want us to begin where James begins. With calling out favoritism for what it is. It is wrong.

[ 2 : 22 ] It is diabolically wrong. He writes, My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

He could not be clearer. Showing favoritism is wrong. Having a face fits type atmosphere in the church is evil.

And from verse 1, James begins to show why favoritism is wrong. And in this verse, he gives us four reasons. We are members of one family.

We are saved by one faith. We are disciples of one Christ. We are worshipers of one Lord. Even as we begin to access this subject together, think to yourself of ways in which we as a church and individually as Christians can be tempted to show favoritism.

And perhaps rather like me, you'll get more of a surprise than you think. First of all then, we are members of one family.

[ 3 : 39 ] We are members of one family. James begins the verse, my brothers. Now we know, of course, the title, my brothers, as used in the New Testament, is to be interpreted brothers and sisters.

But the point remains, the first salvos of James's attack on favoritism in the church are fired from the guns of family relationships.

He says, my brothers. The first reason that we are not to show any kind of favoritism is because we are members of one family.

The early church was heavily characterized by, sorry, the early history of Israel was heavily characterized by favoritism in families. So the conflict between Jacob and Esau was born out of parental favoritism.

Joseph was Jacob's favorite. And for that reason, he ended up being sold into slavery in Egypt. Favoritism, especially in families, is a very ugly thing, which has no good outcome.

[ 4 : 52 ] And we might have hoped that Israel would have learned its lesson. But it's clear that the Jews were just like us in this. They forgot their history and were therefore doomed to make the same mistakes over and over and over again.

Yes, even these Jewish Christians. In the church, we are family. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no room for favoritism here. It is no less an ugly thing for favoritism in the church than it is favoritism in the family.

The wise parent has no favorites among his children. They are all special to him or her. And so in the church, we must constantly bear in mind that there is to be no room for any kind of favoritism whatsoever.

We are all the same, all of us, the same in status before God. Indeed, we could not have a higher status than we already do because God has adopted us as his royal sons and royal daughters through faith in Christ.

[ 6 : 13 ] We are one family, the rich and the poor and the poor and the rich. To show favoritism against another Christian is to show spite and shame our brother, our sister.

And ultimately, therefore, it is to spite and shame our heavenly father, whose children we all are through faith in Christ Jesus. Before we dare show favoritism on the basis of possessions or gifts or status or charisma or anything else.

Look upon the face of our heavenly father and realize that in him we are one family. But look as well how James begins the verse.

My brothers, my brothers, he says, my brothers. At this time, James was the bishop of Jerusalem. And along with Peter, was the most powerful leader in the early church.

And yet before he is a bishop over the people of Jerusalem, he is a brother to the people of God. He places those to whom he's writing on the same level as himself.

[ 7 : 32 ] He and they are brothers long before they are leaders and followers. When you think of great Christians, I don't know who goes through your mind.

Whoever they are, they are our family in Christ long before they are our leaders in Christ. There are no VIPs in this family.

All are equal, one in Christ Jesus. Favoritism at work in a family can rip that family apart and cause damage which lasts for generations.

Favoritism at work in a church can rip that church apart and cause its spiritual death. Favoritism belongs in either family or fellowship.

If any of us are tempted to toady up to someone who is richer than us, either financially or in terms of popularity or in terms of reputation or in terms of gifts.

[ 8 : 45 ] Remember the humility of James, the brother of our Lord, the bishop of Jerusalem. If anyone had a right to be considered a VIP in the early church, it was him.

And yet he addresses all his fellow Christians. My brothers. We are members of one family. Second reason why we are not to show favoritism is that we are saved by one faith.

We are saved by one faith. James continues. My brothers. As believers in. My brothers as believers in.

We are not only fellow members of a family. We are fellow members of a faith. We share. Family in common.

And we share. Faith in common. Incidentally, does this not put pain. Once and for all to that accusation that the letter of James is. Legalistic.

[ 9 : 49 ] That it's all about works. It's not about faith. All the way through we've been arguing that. That the message of the letter of James is. Faith at work.

But it's the faith. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Which must come first. As first. As believers in. Only then can. And must we work out that faith.

In practical expression. But what joins us together. Is a common faith in Jesus Christ. As our Savior and Lord. We're not people of faith.

In the same way. Other religions are. We are people of the Christian faith. That's what links us. Not an abstract concept we call faith. But the person Jesus Christ.

In whom we have faith. We are believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we dare not show favoritism. Golf in recent years has become.

[ 10 : 51 ] Somewhat of a select sport. For the posh and the affluent. But when I was growing up. In the small Highland village of Golsby. On the east coast of Sullivan. It was anything but a game.

For the posh and affluent. Everyone played golf. What linked us together was. We played golf. The village doctor.

Played with the village bin man. Joiners. Played with professionals. There were no distinctions. Between classes. Whatsoever on the golf course.

They used to say of the golf course. That it was a great social leveler. Well if that's true of golf. It's even more true of the church. This place.

Is the greatest of all social levelers. We're rich and poor. We're black and white. We're male and female. We're slave and free. Joined together.

[ 11 : 48 ] As one. Saved in a common faith. In Christ Jesus. But there's even more here. For what kind of faith do we profess? What kind of faith is it?

It's a faith which boasts. Not in what we have done for God. But in what God has done for us. Our faith isn't one in which there is any kind of pecking order whatsoever.

With you being better than me. Or me being better than you. Rather we each come as sinners to Jesus. Admitting not how good we were.

Or how good we are. But how sinful we were. And how sinful we are. Admitting how much we need Jesus. And how it's Jesus who has done everything for our salvation.

Jesus and Jesus alone. We each came on our knees to Jesus. When did we then get back up on our feet again.

[ 12 : 52 ] And realise that one of us was taller than the others. Nearly 400 years ago. The great Scottish minister Samuel Weatherford. After whom our oldest is named.

He wrote these words. Begging poor sinners. Are our Lord's scholars. The lintel stone.

That's the top of the door. The lintel stone. Of our Lord's. School door. Is a low stone. You must stoop low. And bend down.

You will be on your knees with it. Before you can get in. You must be very humble. Else that stone will take your head. And ding you back.

We are saved by one faith. A faith with which we were all on our knees.

[ 13 : 49 ] Before we could get in. We couldn't stand tall before Jesus. Fluffed up with our own superiorities over one another. We had to be humble. Lest the lintel of that door of salvation.

Would have taken our heads and dinged us back. Even the very faith with which we came to God first. Was God's gift to us. Paul reminds us.

It's by grace you have been saved. Through faith. Grace shows no favoritism. We came to Jesus as sinners. And wherever we are today.

It is by the grace of God. Not any of it is earned. You see, favoritism does not belong in a kingdom of grace.

Where it's all. Where all its citizens are only there. Because their king was crucified for them. The face never fitted in the kingdom of God. It was only because the face of Jesus was contorted.

[ 14 : 48 ] In agony that any of us. Can never call ourselves Christians in the first place. And nothing has changed. As Rutherford says.

You must be very humble. Lest that stone will take your head and ding you back. We're saved by one faith.

There is no room for favoritism here. Third. We are disciples of one Christ. We are disciples of one Christ.

That's the third reason we don't show favoritism. My brothers as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. At its most basic level. We are disciples of Jesus Christ.

But of what Christ indeed? That's the question we ask. Surely not the Christ who showed favoritism to the rich. Not at all.

[ 15 : 44 ] I wonder whether James was there. The day his brother was approached by a rich young ruler. Who had the question.

Good teacher. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Now here's a man who could have contributed much to the early Christian movement. He was obviously intelligent and educated and an organized and influential young man.

And he was rich. Fabulously rich. Perhaps we might have expected Jesus to welcome him with open arms. And outrageously flatter him.

In the hope that somehow he would give Jesus his money. And other resources. But no. Jesus loves this rich young man.

No more. And no less. Than he loves the outcast leper. He does not toady up to this rich young man. He does not show favoritism.

[16:47] And finally the rich man leaves empty and sad. If there ever was one person who did not show favoritism on the basis of someone's social, financial or religious status.

It was Jesus. Pharisees felt the bite of his tongue. The blind heard the love of his heart. That's the Christ of whom we're disciples.

Not a Christ who shows us either by word or by example to show favoritism or suck up to the rich or popular. The exact opposite is true.

Give respect where respect is due. But don't ever show favoritism. But as for the last point.

There's more here. Exactly who is this Christ of whom we are disciples? He is the Christ of whom we read in Isaiah 53.

[17:54] He had no form or comeliness. And when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected by men.

He is a man of sorrows. He is acquainted with grief. And we hid as it were our faces from him. He was despised and we esteemed him not. You know, if Jesus had walked into a fellowship of God's people in the early Jewish church, he most certainly would not have been given a seat in the front in the VIP section.

He didn't come across as important enough, influential enough, respectable enough to have that kind of status.

He had a regional accent. He was from Galilee. He didn't dress posh like the glitterati of Jerusalem. The vast majority of his followers were common people.

Fishermen, women, children. The rich of Israel despised him because he saw right through them and he was nothing like them at all. They despised him to the extent that they put him on a Roman cross.

[19:08] He humbled himself and become obedient to the death of a criminal. Imagine following a man who was put to death on a cross. How foolish can you get?

Imagine being a disciple of a man who was stripped and tortured and executed. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. How stupid. You see where I'm going with this, I hope.

When Paul says that God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, He was thinking first and foremost of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom the world considered foolish, but whose cross and gospel is the wisdom of God to the salvation of all who believe.

Bruised, bloodied and battered, the Jesus of whom we are each disciples was no longer recognisable as a man.

As our beloved Donald MacLeod says, He became the lowest of the low, the universe's greatest ever nothing. Did the face of Jesus fit?

[20:19] It never did. Even today it will not fit with many who cannot accept that He could have died on a cross. They can't bring themselves to believe that God Himself could have stooped so low to save us from our sins.

But stooped so low He did. This unremarkable man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief. This is the Jesus of whom we are disciples tonight.

Are we better than He? Not at all, for no disciple is above His master. Therefore, we, if we are to be like Jesus Christ, are to show no favoritism at all.

The final reason from verse 1, why we are not to show favoritism, is that we are worshippers of one Lord. We are worshippers of one Lord.

Of all the ways this verse could have been translated, I rather think the NIV is at the very top. My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

[21:33] The controversial translation is there in the middle, which literally reads, Our Lord Jesus Christ of glory. And the NIV, by its translation, attributes all the glory to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is who the risen and exalted Lord is today. He is the Lord of glory. He is the glorious one. At the very center of heaven, encircled by all the majestic heavenly beings, stands the glory of God himself.

And his name is the Lord Jesus Christ. Although we don't have eyes to see it, we too are gathered there. The church triumphant and the church militant.

The church in heaven and on earth. It encircles the throne of Jesus and falls down in praise and worship. And together we sing these great songs of praise.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise. Although we do not have ears to hear it, the voices of heaven are deafening.

[ 22 : 55 ] Before King Jesus, the mighty creatures of heaven, the majestic angels and the innumerable church of God, falls down in praise and worship.

Who then are these rich people among the early church fellowship compared to the glory of King Jesus?

Their robes are made of dyed cloth. What is his is made of the majesty of divinity. Their crowns are made of painted metal.

What is his is made of the stars in heaven. Their faces are made of the cosmetics of men. Where his face shines like the sun in all its brilliance.

Their voices are coached to the cultural heights. Whereas his voice is the sound of many rushing waters. Who are these rich people in the early church?

[ 23 : 57 ] Compared to the great glory of King Jesus. We're all worshippers of the one Lord. The very glory of God.

The exact representation of his being and the majesty of his splendor. The rich man and the poor man together pale into insignificance before him.

Each calling out through the ages. He must increase. I must decrease. You see. The rotten heart of favoritism.

Exposes a lack of appreciation for the infinite glory. Of our majestic Lord. Even the mighty apostle John.

The last and perhaps the greatest. Of all the apostles of our Lord. When confronted by the glory of the exalted Lord. Whom he'd known for 70 years.

[ 24 : 54 ] Fell at his feet as though dead. If John did. Then we do also. Yes the whole church does. If we should show favoritism.

By whatever measure it should be. Wealth. Status. Gifting. Health. Age. Gender. Color. Or anything else. It shows that we have failed to understand these four key pillars of the Christian faith.

That we are members of one family. That we have been saved by one faith. That we are disciples of one Christ. We are worshipers of one Lord.

So at the very heart of favoritism. Lies the denial. Of the basics of the Christian faith. And of the grace of salvation.

This face fits favoritism mentality. Has no place at all. In the church of Christ. There's a sense in which.

[ 25 : 59 ] And with us I close. We must act here and now. Like we will act there and then. We must act here and now.

Like we will act there and then. What I mean by this. Is that in heaven. There shall be no favoritism at all. But God shall be to us all equally.

Peace. Love. Joy. The church of Jesus Christ. Is an embassy of heaven on earth. And so we must act here.

In the church which bears Christ's name. As though we were already in heaven. Viewing each other from God's perspective.

As precious and beloved in his sight. To him we are each clothed. In the perfect righteousness of his son Jesus Christ. And washed in his blood. Our faces.

[ 26 : 58 ] Will always fit with him. His grace. Is such that even the poorest sinner. Is with the power of the gospel. Transformed beyond the riches of this world.

So let's search out our hearts. And pray that God would show us. Whether there is anything. Of a face fits type mentality among us. And if there is.

To repent of it. And to pursue Christ-like grace. Motivated heavenly mindedness. In this. If you have been on the rough end of favoritism.

In this church. Or any church. Know this. The fault. The fault never lay with you. But with the sinful mindsets.

Of those who sinned against you. You are more beloved of God. Than you can ever dream. My brothers.

[ 28 : 02 ] As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. Don't show. Favoritism. Let us pray. Our loving heavenly father.

We. Recognize the situation. Into which. James wrote his letter. A. Church where the rich. Received. Preferential treatment. And the poor. Were disregarded. And insulted. Father. Perhaps. We're not quite so.

Obvious. Today. And yet. We recognize. Oh Lord. That there are many ways. In which favoritism. The rotten heart. Of favoritism. May manifest itself.

Lord. We pray. That you would show us. If there are any evil ways. Within us. Show us. Oh Lord. The ways. In which we too. May show favoritism. The way.

[ 29 : 04 ] In which we may. Look down. On others. The way. In which we may pretend. That we are better than others. We repent of these things. Oh Lord.

Remembering that. It was on our knees. We came to Jesus. In the first place. We ask then. That you would be with us. Oh Lord. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.