



Week Three: James 2:1-13

"Favoritism Forbidden"

Reading and Study Guide for the
week of Sept. 17-24, 2023

Memory Verse for the Book of James: *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)*

This week, read James 2:1-13. Some questions to answer and think about this week with your family or Community Group:

1. How much money would it take to make you consider yourself rich?
2. What has God promised to the poor of this world? ([2:5](#))
3. What does the church do to the poor person when it shows favoritism toward the rich? ([2:6](#))
4. What do rich people have a history of doing to people in the church? ([2:6-7](#))
5. How can we welcome poor people in our church?
6. In what practical ways can we show genuine love to people of different races, cultures, and economic standing?
7. How can you change the way you look at wealth this week so that you value it as God does?

Life Application Bible Notes

[2:1ff](#) In this chapter James argues against favoritism and for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith: (1) Commitment is an essential part of faith. You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines or agreeing with biblical facts ([2:19](#)). You must commit your mind and heart to Christ. (2) Right actions are the natural byproducts of true faith. A genuine Christian will have a changed life ([2:18](#)). (3) Faith without good deeds doesn't do anybody any good—it is useless ([2:14-17](#)). James's teachings are consistent with Paul's teaching that we receive salvation by faith alone. Paul emphasizes the purpose of faith: to bring salvation. James emphasizes the results of faith: a changed life.

[2:1-7](#) James condemns acts of favoritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures. The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive lifestyle at our expense. In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. God views all people as equals, and if he favors anyone, it is the poor and the powerless. We should follow his example.

2:2-4 Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work. On the other hand, it may only mean that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it may be the sign of greed, dishonesty, or selfishness. By honoring someone just because he or she dresses well, we are making appearance more important than character.

2:2-4 We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly assume that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval. But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Christ calls us to be ready to suffer for him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life ([Matthew 6:19-21](#); [19:28-30](#); [Luke 12:14-34](#); [Romans 8:15-21](#); [1 Timothy 6:17-19](#)). We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life ([Luke 6:35](#); [John 12:23-25](#); [Galatians 6:7-10](#); [Titus 3:4-8](#)).

2:5 When James speaks about the poor, he is talking about those who have no money and also about those whose simple values are despised by much of our affluent society. Perhaps the "poor" people prefer serving to managing, human relationships to financial security, peace to power. This does not mean that the poor will automatically go to heaven and the rich to hell. Poor people, however, are usually more aware of their powerlessness. Thus, it is often easier for them to acknowledge their need for salvation. One of the greatest barriers to salvation for the rich is pride. For the poor, bitterness can often bar the way to acceptance of salvation.

2:8, 9 We must treat all people as we would want to be treated. We should not ignore the rich, because then we would be withholding our love. But we must not favor them for what they can do for us, while ignoring the poor who can offer us seemingly so little in return.

2:10 Christians must not use this verse to justify sinning. We dare not say, "Because I can't keep every demand of God, why even try?" James reminds us that if we've broken just one law, we are sinners. We can't decide to keep part of God's law and ignore the rest. You can't break the law a little bit; if you have broken it at all, you need Christ to pay for your sin. Measure yourself, not someone else, against God's standards. Ask for forgiveness where you need it.

2:12 As Christians, we are saved by God's free gift (grace) through faith, not by keeping the law. But as Christians, we are also required to obey Christ. The apostle Paul taught that "we must all stand before Christ to be judged" ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)) for our conduct. God's grace does not cancel our duty to obey him; it gives our obedience a new basis. The law is no longer an external set of rules, but it is a "law that sets you free"—one we joyfully and willingly carry out, because we love God and have the power of his Holy Spirit (see [1:25](#)).

2:13 Only God in his mercy can forgive our sins. We can't earn forgiveness by forgiving others. But when we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, we show that we don't understand or appreciate God's mercy toward us (see [Matthew 6:14, 15](#); [18:21ff](#); [Ephesians 4:31, 32](#)).

James Study Guide questions and notes are from

