

**Love Favors All.**

***My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby 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?***

***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? 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? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?***

***If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 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.***

***Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!***

What is your favorite music? What is your favorite meal? We all have favorites. Maybe you prefer to watch football instead of baseball. If I was flipping channels on television and I saw that there was an Andy Griffith re-run and a Real Housewives of Orange County re-run, I will take Andy every time. I always thought it interesting that Jesus always took only three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, when it came to something special: the healing of Jairus' daughter; when he went up the Mount of Transfiguration; when he prayed in Gethsemane.

We all have favorites. This is why Red Lobster still offers steak because some people prefer steak over shrimp. We all have favorites. But I pray our readings speak to us today, especially our epistle reading from James. You have your favorites, but don't show favoritism. Favoritism could mean you prefer one thing over another. It also could mean that you will give special treatment to one person and not to another. If you are driving down the road and see your cousin stranded on the side of the road, you will stop for him. But will you stop if it is a total stranger?

Our text is clear. Don't show favoritism. Instead, let us favor all.

*I. Favoritism is a sin.*

***"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby 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?"***

Churches welcome visitors. Churches love visitors. In this text we have an example of a couple visitors to a church. One man is obviously an important and rich man: he has a gold ring and very nice clothing. Quickly the greeters and ushers notice him and shake his hand and welcome him. They usher him quickly to the best seat in the church. Where is that? According to Lutherans, it is in the back. But normally it is the front. Never mind. They made sure he was treated well.

That is fine. In fact, we would probably praise people for being so open to a visitor. But there is something wrong with this picture. Another visitor came and he is poor. But people don't flock around him. They don't shake his hand. They usher him in, but not to the best seat in the church. They make him stand in the back or in the narthex, or sit at someone's feet, which by the way, was a total insult in those days; defeated generals and kings were forced to sit at the feet of the winner as if he was some sort of footstool.

If they had treated the poor man the same way as the rich man, then you would agree that such a church is a caring church. But both men were treated differently. ***"... have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"*** Those members became judges, instantly determining who should be treated well and who should not. They made their judgment based on evil thoughts.

What made their hearts and actions evil? It is because they loved the one and did not love the other. They loved the rich man because he could do a lot for the church. Just think of the offerings he would bring. Think of the influence he would have for the church. It would make the church look more impressive to outsiders that they had such outstanding members.

But they did not love the poor man. They didn't love him because what could he do for the church? His offerings would probably be next to nothing. In fact he might cost the church money. He is poor. He may need someone to give him some money. He probably has no influence or prestige in town. In fact, it may even give the church a bad reputation if they had a rabble like him as members.

So they love the rich man because they will get something in return and they did not love the poor man because he had nothing to offer them. But I am going to suggest that they did not love either man. They saw both the rich man and the poor man as objects. One of them, the rich man, was an object that would benefit them so they got excited over him. The poor man was an object that would do them no good so they barely acknowledged his presence.

This happens all the time. A politician may throw one promise at you after another, but could it be he just wants your vote and once he gets it he doesn't keep his promises? Businesses often do this. They tell you how much they appreciate you, but are they truly thankful, or do they appreciate you only because you spend money there? The world lives by this kind of love. All is fair in love and war, right? It is a dog eat dog world out there. Nice guys finish last. You must think of yourself first. But this happened in the church. They were using him and his money to benefit them. And they didn't love the poor man because he had nothing to offer them. The only people they loved were themselves. Selfish love only hurts others. What happens if a husband and wife loved the other only to get something back? What happens when they don't get something back? Have parents favored one kid more than another because one makes the parents look better?

And it shows that they do not love God, either. ***"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 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."*** Don't do this, but what happens if you throw a rock at a window? It breaks, doesn't it. And it doesn't matter if it is a rock that weighs only three ounces and one that weighs ten pounds, both will break the window. And it doesn't matter if it shatters the whole window or only a corner. The same with the commandments. Break one, you break them all.

That is how we often treat our family and friends, using them more than loving them. That is how we treat God, too, using him, but when he doesn't give us what we want, we turn on him. But how does God treat us? How much does God love you? God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish because we sin and deserve to die all the way in hell, but instead we will have eternal life. He loved the world even when the world only caused him grief. He loved the world even when the world hates him. He loved the world even though they can never pay him back. He forgives the sinner. He forgives our sin. He gives us what we don't deserve, heaven.

That is grace. Sometimes I describe grace as "favor." If I asked you to do a favor, I am asking you to do something for me and I will not pay you back for it. A parent asks a kid, "Can you do me a favor? Can you wash the dishes tonight?" There is no promise of money or anything. You ask them to do something without getting anything in return. That is grace. That is the grace God shows, and it is the grace we can show others.

***"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!"*** This is an unfortunate translation. It says, "law that gives freedom." Which law gives freedom? None. Rather the word can be used for law, but it has also the idea of what makes you tick or guides you. The Holy Spirit is sometimes called a "law" not that he cracks a whip in our lives, but guides and directs us to Christ and heaven. No, this is referring to the gospel. You see, when we stand before the judgment seat, we will be judged, but not by our sins against the law, but by God's mercy. God has mercy on us and forgives us, each of us whether you are rich or poor, intelligent or simple, strong or weak. And that is how we now look on others, with mercy.

I get it. After church, you may visit with someone you know very well, maybe your cousin or brother, or someone who has kids with your kids in school. That is not wrong by itself. I still prefer to watch Andy Griffith over the Real Housewives of Orange County. But I pray we all, myself included, don't turn favorites into favoritism. I pray we see how evil still lurks in our hearts and may move us to judge between people worthy of our attention and others less worthy.

God doesn't show favoritism to the world. He didn't love some and not others. He loved the whole world. And Jesus didn't die more for them and not them. He died for all that whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life. God shows no favoritism. He only shows his favor or grace on all of us. Do the same. Don't show favoritism. Show God's favor. Amen.