



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Real Faith. Real Life.

Part 6: Are You A Snob?

James 2:1-13 | Tim Badal | February 19, 2017

We're in a series we've entitled "Real Faith. Real Life.", We've been learning from Jesus' younger half-brother James, who walked with and talked with Jesus, who saw Him probably every single day of his young life and then into adulthood.



James has been teaching us how to live a practical life that honors God in all we say and do. He's not held back any punches. He knows that one of our great temptations as Christ followers is to talk a great game about how religious we are, how spiritual we are, but in the end our walk doesn't match our talk. Over the five chapters in the book of James, he reminds the church in his day—and reminds us—that if we're going to talk about our salvation in Christ and what it means to follow Him, with the goal of bringing others into God's Kingdom, then our walk has to match our talk. Our life must be in step with the things we say we believe. So over and over again James describes what a life of faith should look like.

Last week we learned that a good outward expression of our faith requires guarding our tongues. Our conversation, our compassion and our conduct must all be conformed to Scripture. Christianity involves two steps: knowing the Word and then doing what it says. Over the course of the next three chapters, James will expand on how our conversation, compassion and conduct must be lived and not just talked about.

In chapter two we will be asking ourselves a question: am I a snob? I know some of you would answer, "Absolutely not. There's not an ounce of snobbery in me." Snobbery is easy to see in other people. Another person's snobbishness can be crystal clear to us. But think about it this way: Do you size people up? Do you look at people and evaluate them based on their appearance, their skin color, their age, their education, their status, their gender? Do you size people up based on outward appearances?

One of the challenges with what James identifies as partiality, favoritism or discrimination is that it's very subtle. Yet he will tell us that it's a cancer in us. And like most cancers we don't know at first that we're living with it. We need a physician to do special tests on us to determine if we have cancer and where it's located. James, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, puts us in the test lab, looking for any symptoms throughout our lives.

Are we snobs regarding our mouths? Do we discriminate with words, ethnic slurs or nationality jokes? Are we heart snobs? Maybe we don't reveal it through our talk or other outward expressions, but we think it. "I'm better than them. I don't want those types of people in my church or in my neighborhood. I don't want to work or interact with them. And God help me if one of my kids would start dating one of them!"

You see, James will tell us that the subtle cancer is eroding our faith, our ability to see people as God sees them: with full respect and honor. As Christians, we should invite them into our fellowship, lovingly engaging them as equally eligible to become heirs of the salvation found in Christ Jesus.

Let me interject here for a moment a decision the elders have made that I need to make you aware of today. We're going to do parking a little differently now. If you have a car that is 2014 or older, we need you to start parking down at Jewel. Here's why. Your car's got rust on it and it looks old. We've concluded that when people drive down Route 47, they want to see nice cars, new cars,

so they'll know that following Jesus Christ means we have nice things. So if you're like the Badals driving around in an old jalopy, you're still welcome to be here. We would never deny that God loves all people, but if you could just park down the road, I would greatly appreciate it.

How do you feel? Okay, I'm terrible at telling a joke like that. It didn't work. But what if I was being serious? What if that was exactly what the elders had decided? What would that say to you about how this church loves? What would that say to you about how God loves? You see, this issue of partiality, favoritism and discrimination is so subtle that sometimes we don't even know we have it. And it's something that impacts both the parishioner and pastor alike.

Some years ago I was part of a conference for pastors, with the goal of teaching these pastors how to be better preachers. It wasn't a large conference. There were about 70 attendees. I went looking forward to it. The first thing we did was gather in a big room and introduce ourselves. One of the questions was, "Tell us who you are and how much education you have. Where did you go to college?" I'm hearing all these guys who are talking about their Masters of Divinity, their Ph.Ds.

And your pastor started gulping. I've got letters at the end of my name: G.E.D. No, I did get my high school diploma. But I don't have any diploma that relates to my Bible teaching. That might worry some of you. I'm sitting there thinking, "Oh, boy. How do I sell this thing?" So I said, "I'm a bi-vocational pastor of a church in Sugar Grove. I've taken classes at Moody Bible Institute, but I don't have any formal degree." And I'm thinking, "Okay, they're God's people. They will love me anyway."

I have to tell you something. It was like a group of junior high girls. As soon as it was time to go into break-out groups, I was like a leper. "We don't want him." And when we would talk, I might give a recommendation or thought, and they'd act like, "Because you don't have a degree, maybe you should just be quiet." You might ask how that could happen. It happens all the time. Now, do I think they meant to be mean? No. It's okay. And after years of counseling, I'm able to talk about it today.

This kind of prejudice really happens. We are making assessments of people all the time. The human brain and heart is able to size people up by their outward appearances. We decide if they're going to be our friends. We're leery of who is going to be our co-workers or our employees. Do we want them as neighbors? We do this all the time. Sometimes we'll size up people passively, simply deciding not to interact with them.

This is what James was talking about in chapter two. He's addressing an issue that needs to be called out for what it is: a cancer to our souls. You may think you can discriminate or hold favoritism quietly in your heart; you may think no one will know. But God knows, and He will judge every careless word and thought you have. Yet this issue is foundational to ministry, because as people come to a church looking for the answer that is only found in Christ Jesus, our discrimination or favoritism can drive them away.

One of the most famous instances of this was described by Mahatma Gandhi. He was thinking about becoming a Christian. He had read the Gospels and was moved by them. He had come to the conclusion that Christianity offered a solution to India's caste system, where they put people in different categories. He was looking for something that would revolutionize their thinking, so he decided to attend a church one Sunday. As he walked into the church, he decided he wanted to go see the pastor to seek instruction on the way of salvation and how God sees all people as equal. But when he entered the church, which consisted primarily of white English people, the usher refused to give Gandhi a seat. They told him to worship with his own people. He left and never entered a church again. He made this statement. "If Christians have a caste system, I might as well just remain a Hindu."

We have to ask: are we showing favoritism or discrimination as a people? As individuals? Is it happening within the church? This is the tragic story that illustrates what James is telling us in our text. We need to ask ourselves, "Is this something I need to deal with? If so, how will God help me see people through His eyes and not my own?"

Let's go to our text, James 2:1-13:

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² 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, ³ 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," ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ 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? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for it all. ¹¹ 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. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

I want to move quickly through four points here:

- A principle we need to remember.
- A problem we need to recognize.
- A perspective we need to retain.
- A practice we will render.

1. We need to have a principle to remember.

Keep in mind that there are no chapter breaks in James’ original letter. So chapter two, verse one comes on the heels of telling his people to watch their conversation, show compassion to the poor—especially widows and orphans in their distress—and to remain unstained by the world. One of the ways we can be stained is to look at people differently from how God sees them.

So James sets a goal for the church of not showing partiality toward people. He wants to declare that all who are within the church are the same. We all come from the same background, in the sense that God does not consider any one of us better than another. Then once we recognize our equality under God, our relationships and fellowship will grow exponentially.

This means we are not to discriminate against people.

When we talk about what it means to be a snob, we’re referring to someone who has an exaggerated respect for high social status or wealth, and who seeks to associate with social superiors. As a result, this person dislikes people or activities that might be regarded as belonging to a lower class. Maybe you know someone who thinks that way or acts that way, but have you ever put yourself in front of a mirror and asked, “Might I be that person? Might I not even be aware that I’m revealing discriminatory thoughts, actions or words?”

You can look at this either positively or negatively. On the positive end of the spectrum is what we call favoritism. It means giving unjustified preferential treatment to a group or person at the expense of another. Because of something someone wears or because he looks like you, he gets a promotion, even if he doesn’t deserve it. Because this person likes me, or is like me, I’m going to promote him over someone who is different from me.

The negative side of the spectrum is discrimination, which is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of people based on their category. But on either negative or positive side, we need to realize that sizing up people based only on externals is a sin. James isn’t okay with it. God’s not okay with it. And when it takes place in the life of a Christian, James calls it evil. It is against the heart and mind of God and has no place in a spiritually healthy church.

Here’s why this is true: At our core, you and I are equal. We came from the same earthly parents. Adam and Eve started it all. Even though that family tree is awfully big right now—with billions of limbs and branches—we’re still part of the same family. We were knit together by the same God. He creatively made us with different colors and placed us in different nations and ethnic groups. Why? Because He didn’t want a bland group of people. He wanted a colorful group that reflected more of His nature and glory.

We also need to remember that we have been loved by the same Savior. The Bible does not say, “For God so loved the white world...” or “God so loved the black world...” or “God so loved the rich...” or “God so loved the poor world.” Jesus simply said, “For God so loved the world,” the entire world. He shows grace and mercy to each of us, not based on gender or class or race. He loves each one of us. Heaven is going to be a place filled with all tribes, tongues and nations.

Finally, the Holy Spirit resides in each of us. The same Spirit Who is in me is in my African-American brothers. The same Spirit Who is in them is found in their Asian brothers. We have the same Spirit of God living in us and because of that, God is no Respector of persons—and neither should we be, yet we do want to show someone respect and honor.

This means we are to show deference to Jesus.

You may be thinking, “We can’t all be equal. Someone needs to be put in a higher place.” James says, “If you want to show partiality and favoritism, here’s how you can do that...” Verse one, “*Hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*” That’s James’ older brother. But he calls him the King of Glory. If you want to show respect and honor and favoritism toward someone, then show deference to Jesus. If someone is going to get the best seat in the house, if someone is going to get all the accolades, if someone is going to get the honor at Village Bible Church, let’s make sure it’s Jesus and not one of us. We must be very careful not to elevate others to the place only Jesus should have. In this church, the only Person Who should get the applause and headlines is Jesus Christ. James says, “If you really want to be partial to someone, be partial to the King of Glory. He deserves it. It’s at His name that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that my Brother is Lord.” Show deference to Jesus.

Now that we acknowledge the principle that we’re all equal and the only Person we’re not equal to is Jesus, we should elevate His name and devalue ourselves relative to Him. In comparison to Him, you and I are welfare cases. Even the richest among us has nothing in comparison to Jesus Christ. We are all poor based on the riches of God found in Christ Jesus.

2. We have a problem to recognize.

But after the principle is stated, James points to a problem—the problem of partiality. He illustrates this beginning in verse two:

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, 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,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

We might wonder if James is making this up. It’s probably not a theoretical or hypothetical situation, but probably really happened. Verse one reads, “Show no partiality,” but the actual Greek should be translated, “Stop showing partiality.” He’s calling out the church, saying, “Stop doing this.”

My impression here is that James has heard of a situation—probably exactly as he describes it—in one of the churches, so he’s using it as an example to the numerous churches that will receive this letter. In essence, he’s saying, “I received a report that one of our churches has done this. Stop doing it! Stop showing that kind of division toward people based on external things.”

Notice, it’s the church ushers who are causing this problem. They existed in the first century because there was a need to put people into places. They were still meeting in the synagogues (to which the word “assembly” refers), where the Jews met on Saturday but the Christians now used on Sundays. There was apparently a limited number of seats and the place must have been full, because James speaks not only of sitting but of standing as well.

So a man comes in who looks like he stepped off the cover of GQ. He’s wearing a nice suit with French cuffs and has a beautiful watch—the text mentions a gold ring. His wardrobe speaks—if not shouts—“I’m a person of means.” And in the early church, it would be uncommon to have someone like that visit them. The first believers in the New Testament churches were the poor—usually the slaves of the house who received the gospel of Christ.

We also know that Jesus Himself interacted with the rich. Some of these encounters were positive; some weren’t. Some of the rich were not willing to give up their riches. They walked away disappointed, because although they wanted to follow Jesus, they couldn’t put their wealth second to following Him.

So back to James: A rich man walks into a church with adornments that let people know he was a person of means—and the ushers jump into action. “Well, hello, sir. Here’s a place right up front.” It was a place of honor, or rather, *the* place of honor. It was the best seat in the house, what was called the “rabbi’s seat.” It was where the Pharisees would sit as they presided over the worship service. So they usher him in, and if it was a full house they may have even moved people out of the way so this fine-looking man could have a seat.

Then another individual comes in who is not so magnificently dressed. His clothes are shabby. The Greek word implies he came straight from work. In that world, it probably meant he had worked with the flocks or in the fields, maybe for multiple shifts. He is dusty, dirty and possibly smelly, but he wants to worship with God’s people. So the ushers, having already given the best seat to the rich man, ask this man to stand in back. We don’t know why they do this. We don’t know the motive, but only the outcome. They give him the option, “Stand in the back, or sit at my feet.” That imply they were putting him in a subservient position to another’s place or role. He is less and they aren’t going to give him a position equal to the rest of them. “Sit at our feet; then you can worship with us.” The text clearly says they pay attention not to all, but only to the rich.

What would you think if, as you enter or leave this church, I were to size you up based on what you bring home in your paycheck? As the people are walking by, I then turn from you who have the lesser income and turn to others saying, “Hey, Mr. So-and-so. I know you make a lot of money. I know you’re Mr. Important.” How might you feel as I turn my back to you and give all my deference to someone based completely on income—something God says we should not do? You’re going to be broken-hearted.

Put yourself in that man’s situation. This is a sin. They’re separating two men based on what they wear. This sin is a faulty view of God’s judgment. Little did the ushers know that they were showing zero compassion to their brother in shabby clothes. Let’s say you and I were innocent bystanders in this scene. As we watch this unfold, what would our understanding of God have been as a result? Maybe you would conclude that God likes the rich guy, because after all He has blessed him with lots of resources. So if you’re rich, therefore you’re good in God’s eyes. That’s obviously what the ushers are communicating to this man. “You’re more important. You’re of greater value because you’re rich.” So you might think that’s how God also looks at individuals.

Second, I’ve got to think that if the church judges people in this way, God might also have the same standard of judgment. Would my eternal destiny be at risk because I’m destitute in this world? Should I consider myself less than the rich because I don’t make or wear what they do? I can’t buy their kind of cars or houses. This was a serious problem in the early church—in the culture of James’ day. There was racism between the Jews and Gentiles. It was seen in the sexism that continually pushed down the value of women. It was seen in the slave/master society. It was seen between the rich and poor, between the educated and the uneducated.

You might say, “But we’ve evolved. We’re so much better than we used to be.” But let us be reminded that only a generation ago half of our country lived under segregation. Half of our country lived under Jim Crow laws. Even today, crimes are committed because people are different from us. We look at situations differently. If a murder happens somewhere in the suburban area, all the media rushes there to cover the story and the person who lost his life. But we give zero regard to the dozens of people who are mowed down in the Chicago ghettos each weekend.

Don’t tell me we don’t struggle with discrimination. Don’t tell me we don’t struggle with favoritism, because if so, then I am very different from you. At times I give little regard for individuals. We do it with our patriotism. I think it is important to love our country. I love the United States; I believe it’s one of the greatest countries on the face of the earth. But when we elevate our patriotism—saying an American life is of greater value than anyone else, turning our eyes away from bombs being dropped on people, thinking, “I hope they learn their lesson”—then we have devalued those individuals because they’re not from our country or creed.

That’s revealing the discrimination and favoritism that James is talking about that he says is wrong. He hits it right on the head. He says, “When you think or feel this way, you are judging that individual with evil thoughts.”

Here’s a quick rabbit trail: James is not saying that we can never judge. We just should never judge with evil thoughts or evil intentions, or judge in a way that God would not. We are called to use discernment. We’re called to use wise judgment. But when we judge with evil thoughts or motives, we sin against God.

3. We have a perspective to retain.

So what does James want us to know? He says there is a perspective we should retain. In verse five he says, “*Listen, my beloved brothers...*” When James’ letter was read in various churches, it was not just being read to the rich, but also to the poor. Not read only to the master, but also to the slave. Not just to men, but also to women. Not just the old, but the young. Not just the Jew, but the Gentile. Not just the educated, but the unschooled as well.

James was saying, “Not only do I want you to hear my words, but I want you to see my example. You are my beloved brothers—every one of you. No matter where you are, no matter how much money you have in your bank account, no matter what your nation of origin is, no matter how smart you are or what kind of job you have—you are my brothers.” James’ pastoral heart was a heart of equality regarding love. “I love you all. I want to serve and minister to all of you. I want you all to know that God loves you.” He modeled Christ-likeness.

When James says, “Listen,” you should underline it in your Bible. It means what he’s going to say is important. And in the next couple verses, James will teach us God’s Word, and he’s hoping by verses 12 and 13 that we will do what it says.

So here are some things we need to know about favoritism, partiality or discrimination; things we can learn from what James says in this Scripture, realizing how it should impact our actions and speech. James says you can’t do these things.

Favoritism and discrimination are incompatible with our church's calling.

Why not? Because it goes against our mission statement. It goes against why we exist. Some of us think the church is a country club to join. We've made the cut; therefore we have the right to make the decisions on who can join and who can't.

If you were at the annual meeting on Friday, you heard me challenge our members to open your hearts to all kinds of people, in all kinds of places, with all kinds of experiences. Show grace. Be magnanimous. Show love to all kinds of people. God is drawing all kinds of people to Village Bible Church and we should be all the more open to welcoming them.

Here's why: The church is not a country club. The church is a hospital. We don't turn away patients. We don't check a patient's billfold before we start the surgery. We don't ask to know their background or ethnicity before we start treating them. We at Village Bible Church—and at every healthy, biblical church—should believe one key truth about the people who come to them: they are sinners in need of God's grace.

When we see people as sinners in need of God's grace, that is the only distinction God wants us to make. It's not based on wealth or gender or occupation or social status. Every person who walks into this place needs to recognize that they're a sinner in need of help. The church then grabs them and embraces them, saying, "We too were lost and broken. We too were sinful, but by the grace of God we've been redeemed. Come, get the treatment you need—the medicine you need—that only Jesus Christ can prescribe."

You see, when we live the opposite of that, then we tell the world we're something that we really aren't. We are falsely advertising our reason for existence. This is such an important part of our membership commitment. In point three of our membership commitment, we say the following: "I will strive to accept and fellowship with all members of the church, regardless of race, gender, background, social status or level of education, since all are of equal value in Christ." We cannot have the attitude that says, "I sure hope we don't get more people of that type in our church." We can't say, "That whole ethnic group? They just do things differently. I'd rather they find their own service, in their own place."

God is doing a miracle at our Aurora campus. Five to seven years ago it was an almost completely white, Anglo-Saxon congregation, and now it's become a massive pool of diversity. They're people who speak different languages, who worship differently, who come from different backgrounds and religions. We're watching with great excitement as we see a glimpse of what happens in heaven. These are people who are coming before God as sinners, looking for the remedy that is Christ Jesus alone.

Favoritism and discrimination are inconsistent with God's choices.

Discrimination is incompatible with our calling as a church. It's also inconsistent with God's choices. If you're going to show favoritism or discrimination, that's your choice, but it's evil and a sin. Don't attach your name to God's name, because He doesn't do that with people.

James continues in 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?"* The Bible tells us God has bestowed His love on us because we're white, right? That's what my Bible says, right? No. God shows His love to us because we all carry college diplomas, right? No. I hope not. God shows His love because we've got a certain balance in our checking account. I want each of you to get on the internet and check your bank account balance. If you have less than a certain number, you're not loved by God, but if you have more than that, you are loved by God. No. God has chosen to love people—not based on what they are, or what skin color they have, but because they're sinners in need of grace.

I'm reminded of the truth in 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. Let us be reminded of how God called us:

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being [not one—not the whites, not the rich, not the socially superior—none of them] might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

We've got nothing. God didn't look at us on a playground and say, "When I decide to choose who will be saved, I'm going to choose Badal. He brings a lot to the table. He's my first choice." No, God said, "I choose Tim in his sin, in his debauchery, in his depravity, because he needs someone to love and care for him. If I don't minister to him, he'll never choose Me." God shows us His love,

therefore when you show discrimination toward a brother or sister, you go against God. You do exactly the opposite of what God does in salvation.

Favoritism and discrimination are illogical, given the conduct of the rich.

Let me share a true story with you. When I was in high school there was a group of popular kids I really wanted to be part of. I wasn't alone. There were a lot of kids who wanted to be in this group. The weird thing was that this group was filled with some of the meanest people you would ever come into contact with. Why would anybody want to be with them? They were heartless at times, ruthless. They betrayed people, but they were popular, and I wanted to be with them. I knew they were probably talking behind my back, but I didn't mind because popularity was my goal. I wanted to elevate my status. If it meant I had to walk over people to get higher and higher in the social status of the school, I was okay with that.

This is what was going on with the ushers in James' day. They were saying, "The rich guy? Man, he's got potential. Maybe I can get a job with him. Maybe I can get some of his money. Maybe if I befriend him, my status will change, at least within the church and maybe within the community." But that gave no regard to what the rich were doing. In verses six and seven, James writes, *"But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you?"* That's the first thing they do. Secondly, are they not *"the ones who drag you into court?"* Thirdly, *"Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?"* The rich were brutal to the church.

It didn't mean the rich couldn't come to Jesus. It didn't mean that all the rich were bad people. But James said, "Listen. Before you start cozying up to those who betray, dishonor and oppress you—those who drag you into court—think through what you're doing. Was it not Jesus Who ministered to the poor?"

You see, when we show favoritism or partiality, Jesus is offended, and here's why: Because Jesus was poor. He came from a backwater town called Nazareth. Remember the phrase, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Jesus had a dad who wasn't all that well-known or well-liked. "Is this not the carpenter's son? I mean, how serious can He be? How special can He be? His dad was just a carpenter" (Matthew 13:53–58).

So Jesus endured favoritism and partiality. He endured discrimination based on His status, on where He lived, and on His occupation. I believe it was also based on His appearance. Isaiah 53:2–3 tells us, "We did not esteem Him, because we were not awed by the way He looked." There was nothing about Him that would win our esteem. So He experienced this kind of judgment—and the rich were the ones doing this. The higher-ups were rejecting Him.

So He shared this with His disciples and now James is sharing it with us: be careful that you don't give preferential treatment to the very people who are thwarting the gospel. Don't strive to become friends with those who make fun of or discriminate against others. It is illogical for us to do that.

Favoritism and discrimination cause us to be indifferent to the commands of Jesus.

James continues in verse eight, *"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well."* He brings up the royal law from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 22:34–40): to love your neighbor as yourself. You cannot live out the greatest commandment—to love your neighbor as yourself—and show favoritism or discrimination toward a group of people.

Here's why: Your neighbor isn't just the person who lives next door. In one of Jesus' most famous stories, the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus teaches that everyone is our neighbor. We are called to love all human beings as if they lived right next door to us. We are to love them as we love ourselves. We can never elevate one over the other. We cannot live out the great commandment and show favoritism. We cannot live out the great commandment and show discrimination toward another person.

Over and over again, in both word and deed, Jesus models what we should do. He ministered to the Jews and the Samaritans. He ministered to the rich and the poor. He ministered to the young and the old. He ministered to women and men. He ministered to the slaves and the masters. He ministered to the religious elites and the downright filthy. And He did all this with love in His heart.

If Jesus did that, and if He commands us to do this as well, then the Christ-follower should obey Him. We cannot be indifferent to the commands of Jesus. We can't say we love Jesus and hate His commands. He said, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). And the greatest commandment He gives us besides honoring and loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is to love each other as we love ourselves—no matter what we look like or what we have.

4. We have a practice to render.

Verses 9–11 tell us that we must change our attitude. Instead of judging, let's remember that you and I will be judged. He reminds us that we need to be careful not to think that just because we're doing really well in all other situations that it's then okay to show a little favoritism here or there. He reminds us that if we obey the whole law but transgress in one thing, we are still transgressors.

Think of it this way: Let's say you've stolen lots of money from your employer. You go before the court and stand before the judge, who says, "Prove your innocence." Your response is this, "I'm innocent of this crime because I've never cheated on my wife. I've never killed anybody. I've never had a traffic violation." The judge would respond, "Wait a minute. We're not talking about that. It's great that you haven't broken the law in those ways, but you're still a lawbreaker. You stole money from the company." "But I'm not an adulterer, judge!" "It doesn't matter. You are a lawbreaker."

James calls us to change our attitudes.

You see, what we will do—and what the religious people in Jesus' day did—is size ourselves up by checking off a list of what we haven't done. "I haven't done this. I haven't done this. I haven't done this. Oh, yeah, there's one area, but does it really matter?" James says, "If you've broken the law in one area, you've broken it all. You're a transgressor. You're either innocent or you're guilty. Whether you're guilty by one sin or all of them, you're still guilty." He says we must recognize that we will be judged for that.

As Christians, our eternal destiny is not at stake, but we will be judged regarding how we've lived for Christ at the judgment seat of Christ in heaven. Instead of judging people, we need to train our minds to show mercy. Instead of thinking we've kept the whole law, we should remember that we've broken it if we've failed in this one area. Our attitude needs to change. You and I must remember we are sinners, like every other individual on this earth. And at the cross of Jesus, our footing is all on the same level. We're all sinners in need of redemption.

James calls us to change our actions.

In verses 12–13, we read, *"So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."* So now that we know the Word, what are we going to do? Are we going to act differently? Are we going to speak differently as the result of what we've learned? Are we going to be careful with what we say about other people? Are we going to cease some of the random thoughts we have about people based on their externals?

James says, "Don't elevate some people over others. Only Jesus should be elevated. If you want to elevate someone, elevate Him." On the judgment day, we're either going to be judged based on judgment or judged based on mercy. What James is telling us is that when Jesus judges us, He's giving us an out. He's saying, "You're a lawbreaker, but one way you can remedy your judgment time before the Lord is to show mercy to people."

This isn't the only mention of this Scripture. We read that with the same mercy we show others, God will show us mercy. The way we show judgment against others, God will use the same standard in judging us. I have to believe that every one of us wants mercy on the judgment day, not judgment—right? We must speak and act with mercy, not with judgment, because God's perspective is that mercy always triumphs over judgment. So what do we do? Here are three applications for each one of us:

1. Accept everyone. Romans 15:7 is a command for us to accept everyone. Do you have a big enough heart to accept everyone? We're commanded to do just that.
2. Consider the needs of others. Philippians 2:3–4. Don't look to your own interests, but look to the interests of others.
3. Affirm all people. First Thessalonians 5:11 says we are to encourage one another. We are to affirm one another. We are to love one another.

The entrance to Moody Memorial Church in Chicago has this inscribed motto: "Ever welcome to this house of God are the strangers, the destitute, and the poor." Is that true of your heart? Is that true of our church? If we want to be a biblical church, if we want to be a healthy church, then we must ask this question continually: Do I love like Jesus loves?