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We all face some kind of discrimination or favoritism against us, whether it is because of how we dress, look, speak, or some other superficial reason. We identify easily with characters in stories who are misjudged because of what is on the outside. But do we ourselves show favoritism, unfairly treating some better or worse based on outward appearance? We might not overtly show favoritism based on appearance, but do we treat a CEO with a doctorate better than a waitress with a high school degree? Or do we perhaps favor people who are like us, in culture or in the color of their skin? Most of us even favor cute and responsive babies and flock toward them more than other plainer babies.

And there is even favoritism in families. The favored child feels self confident, spoiled and entitled, while the unfavored child feels unfairly treated and resentful. Even our Christian community is not immune from the effects of favoritism. That is why James treats the issue so directly in his epistle.

James states that favoritism is inconsistent with the faith we proclaim in 3 ways and tells us how to counter it. Firstly, in verse 1-4, James writes that favoritism is inconsistent with our faith in Jesus. He writes, “as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism.” Showing partiality and giving unfair preferential treatment based on external factors is directly contradictory to the impartiality of Jesus, whom we declare as our Lord. Jesus values what is in the heart more than appearances. Even the Pharisees in Matthew knew Jesus to be an impartial man, not swayed by appearances. He loves everyone and extends His salvation equally to all, even to “sinners and tax collectors.” So we should all be aware of our own reactions to people’s outward appearances and try not to show favoritism, because Jesus never did.

Secondly, favoritism is inconsistent with the character of God. In verse 5-7, James writes that God choose those poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. This is not to say that God doesn’t save rich people. In the Old Testament, the concept of “poor” is of the humble, righteous and oppressed people, not merely those who lack money. The Gospels show that Jesus delighted in showering grace upon those whom the world disregarded, like prostitutes, cripples and lepers, because they were more aware of their inadequacies and more willing to depend on the grace of God. But if we show favoritism to the

rich, those of high status, education, or good appearance, we are inconsistent with the nature of God described above. Proverbs 17:5 states that whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their maker. Thus whoever shows favoritism towards the rich is acting against God's nature.

Thirdly, favoritism is inconsistent with the law of love. In verse 8-11, James says you do right if you "love your neighbor as yourself" but if you show favoritism you are a sinner. We might think favoring one person over another is a small fault, well compensated for by good deeds. But James makes clear that there is no ranking of sins by severity and that breaking one law is breaking the whole law. A murderer is not innocent merely because he is not a thief as well. And showing favoritism in particular breaks the 2 greatest commandments, to love God and love your neighbor as yourself. For in showing favoritism you do not love others and you act against God's character. Therefore watch your attitude towards others who are different in appearance and upbringing so that you do not show favoritism.

Lastly, James tells us how to avoid favoritism. In verses 12-13, James writes that we should treat others in light of God's impending judgment upon us and His mercy. None of us can keep the whole law and are guilty and deserving of punishment. But God in His mercy saved us from judgment. This is the freedom God gives us. Therefore, in light of that, how can we show judgment instead of mercy on others? If we judge others and show favoritism, that shows that we haven't truly received or understood the God's mercy; and therefore we will be judged. But James does not leave us fearing judgment. He states that "mercy triumphs over judgment." Jesus has already shown us mercy, the tree in the garden of Eden has been replaced by the cross. We should not fear judgment, but instead show mercy in light of the mercy we have received.

Think of who you show favoritism against. If it is because of something outward, ask God to give you the sense to overcome that prejudice. If it is because of something inward, ask God to help you accept the person for who he is, lest you continue to live in a way inconsistent with your faith in Christ, God's character, and the law of love. Let us live a life worthy of the calling we have received.