

THE FOOLISHNESS OF RITISN S Μ Ν G Ε R 0 U D Ε

The Foolishness Of Favoritism

James 2:1-9

INTRODUCTION

Today's key text invites us to consider what happens in the church when favoritism goes too far. At the time of our text, it would be perfectly normal for people in church and society to show favoritism and preferential treatment to people with means and money. Society was structured and ordered around giving those of a certain class, in a certain tax bracket, and with access to power the highest privileges that society had to offer. James opens this chapter by confronting this worldly mindset and addressing the dangers of bringing it into the house of God. James says to them then and us now that we must not let the prejudices of the culture or the subjective preferences in our minds influence how we handle those who, like us, are made in the image and in the likeness of God. Society may make distinctions and judge people based upon their background, their moral history, their mistakes, their family of origin, their race, their gender, or their class, and you may have personal preferences for the type of company you prefer to keep, but you should not call yourself a Christian, as verse one says, if cultural prejudices and personal preferences cause you to show partiality.

KEY POINTS

1. Showing Favoritism In The Church Is Theologically Foolish

James 2:5 says, "Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?" In other words, doesn't God make the benefits of the kingdom available to people without regard for what they do and how much they possess? Doesn't God administer favor and blessings to His children without checking their credentials, their bio, or their references?

It is not consistent with the pattern, the paradigm, and the process of God to do that. Favoritism and partiality based upon such judgments are theologically foolish because that's not how God works. When one searches through Scripture, one discovers that God chooses and uses those who are the underdog in this world to be the head in the Kingdom. God uses the most despised, the most dejected, the most mistreated, and the most maligned in the world to be exalted in the Kingdom. That's how God works. Therefore, if that's God's mindset, why shouldn't it be ours as well?

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2. Showing Favoritism In The Church Is Practically Foolish

Notice that at no time does the text say that the man who is dressed in fine clothes is actually rich. It just says that a man came to church wearing fine clothes and gold rings, and they just looked at what he was wearing and assumed that he was rich. Now, you and I know that just because a person is dressed like a million bucks does not mean they actually have money. How many times have we seen people flossing on social media only to discover later on that they were really broke?

With this in mind, I think James wants to highlight the foolishness of looking at people and assuming they are something that they are not. While every commentary I've read says that this text is about the tension between the rich and the poor, I think there is something deeper that James is trying to say.

I think he's trying to challenge making decisions and judgments about people based on superficial criteria. You better be careful, James is saying, about looking at someone and concluding that what you see is necessarily who they are. Just because someone quotes the Bible doesn't mean they're living it. Just because someone shouts doesn't mean their faith is sincere. Just because someone looks good on paper doesn't mean they are marriage material. These warnings make it very clear that favoritism is practically foolish, especially when you don't really know someone.

3. Showing Favoritism In The Church Is Personally Foolish

In verse 8, James gets to the heart of the matter. He says that if you would just love your neighbor as yourself, you'd be good. In other words, there is a relationship between how you treat others and how you regard yourself. But there's something that was preventing some people in this congregation from doing that and I think I found the answer, not in this chapter, but in the prior one. In the prologue, the writer acknowledges that the recipients of the letter he says are "in the dispersion."

As I read this part of the text, I wondered: How do people get to the point where they devalue others and esteem themselves? The Lord gave me the answer by taking me back to the very first verse of the first chapter, where the text says that James is writing to Christians who are "in the dispersion." NOTES

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"The dispersion" refers to those Jewish Christians who had been scattered outside Palestine when foreign armies destroyed Jerusalem and oppressed the Jewish people.

"The dispersion" here refers to the early Church's sense of feeling alienated, separated, and estranged from their homeland Jerusalem. And so, the letter itself is addressed to a group of people who were historically oppressed and poor themselves. Therefore, the critique found in this chapter is rooted in the recognition that the recipients of the letter were at one time in the same situation themselves. That's right, the people who mistreated that poor man were at one time poor themselves. This is where we have to be careful because there is such a temptation to start showing favoritism to the point where you alienate people who are in the same place you once were. And that is personally foolish. NOTES

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1. Has there ever been a time you showed favoritism when you shouldn't have? What can you learn from that situation?
- 2. On the flip side, have you ever been on the receiving end of favoritism in a negative way? How did that feel?
- 3. What did you learn about God's heart regarding favoritism in this message?

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