The Gospel Rebukes Our Sinful Partiality

James 2:1

November 12, 2023

If you'd open your Bibles to James chapter 2, James chapter 2, today we're going to begin to make our way into the main body of the letter of James by looking at the first verse in James chapter 2.

So up to this point in the book of James, we've spent quite a bit of time going through what most understand to be the introduction of James, verses 1-18 of chapter 1. They kind of serve to set up the context of the book and primarily address the issue of trials and how Christians are to live in light of them and through them. And we talked about the necessity of James addressing the issue of trials because this is the context that these people are in, and if someone's going through a difficult situation, you need to address that at the forefront

of your conversation if you want to talk to them about something else, or they're not going to pay attention.

So he addresses the issue of trials, he bases the whole context of the book in that, and then he gives clear instruction on how to righteously think and act through them. And then in verses 19-27, what we've looked at the last three sermons, while still working in the context of trials as is evident from his use of linking words, James begins to transition into some of the broader concepts that he's going to spend the remainder of the letter dealing with.

So in particular, he begins to draw attention to the concept of false faith, which is going to come up again and again throughout the letter in different ways. So he introduces the category that we saw last week of being self-deceived, of being a self-deceived practitioner of religion, one who may truly believe themselves to be a Christian, but upon an actual examination of their life, it would appear otherwise.

So he anchors the difference between true and false faith with one's approach to the Word. How do you approach the Word? That is the key to true and false faith. Are you one who receives the implanted Word with meekness, ready and anxious to be changed by it, one who hears the Word and then acts upon what they've heard? Are you one who conforms your life to whatever the mirror of God's Word exposes to be true about you? Is that you?

Or are you a hearer only? Are you one who sees what the Word says to you, but then walks away unchanged, one who might be kind of devoted to religious practices in order, maybe, to make yourself feel better about who you are? But really, your life demonstrates that while you may be dedicated to various religious observances, you're not actually at all dedicated to the God whom those observances point to.

So this picture in 1:19-27, the idea of how you receive and respond to the Word of God, needs to be like the interpretive grid through which we read the rest of the book. So the rest of the book is asking, are you really a doer who acts on the Word?

Is that really you? Well, the rest of James asks you, then, "Well, let's see, let's see about that," as we now go through four chapters of practical situations and instructions to see if that's actually true about you.

So we need to keep that in mind, that this is a letter that is meant to be read all at once. We need to keep that in mind, also, because we're studying this book over months and months and months of time, over many, many different sermons. And it can sometimes be easy to forget that just because some of this stuff was a month ago for us as we come into chapter 2 today, it was mere seconds ago that the original audience heard verses 19-27.

There's no chapter breaks originally, and so the original audience didn't just gather together and hear a verse or two, then go back home and wait until next week and hear another verse or two. That's not how we read letters, and that's not how they read letters. So it's not to say that we're not right to slowly mine God's Word to the depths, as we do from the pulpit

here every week. We should do that, and that's what a high view of the Word of God demands.

But a high view of the Word of God also recognizes the literary genre of letter, and we study it as such. So we need to recognize the fact that this audience is hearing these things, hearing chapter 2 right on the cusp of that marvelous section that we've just looked at over the last few weeks. And therefore, they will recognize that now James is getting into the practical outworking of what he has just introduced in the previous verses. That's what's going on. So now he's expanding on some of the topics that he's touched on in the introduction, and they will see whether or not they truly are doers of the word or merely practitioners of a false faith.

So with that in mind, then it's interesting, when we ask ourselves what is the first issue that James decides to address, the first thing to confront them on, to help them see the danger of self-deception? And there's a long list of what we would maybe consider major sins that we might think he would put here.

But it is the sin, it is the sin of showing partiality, the issue of showing partiality or favoritism. That's where he goes. And this is possibly one of the most common sins that we commit, and it's almost certainly one of the easiest ones for us to excuse and defend. And it's this sin that is the theme of the entirety of this first large section of the body of this letter. So even though we're going to anchor all our thoughts in verse 1 of chapter 2 today, let's read verses 1-13 together so that we can have an understanding of everything that James is saying, of what he's going after.

James, chapter 2, beginning in verse 1: "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 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,' or 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?

"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? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you're committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you've become a transgressor of the law. 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 we can see here that James introduces the subject, and then he gives a lengthy example of a certain specific type of sinful partiality, and then he continues his teaching on just why this is such an evil practice that should never be a part of the church. And today we're going to, again, we're just going to dip our toes into this section a little bit, only looking at verse 1 and just get an introduction to the topic, and something that we can come back to and look at later on when we're back in the book of James. But as we're going to see, this is an extremely important verse. Chapter 2 verse 1 is an extremely important verse that stands out within the book of James and is worthy of our close examination.

So first, today we're going to discuss what is meant by partiality, and then we're going to see five Gospel realities that make the sin of partiality so heinous for those who claim to be Christians. So we're going to do that under two main points, two main points today: point number one, clarifying the requirement; and point number two, consistency in the rebuke. Clarifying the requirement, consistency in the rebuke.

So first point: clarifying the requirement. And this is important because coming straight out of the last section, we come to the command in 2:1. And because of all of the confusion about what this concept, the idea of favoritism or partiality, what it's referring to, because there's so much confusion about that, it's good for us to just take a moment and talk about what is actually being commanded, here, and what is not being commanded, here. We need to gain some needed clarity.

So the imperative is the short phrase, "Show no partiality." "Show no partiality." You see that right there in verse 1: "My brother, show no partiality." The word that is translated as "partiality" or "favoritism" is a Greek term that is totally unique to the New Testament. It's found in no other secular sources, but it's used in a few places in the New Testament. It's the long Greek word prosopolempsia, prosopolempsia. And it's the idea that showing favor to someone, showing favor to someone in an unfair or unjust way, making a verdict about how you value or will treat someone that is motivated by wrong considerations or external factors, factors which should have no bearing on the ultimate evaluation of a person.

And so common areas that people show sinful partiality, and we talk about this verse all the time, would be social status, wealth, race, gender. We hear all of that type of stuff these days, but at its core, at its core, what it usually boils down to for us when we are honest, it's the sinful judgment of another person, how we treat them based on our own preferences, based on our own values, and based on what we esteem or what we decide to be the value of that person in contributing or detracting from our happiness or our comfort. This is how we make our judgments. This is how we go about our lives, throwing everyone we need into different levels, different layers, different stratification, if you will. It's based on that type of thinking.

So even though this particular word is unique to the New Testament, the concept of possessing impartiality as a righteous characteristic is thoroughly biblical. That concept has its origin in the character of God. The impartiality of God is an attribute that we see throughout Scripture, and ultimately it is the basis for this command. The basis for this command is to call us to emulate him in this. In fact, what James is most

likely doing here is expanding on the principle that he just talked about in verse 27 that we looked at last week, about taking care of the widow and the orphan because this is a demonstration of the impartiality of God, taking care of the widow and the orphan.

And James, the wise author that he is, is probably capitalizing on the familiarity of his Jewish audience with the Torah. Because if you remember, last week we pointed out that verse 27 has its basis in several Old Testament verses, and probably the most famous one coming from Deuteronomy 10:18, which reads, "He," He, God, "executes justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing." But right above that verse, in Deuteronomy 10:17, it says, "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who is not partial and takes no bribe."

So when read together, there is an incredibly specific correlation between Deuteronomy 10:17 and 18, and James 1:27 and 2:1. So there's that, but in addition to that, all the other

places in the New Testament where this word is used, it is in reference to the character of God, all the other places. So Acts 10:34-35, where we read about Peter when he is coming to the understanding that Gentiles can be saved in Christ also, Peter says, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

And Paul, in Paul's teaching instructions on earthly masters in Ephesians 6:9, he says, "Masters do, do the same to them and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven and that there is no partiality with him." And in the parallel passage to that one, in Colossians 3:23-25, again as Paul is referencing the rewards and punishments of God, we read, "Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You're serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong that he has done, and there is no partiality."

Romans 2:9-11: "There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek, for God shows no partiality." And then the only other place where it's used in the New Testament, it's used as an adverb in 1 Peter 1:17. But it's still for God. Peter says, "If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile."

So these are all the other places in the New Testament where we see this same term used here in James 2:1, and they are all in reference to the character of God. James is unique in his use of it to talk about something that's supposed to apply to us. So the fact that these are all in reference to the character of God, that this phrase is used only for the character of God in all these other places, that should add a lot of weight to the actual command that we're looking at today. What we're being commanded here is to emulate God by relating to others and viewing them in an impartial way. We are to be impartial, just as God is impartial.

And it is really important that we keep this in mind because the command, the imperative, is "show no partiality." Zero. None. We need to keep that in mind because the way that this command and this verse is most often used, it actually ends up being adding a modifier onto it and then changing the meaning slightly. So the idea is to emulate God, who shows no partiality to anyone.

But how it's often used is to just say something like, "Show no partiality toward a certain group like the rich," which is true because that qualifies as a status level that should have no bearing on how we ultimately view someone. But what is often meant by that in our culture, and how it's often expanded on, is something like, "Show no partiality to the rich, and do this by showing partiality to the poor." Or more, more common today, "Show no partiality to" whatever, fill in the blank answer for the current oppressor class is, "and the way that you do that is by showing partiality to" whatever, fill in the blank the victim class is.

But that is not the command. Favoring someone over someone else for any reason, treating someone unfairly for any reason, no matter how you might justify it, is a violation of the command. James uses the example of the rich being favored because that seems to be what the greatest threat to the violation of this command is in the current context that he is writing to. But that doesn't change the command itself. It doesn't change the command itself from being applicable in any situation where someone is being favored over another for an unbiblical reason.

So the example of the principle, the example of the principle, is not the same as the rule of the principle. In fact, you can't really see this in the English because it doesn't quite sound right, but that word translated as "partiality," is actually in the plural. It's in the plural. So that shows that James has this in mind. So it literally says something like, "Show no partialities." That means that it is intended to cover a variety of areas where partiality could be expressed, not just the one he is going to express.

So it is therefore a misinterpretation of the text to say that the only thing that James cares about is partiality towards the rich, and that he does not care about any other form of sinful partiality. To come away thinking otherwise would be like listening to last week's sermon, with the concept of bridling your tongue, and remembering that the example I used was using crass and vulgar language, and then going home and being like, "Well, I can still go along my life of slandering people behind their backs because that's not the example." No, the principle is bridling your tongue. You can still violate that just because I use a different example. So the biblical principle is to show no partiality, and the prominent example that James uses in detail has to do with the specific case of rich and poor.

But to make this point even more clear, go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Leviticus 19. Leviticus 19 is one of the Old Testament chapters that James alludes to, actually pretty regularly in his epistle. In fact, in chapter 5, there's four allusions to this chapter, to this section we're going to read right now. There's four allusions just in chapter 5 alone, and Leviticus 19 is no doubt what James has on his mind now also.

So let's just read verses 9-14 really quick. Verses 9-14 start out, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor, for the sojourner. I am the Lord your God.

"You shall not steal. You shall not deal falsely. You shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. You shall not oppress your neighbor to rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God. I am the Lord."

So in those verses you see here pretty plainly the type of concern for the poor and the weak and the oppressed that James also is demonstrating in his book. Showing loving concern for those in need is part of the impartial character of God that we are supposed to follow ourselves. But giving to those in need is

not the same as showing partiality to the poor. So as you keep reading in verse 15, you read this: "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor." So we are not to show partiality to the poor or defer to the great.

Righteousness is supposed to be the standard through which we see people, through which we treat people. What does righteousness demand in this situation? So if a poor person is stealing from a rich person in this situation, it doesn't matter how well off the rich person might be. Righteousness demands that the poor person be treated justly, be treated fairly, and therefore punished.

So there's an understanding that yes, there is a greater chance that the poor and marginalized might be taken advantage of easier because of their more helpless state. But that is never a reason to tip the scales of justice. That is not how God operates. He is impartial. Showing no partiality is an across-the-board-type of command that applies to every demographic.

So it's an application of loving your neighbor as yourself, which is also found in the text. If you just look at verse 18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." So in the same way that you naturally look out for yourself and are aware of ways in which you are being viewed or treated unfairly or unjustly, you make sure you're looking out for others and viewing them through the lens of righteousness, also.

So as we turn back to James, you can turn back to James, now, as you turn back there, let me just point out one more thing that this command is not. The command to show no partiality is not the command to erase distinctions. It's not the command to erase distinctions among people. Again, many times this passage is misused in the same way that Galatians 3:28 is often misused: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free; there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," that the answer is erasing distinctions.

They say this verse points to that, this verse in James points to that, and the verse in Galatians is pointing out the greater spiritual reality that in Christ all are equal partakers of the promise of the Gospel, that in him we are all partakers of that divine promise.

But all of the physical distinctions that Paul points out in Galatians, in Galatians 3, they still remain. There are still slave and free when Paul is writing, and Paul has given commands to those in both categories throughout his epistles that he wouldn't have given if his concern was to eliminate the categories of slave and free.

There are still male and female. Those distinctions are expectations; there's expectations that they remain in place. And Paul elsewhere recognizes the distinctions by giving unique commands for women and unique commands for men. The fact that those distinctions remained do not take away from the truth of this Gospel promise in Galatians 3; there are still Jew and Greek. Those ethical distinctions still remain in place. Paul

elsewhere in Romans recognizes the ethnic distinction of Israel still and the unique promises that are still Israel's.

So in a similar way, the command not to show partiality is not an attempt to erase all distinctions. Again, the scene in Leviticus, the idea that there was this law for how to treat poor people in light of the impartiality of God, there was this law there, and that means that the answer wasn't, we just read it in Leviticus, the answer wasn't, "Give until everyone is on the same level." No, it was to "love and care for them according to their needs through your prosperity." So this is the command: to see others in whatever distinctions that the sovereign God has put in them and on their life, to see them as God does, to not place any sinful or selfish filters over our view of others. That's the command.

And so with that said, with what the command isn't, I want to get back to what I mentioned earlier, that this is an incredibly serious problem that is often overlooked, and we overlook it, and we a lot of times let ourselves off the hook because we think of those major categories, right? "I'm not a

racist." "I'm not a sexist." "I'm too poor to, to look down on the poor." We all think of ourselves as too poor. "So I'm good, I'm good on this command. I am impartial."

No, we can't just let ourselves off the hook like that. This is any way in which we view others through our own lens of value and importance, any way in which we do this. So how that person makes me feel, or if their personality bothers me, or if they're constantly saying or doing things that, whether justified or unjustified, gets on your nerves, affects your ability to view them in the same way that God does, there's partiality there.

So think about the people who you complain about, either out loud about, or in your heart about. Think about them not to a sinful place, but think about them. Maybe it is a type of person. Maybe it's a particular characteristic. Maybe it's just a particular person. Maybe it's a physical, visible trait. Maybe it's the way someone talks. Maybe it's just a certain type of personality or demeanor that you find bothersome or even offensive, and you can find a way to justify it. But in the end,

it really is that this person or this type of person, you know, gets on your nerves, or you don't benefit from them in any way. Maybe that's really what it is if you're really honest. This person is one who just takes up time.

Again, it's not that you don't notice differences in people. That's part of our responsibility, to be able to see bad and sinful habits in people and help them with it. So it's not that we don't do that and just pretend that they aren't there. It's just that you view that person through your own lens of preferences, your own lens of benefits to you rather than through the Gospel.

That really is what James is going after, here. In our sinful partiality, we have forgotten or neglected the greatest truths that should be at the forefront of all of our dealings with one another. The fact that a Christian would treat others with favoritism or partiality, that we would think less of some than others, should be absolutely reprehensible when we consider what it is that we claim to know and believe as Christians.

And that leads to our second point: consistency in the rebuke. Consistency in the rebuke. And what I mean by this is that what we claim to believe about Jesus and his Gospel is a rebuke to our partiality. Partiality shows us to be inconsistent with what we claim to believe, and this has to do with everything that a believer is either forgetting or minimizing whenever they fail to be impartial.

And that is because this command is directly linked to all of the realities that belong to us in the Gospel. And James really does want us to see this, and he does this through the words with which he surrounds the command. So the verse doesn't just say, "Show no partiality." That's not all it says. That is the command, and that in and of itself is sufficient to demand our obedience. But that's not how he states it. He states it in a specific way in order to draw attention to the reality of just how truly awful it is for a Christian to sin in this way.

So look again at verse one, the entirety of it. "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." "Show no partiality as you

hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." And the tense, the tense that he uses, here, implies that this is what they're already doing. They're doing both things at the same time. They're claiming to hold the faith while still holding on to their sinful partiality. They're doing both of those at the same time, and it is apparently fine with them.

So James is building off of that idea of a false religion or a false faith that we've looked at in the previous weeks. He's saying here again, "You cannot at the same time hold on to your sinful partiality and a faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." The two things have nothing to do with each other. They are opposite from each other. He wants them to see the contradiction, and he wants them to feel it based on the words that he uses here.

So all commentators agree that this verse, that James 2:1, stands out from the rest of the epistle. When you consider the fact that the only other place in the entire letter that James uses the actual name of Jesus is in the very first verse, in the greeting, it should draw our attention to what he is doing here.

The things that James says about Jesus here, "Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory," it's the only place in the whole book that he uses those names, that he talks about the person of Christ. And it sticks out so much that liberal scholars try and say that this verse was placed here, that these words were added here later just to make this book sound more Christian. That's how much these words stick out.

So this is a big deal. James is doing this intentionally. He wants us to see it. It's important for his readers to see what he's doing, here. So it's not just the name of Jesus; it's all the words that James packs around this command that describe Jesus, words which, when you think through each one, make the idea of a Christian showing favoritism just absolutely appalling.

The book of James is kind of famous for having very little development of theology and Christology in the book, other than all the references to the actual teaching of Jesus throughout the letter, a lot of references to the passage that Travis read from earlier. But other than that, there's no development of

Christology. James focuses instead on the practical outworking of the faith.

So it is intentional and striking that he, here, uses a phrase of such high Christology. It's seemingly out of nowhere and only here in the whole book. So it's meant to be striking, and it is. So there's a sense in which it's a wonderful introduction to the entirety of the rest of the body of the book, but also to this command in particular. James wants them to hear this command in light of a strong and deep understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. So it's appropriate for us to take a moment and look at these words.

And as we do that, we're going to point out five realities about the person and work of Jesus Christ from these words, five realities that stand as a rebuke to every believer who would, even for a moment, hold on to the faith in our Lord Jesus and a sinful partiality at the same time. If we are always looking at others through these Gospel lenses, it should be impossible at the same time to display sinful partiality. So notice that not only does James use the name of Jesus, he uses an extremely

exalted title for him. Those will be each of our points. Each word is significant for us.

But the first subpoint under this heading, the first subpoint under this heading that I want us to see is the life of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. The life of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. Again, it is important that, other than the greeting, this is the only place where James uses the earthly name of Jesus. It is quite significant that James, the brother of Jesus, who knew Jesus personally, who lived with him in the same house, who knew him for most of his life as nothing more than "my older brother Jesus," he doesn't even bring up his actual name until right now, and he doesn't even mention it again throughout the rest of the book.

And so the name of Jesus, the physical name that reminds us of the humanity of Jesus, the human life that he lived, the very truth that we are getting ready to celebrate next month, that God became man, a fully human person born to a real mother, who gave him the name "Jesus," the incarnate God during his life on earth had the name Jesus. He responded to it when he heard it

with real physical ears. Jesus, a real person from the despised town of Nazareth, born into a poor carpenter's family, born in a stable.

He was mocked throughout his life because of where he came from. He was despised and rejected, treated with some of the most heinous, sinful partiality imaginable. This man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the exact type of person that these recipients, who, if they saw him at their gatherings, would have moved him to the corner, forced him to stand somewhere else, or sat him down at their feet.

But it is this very man who lived the perfect life that the law demands from each of us, that none of us could live. He is the only true, innocent man to ever walk the earth, yet he was put to death in the most humiliating way possible, dying like a common criminal on a Roman cross. The fact that Jesus embraced humility, as one who had far less reason to embrace humility than anyone on earth, should sober us, should make it easy for us to humble ourselves and think of ourselves as more lowly than anyone whom we are tempted to look down on for any reason. As

reminded in Philippians 2:4-9, the humbling of Christ all the way from eternal glory as God to a shameful death on a cross as the lowest place in humanity, the horrible and unjust way that Jesus was treated, the humble status he embraced should be a catalyst for making sure that we strive to treat others with impartiality.

In addition to that, the example of the way in which Jesus lived his life, the example in which Jesus lived his life, again pointing to the life of Jesus that demonstrates what it looks like to live in impartiality towards others. So just think about how he treated people. His disciples were made up of the poor and the rich, those with respectable positions and careers, and those with not-so-respectable careers. And he loved and ministered to all impartially: the powerful Roman centurion, to the blind and the lepers, from mothers who have lost their children to other women who have lost their dignity. He loved and served those whom he knew would prove their love and loyalty to him, and he loved and served those whom he knew would betray him. Who Jesus was in his earthly life and how he lived with the people around him, combined with our claim that we desire to be like him, is a strong rebuke to our sinful partiality.

This leads to our second point under this heading, second point under this heading, subpoint if you will, the saving work of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. The saving work of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. Again, other than 1:1, this is the only place where James uses the title "Christ." Just striking that, that he puts all of these things right here in this command. The title of "Christ" is the reminder that this is the Messiah; he's the chosen one; he's the final prophet, priest and king prophesied throughout the entirety of the Old Testament, the final prophet, priest and king prophesied throughout the Old Testament. That's who Jesus is, and now we understand him to be the Messiah who had to die to make a people for himself, to bring a people into his kingdom.

He had to die from the perfect life that he lived. The death that he died was necessary because of his role as our Savior. This was what needed to take place in order to purchase this people for him. We were all lost in our sins. Our sin before a holy God meant that each one of us deserves punishment in an eternal Hell. Just one sin against an infinite God warrants a just and infinite punishment, and we are sinful

through and through. We're sinning all the time, sinning in our thoughts and in our actions.

But Jesus Christ lived the perfect life in our place and then died the atoning death in our place. He had to be a man to stand in the place of man, he had to be sinless so that he could bear the sins of others and not his own. And he had to be infinite so that he could stand in the place of many. So in that death on the cross, he took on himself the punishment for our sins and imputed his righteous life unto all those who would call on his name.

And this fact alone should absolutely crush even the slightest ounce of favoritism that might pop up in us. Sinful partiality, or favoritism, always has pride and selfishness at its root. The reason we are able to place others into different categories of worth and value in our mind is only because we are somehow able to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. That's the only way we can do it, that we are somehow in some exalted position that allows us to make judgments about others,

whether someone is more worthy of something or more worthy of salvation than another, looking down on others, despising them.

It's only possible for the one who forgets the truth that were it not for the saving work of Jesus Christ, they would still be blind and dead in their sins. At a most basic level, all mankind is in desperate need of a Savior. So it makes no logical sense for one person who desperately needs a Savior in order to be anything but a blind, ignorant slave to sin, to look down on another such person, to be comfortable putting them in their own category. The need of every individual for the saving work of Christ should keep us from the sin of impartiality.

The third point: The lordship of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. The lordship of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. In this incredibly powerful string of words, we are once again reminded of the word, "Lord," the word that we say so much that we forget the importance of it. "As you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." To our shame, we've become so familiar with that that we almost just think of it as Jesus' first name sometimes, or just a synonym for God.

But it is a title. It means he's our Master. One can only be Lord if he has subjects. That is what we are. The Messiah, who died in the place of his people, ransomed us. He purchased us for himself. He owns us. The Bible rightly and regularly refers to us as doulos, as slaves. It’s a stronger word than just just thinking of ourselves as servants. A slave is one whose entire life is bound up in his service to another, and to his will. Jesus Christ is Lord over his people. He is our Master, and we long to obey him, right? Don't we? Don't we?

When we show sinful partiality towards someone, we are in violation of the command of our Master, many commands from our Master. He's told us that we're to love our neighbors as ourselves, to treat others as we want to be treated. He has told us that we are to live for the sake of others, that we are to, among many other things, bear one another's burdens, pray for one another, show hospitality to one another, encourage one another, forgive one another, bear with one another, be patient with one another, seek the good of one another, to be devoted to one another.

Those are commands from our Master. Whenever we fail to do these things, or when we decide, either purposefully or passively, that someone isn't worthy of our effort in one of these commands, what's going on there is we're committing a type of rebellious mutiny. It's a hostile takeover to give ourselves the lordship of our lives back.

The moment that we begin to notice in ourselves the type of pride that leads to sinful partiality, the second we see ourselves looking at others through the lens of anything other than the love and mercy that we are commanded to, when we justify our sinful partiality, the words of Jesus to his followers in Luke 6:46 should snap us back into obedience: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

Fourth subpoint: The glory of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. The glory of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. And this one is probably the most interesting, grammatically. This is the term that really sets this whole section apart and draws your attention to everything that's going on in this

verse. He does use the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ" in the first verse of the book, in his greeting, again the only other place where it's mentioned.

But now with this term, it's an even stronger Christological phrase, and in fact, it's one of the stronger Christological titles in the New Testament. It's actually quite difficult to translate. If you've got different translations, you probably see that. Translations like the CSB and NAS do it as the full phrase, "the glorious Lord Jesus Christ." But it literally reads, "the Lord Jesus Christ, the glory." It's an odd way to phrase it, but pretty much all commentators agree this is still in reference to Jesus. That's what the ESV is trying to do, here, with its translation. Even though the word "Lord" is only in the Greek once, they say, "the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."

But the idea is that James is bringing special emphasis to this particular characteristic, to this characteristic of Jesus Christ, a special focus on seeing the glory of Jesus Christ by saying, "the Lord Jesus Christ, the glory." In fact, by just

saying "the glory," some have said that this is James commenting to this particular situation that he is addressing. This is kind of a poke at them because "the glory" indicates all the glory.

It's not just that Christ is one among many receivers of glory, not just some glory, but that he is glory. Next to him there is no other who is deserving of glory, and this is really important when you consider the sin that is being addressed. The idea that these recipients are showing partiality toward the wealthy, that they are essentially honoring some people at the expense of others, in doing this, when there is in fact only one who is worthy of all glory. There's only one who deserves to be viewed above others. There's only one who we are to see as categorically different and worthy of our praise and adoration, even at the expense of others. He is the glory, so he's pointing that out to them by saying it like this.

But the idea behind using the word, here, in this way to portray Christ is to show him in the manifestation of all of the splendor of God, to remind them of the magnificence of the bright and shining glory of Jesus Christ. And in so doing, it

should destroy in us all of our ridiculous reasons that we might throw people into different categories with our own sinful judgments.

Thinking about the glory and majesty of God, rightly thinking about Christ in that light, and then looking through the light of the glory of Christ, looking through that light at others, and then still having the type of pride that you need to look down on someone else and think of them as less than others, that should be impossible. And likewise, looking through the light of Christ and then showing favoritism and lifting someone else up above others should be equally impossible. We shouldn't be able to look through the splendor of the glory of God and think less of his people or more of his people.

So in addition to this, the glory of God is also a continual reminder throughout the Bible of the eschaton, that Christ will return, the fact that the fullness of the glory of Christ will actually only one day be fully revealed in his return. You see that pictured throughout the Bible. Isaiah 60:1-3: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the

Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth in thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you, and nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." It's a day yet to come.

Ezekiel 39, also, 21-22: "And I will set my glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed in my hand, that I have laid on them. The house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day forward." The fullness of the glory of Christ will be revealed when he returns. In the New Testament, Titus 2 also mentions that, "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," the fullness of the glory of Christ revealed when he returns. And on that day, as was mentioned in those passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel, we will see the perfection of his righteous impartiality as he makes perfect judgments that make all of the little petty judgments that we've made throughout our lives look ridiculous.

The concept of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, is just another reminder that there is only one who is qualified to make perfect judgments about other people. When we are sinfully impartial, when we show favoritism to some and look down on others, we are treading on ground that no one but Christ has any business walking on. He and he alone sits on the judgment seat, and we take our place with everyone else in front of it. So when we say, "Show no favoritism as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory," every single word stands as a strong rebuke against any justification we could ever give for showing sinful partiality.

That leads to our fifth point, here: The family of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. The family of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality. And by this I mean the fact that God has united us together as a family through Jesus Christ, a point that I enjoy making any time I see it in the text. And here it is once again, at the very beginning of the verse, as James uses that loving, familial term, "my brothers," to remind these people of their relationship. He isn't merely speaking to them as their spiritual leader, which is actually one of those appropriate distinctions that remain. There is a respect and

honor that is owed to him in the position that God has placed him in, in regard to them. He speaks with a God-given authority over them.

Impartiality doesn't change this distinction, but rather reminds us of their equal standing. But rather, he's reminding us of their equal standing as brothers and sisters in Christ. They have, and we all have, different roles, different responsibilities, different distinctions among ourselves, but all holding the same primary standing as members of the family of God. And all that we have talked about when it comes to who Jesus Christ is and what he has done is for the ultimate end of making a people for himself to further manifest his own glory.

What we're going to celebrate here in just a moment, after lunch, the broken body and the spilt blood, the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, unites us together with him and with one another. Jesus has united us together as a true and real family. That is his decision and not ours.

When we think of all those around us and our tendency to look down on some and show favoritism to others based on our own flawed and sinful and selfish judgments, when we do that, we are making those decisions as one who has been chosen by the Father, redeemed to him through Christ, against one who has been chosen by the Father, redeemed and reconciled to him through Christ. That's what we do. The true relationship between us and this other person in the church is not whatever our flawed and probably selfish judgment of the relationship is. That's not what it is. It's what God says it is, that of brother or sister in Christ.

So think of it this way: Right now, in our culture, we are making a big deal, and rightly so, of arguing against this warped delusion that is transgenderism. What does our argument look like? It looks like this: We tell them it doesn't matter what gender you might feel like you are. The sovereign God has declared you to be male or female, no matter what you might think otherwise. Similarly, within the church, it doesn't matter what you feel your relationship might be towards another. The sovereign God, the creator of male and female, that same one,

has declared you "brother or sister in Christ," and he placed a final stamp on that designation with his blood.

So if you're going to hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that is who you are to one another. That is our relationship, and how we feel about that in any given moment doesn't change the reality of what God has done, just like the creation of male and female. And just like the responsibility before God, then, for a man who feels like a woman trapped in a man's body to conform their thinking to the reality that the Creator has determined, so, too, then, the one who practices sinful partiality by looking down on one whom God has declared to be their brother or sister in Christ through the same blood and broken body that makes you an adopted child of God, the one who practices sinful partiality by looking down on such a one has the responsibility to conform their thinking to the reality that has been accomplished by Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

So brothers and sisters, let us be diligent to battle the common temptation to sinful partiality that so easily manifests itself in our selfish hearts. Let us continually rehearse the

Gospel to ourselves and to others. Let's let the person and work of Jesus Christ be the determining factor in how we view everyone, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ might continue to be that which we continually desire to conform our lives to, and not that which stands as a rebuke against us. Let's pray.

Father, thank you so much for your Word. Thank you for its clear instruction to us. Thank you for the infinite truth available to us in your Word, that we can continue to mine and look at and think through. Thank you for the Gospel of Jesus Christ that declares to us what is true and right, that tells us, no matter what we believe the value of each person is. Father, I pray that you would help us to conform our lives to what we see in your Word, that we would be so in awe of the Gospel continually that it would just become more and more impossible for us to look down or despise another person, let alone a brother or sister in Christ, even more unified. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.