

■ SCRIPTURE

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 guilty of all of it. **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. *ESV*

■ DISCUSS

1. Okay, let's be honest. Suppose the scene described in verses 2-3 were to happen this week in our church. What do you think would happen? How would we treat the two people differently?
2. In James 2:5-7, what does it say about the poor and the rich?
3. How does this connect with the previous point about favoritism?
4. Do you think James is promoting a "reverse favoritism," in which we welcome and honor the poor more than the rich?
5. What is the "royal law" James mentions in verse 8?
6. How does showing favoritism break that law?

7. According to verses 10–12, how would James respond to someone who said, “I’ve kept seven of the Ten Commandments. That’s a passing grade, right?”
8. In James 2:12, James speaks again of the “law of liberty” (see 1:25). But his previous comments seem to be more restrictive, forcing us to keep every point in the law. How does the law give us freedom?
9. Two key words appear in verse 13. Let’s define them. What is judgment? What is mercy?
10. How does the idea of mercy bring us back to the matter of showing favoritism?

■ LIVE IT OUT

The book of James emphasizes the active side of our faith, so let’s consider several ways we might put its teaching into practice.

Conversation: Learn the Beatitudes. Matthew 5:3–12 or Luke 6:20–26. In a succinct way, these describe the reordering of the world from God’s perspective.

Seek Counsel: If you have been working hard to keep God’s rules, and you’re troubled by this assertion that breaking even one command makes you a lawbreaker, talk with a pastor or teacher about this. Ask how to unpack the idea of God’s “mercy.”

Evaluation: If you are in a position of authority in the church, take this opportunity to evaluate the church’s response to visitors— not just the stated policies, but the actual behaviors. Is favoritism shown? If so, what can you do about it?

Serving: Can you get involved in a ministry to the poor and homeless in your community? Many such ministries need volunteers and financial support. If you can’t find one to connect with, perhaps you could start one.

Spiritual-Financial Audit: This might be a good time to talk with your spouse and family about the financial decisions you make. How do your spiritual principles come into play? This is more than just a review of your fiscal security, but a chance to ask, “Where does our security really come from?” How can you as a family keep from loving, serving, or trusting in money, while still being good stewards?

Prayer: Consider offering a prayer of confession, individually or with others. Ask for forgiveness if you have shown favoritism to the rich, disregarded the poor, or worshiped money.