

## STREET SMART Series

**James 2:1-13 - No Favorites**

It's easy to tell flabby from genuine Christian life, says James. The believer who is heading toward spiritual maturity is persevering while his faith is tested, is asking God for wisdom to deal with trials, and above all is listening to God's wise words and doing what He says. And what is this maturing Christian doing? Of the many tests of genuineness James could have named, he gives us three in [1:26-27](#). But exactly what do these tests of true religion—true faith—mean? James explains each one further in [James 2-4](#). Consistently, he roots what we must *do* in who God *is* and who we *are*. Look for these themes as you read [2:1-13](#).

1. What three tests of true religion—genuine faith—does James list in [1:26-27](#)?
2. What is James's main point in [2:1-13](#)?
3. Which of the three tests does James seem to be elaborating on in this passage?
4. What is your “In Group”? Can you relate that at time you might not treat those in your “Out Group” the same as you do to your “In Group”?
5. Why shouldn't we show favoritism to the rich?

[2:1](#)

[2:4](#) (compare [Matthew 7:1-2](#)).

[2:5](#) (compare [Luke 6:20](#))

[2:6-7](#)

[2:8-11](#)

***Discriminated among yourselves*** (2:4). The Greek word rendered "discriminated" here is the same as the one translated "doubt" in 1:6. This word has the sense of "wavering" (1:6, KJV) or being "divided" (2:4, Revised Version). The Bible does not speak against discernment or discrimination based on valid standards; for instance, we should distinguish true teachers from false on the basis of their lives and characters ([Matthew 7:15-23](#)). Discrimination or judgment is bad when it springs from our divided, wavering values. To discriminate according to wealth is to mix worldly values with heavenly ones, to try to serve both God and Mammon ([Matthew 6:24](#)). This is the essence of the double-minded, unstable character James wants to root out of his readers (1:8).

***Exploiting you... dragging you into court*** (2:6). The book of Acts and other early documents confirm that it was more likely to be wealthy people who both felt threatened enough by Christianity and had the time and influence to cause trouble for believers. With a few exceptions, the rich and powerful have caused most of the persecutions throughout Christian history.

6. a. What might lead a person or group to treat rich people better than poor ones?

b. What is wrong with the motives you just listed?

7. What is "the royal law" (2:8)?

***Royal law*** (2:8). This law is royal because it is one of the primary laws of the Kingdom of God, because it was proclaimed and confirmed by the King Himself, and because it rules and encompassed all the other laws of the Kingdom ([Matthew 22:34-40](#); [Romans 13:8-10](#)).

8. Why does breaking one of God's laws make us guilty of breaking the whole ([James 2:10-11](#))? (Consider what we are saying about God when we break a law. *Optional*: See [Matthew 5:17-20, 48](#); [Matthew 22:34-40](#); [Romans 13:8-10](#).)

***Judged by the law that gives freedom*** (2:12). Christ's law offers us the power to obey it, so it frees us from guaranteed condemnation ([Romans 8:1-13](#)). When we stand before Christ's judgment seat, we cannot plead that we are unable to obey the royal law. Also, by committing ourselves to Christ we freely pledged to obey Him, so we cannot claim that His law is a harsh burden imposed on us. Our freedom as God's children and friends means more responsibility than when we were slaves to sin. Law and grace are not contradictory. God gave Israel the Ten Commandments after He graciously liberated the people from slavery in Egypt. The laws were a gift to show how the redeemed should live. Likewise, after God frees us by grace from slavery to sin and death, He gives us commandments by which we may live abundant lives ([Romans 6:15-23](#); [Romans 8:2](#)). If we ignore

those laws, we inevitably fall back into slavery to sin. (See also the discussion of the [perfect law](#) from [1:25](#) in lesson four.)

9. Specifically how should you "speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom" ([2:12](#)) in your current circumstances?
  
10. What will happen to those of us who have not shown mercy to the needy, and why ([James 2:13](#))?  
(Optional: See [Matthew 5:7](#) and [Luke 6:38](#).)
  
11. In this context, why is it personally important to you that "mercy triumphs over judgment" ([2:13](#))?
  
12. What one truth from [2:1-13](#) impresses you as something you need to apply?
  
13. How do you fall short or need to grow in this area?
  
14. What can you do this week to begin taking this truth to heart and putting it into practice?
  
15. List any questions you have about [2:1-13](#).

## Sidebars

- 1. For Thought and Discussion:** a. What does it mean to show favoritism or partiality?  
b. Can you think of any times when you or your church have shown favoritism? If so, ask God to forgive you for these and commit yourself to avoid favoritism in the future. Ask God to enable you to do this. Watch for any temptations to show favoritism this week.
- 2. Optional Application:** The next time you are at work or in church, make a point of greeting those whom you usually don't.
- 3. Optional Application:** Have you ever been the poor person treated condescendingly in a church? How did that make you feel about God? What did you do?
- 4. For Thought and Discussion:** Why is it inconsistent for a believer "in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" to show favoritism? Consider how Christ acted.
- 5. For Thought and Discussion:** Who are currently leading the attacks on Christianity? Are they well-off, well-educated people or poor people? How should this affect our attitudes and actions ([2:1-7](#))? Should we discriminate against the rich?
- 6. For Further Study:** Study how Jesus treated the poor and the working class ([Luke 5:27-31](#); [Luke 14:12-14](#); [Luke 15:1-7](#)). How is this a model for you? How can you follow it?
- 7. For Further Study:** What is God's attitude toward races and classes ([Acts 10:34-35](#); [Romans 2:9-11](#); [Ephes. 6:9](#))?
- 8. For Thought and Discussion:** Does [James 2:12-13](#) contradict the idea that believers will be judged by mercy and grace rather than by strict justice and the Law? (See [Matthew 5:7](#); [Luke 6:38](#); [Romans 2:6-11](#); [2 Cor. 5:10](#); [Galatians 6:7-10](#).)
- 9. For Thought and Discussion:** In the context of [2:1-13](#), what kind of mercy is James saying we should practice?
- 10. For Thought and Discussion:** How do favoritism and discrimination show that we love ourselves more than others?
- 11. Optional Application:** Toward whom do you need to show mercy this week, rather than prejudice, indifference, or resentment? How can you treat that person with mercy?
- 12. Optional Application:** How can you help see that the poor are welcomed into your church or fellowship?
- 13. For Further Study:** Add [2:1-13](#) to your outline of James.