

Racism and the Bible

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If you search for the word "racism" in the Bible you won't find it. Just go to any online Bible concordance and type *racism* in the search window and hit "enter." Nothing will show up. Nada. Zero.

The Word Is Favoritism

That doesn't mean God has nothing to say about the subject. He does. But in the Bible the word is "favoritism." Followers of Jesus are not to play favorites. They are not to show preference to people due to their power, wealth, fame, or skin color. When favoritism rears its ugly head, we're to push it down.

A Place of Honor

In his letter to the ancient church of Jerusalem, James, the half-brother of Jesus and pastor of the church, addressed the issue of favoritism. Persecution drove his readers from Jerusalem to surrounding towns and villages. As their families endured economic hardship, so did their churches. In the face of this, when a man wearing an expensive ring or clothes visited their church, he received a place of honor, near the front. After all, he might make a generous donation. Or provide jobs for the unemployed.

And what about poor people? They sat in the back.

James had heard about their acts of favoritism. When followers of Jesus don't act like Jesus, word gets out. Fortunately for us, James urged his original readers to deal with their sinful attitude.

People Won't Change Without a Reason

We've all heard that before, haven't we? We've had people tell us not to do all sorts of things. They've told us, "Don't eat so much! Don't work so hard! Don't yell so much! Don't be impatient! Don't judge him like that!" But my observation is that most people won't change without a reason. Understanding that, James not only told them not to play favorites, he told them why they shouldn't.

"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism" James 2:1.

On the surface that short verse looks like a command without an explanation. But look closer. James is saying those who believe in Jesus, believe in someone whose glory is greater than that of any human. He meant those who follow Jesus, should be so absorbed with the glory of God that they're not impressed with human glory. Money, power, intelligence or even skin color have no glory compared to God's glory.

A Flashlight in Daylight

Shine a flashlight in a dark room and its beam is impressive. Shine it in the light of day and it's invisible.

The next time you're impressed with someone or something someone has—think of a flashlight beam. Remember that their possessions, position, intelligence or skin color, are nothing more than an unseen flashlight beam when compared to the glory of God. When we play favorites—it shows we've lost perspective. When we treat all people with honor, we honor them as we honor God.