

Good morning! This is Sunny Ahn, the Senior Pastor at Kona United Methodist Church. I am glad that you are with us this morning. Let me start today's message with a short story.

[Story] There were these three guys talking. Two of them are talking about the amount of control they have over their wives, while the third guy remains quiet. After a while one of the first two turns to the third and says, "Well, what about you, what sort of control do you have over your wife?" The third fellow puffs out his chest and says, "Well, I'll tell you. Just the other night my wife came to me crawling on her hands and knees." The first two guys were so amazed! Their eyes are wide and they have a newfound respect for this guy. "Wow! What happened then?" they asked. The third fellow sighed and uttered, "She said, 'Get out from under that bed and fight like a man!'"

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Unfortunately, I would say that we live in a very rude world. People are becoming ruder by the minute. Common courtesy is not so common anymore. It seems that respect for people is at an all-time low. Our favorite kind of humor these days is sarcasm—put down humor targeting those in authority, those in leadership; those who should be respected, if for no other reason than because of their position.

But the Bible makes it very clear that respect is one of those values that is necessary for life. The Bible is very specific about this. We find that we are to respect parents, people in authority, and church leadership. The Scriptures go on to instruct wives to respect and reverence their husbands and husbands are to respect and reverence their wives. And if we think that someone does not fit these categories, the Lord tells us that we should respect everyone (1 Peter 2:17). We all want to be respected. We want other people to treat us with dignity. So do others. So, today briefly we're going to look at this character we often miss in our daily speech and actions.

First, let us pay our attention to the word translated "respect of persons" in verses 1, 3, and 9 of today's scripture which was read in the King James Version of the Bible—the Greek word προσωπολημψία (*prosōpolēmpsia*). This word is translated

as “not showing favoritism” in the New International Version of the Bible, “not having an attitude of personal favoritism” in the New American Standard Bible, and “showing no partiality” in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

According to these translations of the Greek word προσωποληψία (*prosōpolēmpsia*), respecting others means not showing favoritism, not having an attitude of personal favoritism, and showing no partiality.

It is always good and right for us to show respect wherever and whenever it is due according to the Book of Romans 13:7. But, the use of the Greek word προσωποληψία (*prosōpolēmpsia*) in today’s scripture in the Book of James has nothing to do with showing respect when it is due, but when it is undue.

In the example given in verses 2 and 3 of James chapter 2, respect was given to a man who walked into a church, all because he was wearing a gold ring and was dressed in finely embroidered outfits. This respect was based only on his outward appearance. Bear in mind that he was only a visitor to the church. But because his appearance attracted so much attention, he was given much better treatment or respect than the other visitor. Such respect is clearly out of place. It is an undue respect. This is what favoritism is all about. This is what discrimination is all about. Treating people differently just because of their outward appearance. It is the giving of “undue-favor” to someone.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with showing favor to someone when it is due. For example, if two people were to walk into our church at the same time and one is an elderly man with crutches while the other is a healthy young man, what should we do? We should help the elderly man first to find the most convenient place to sit and let the healthy young man be ushered a little later. Is this favoritism? No, it is not. The same thing is done in our public buses and trains. There are special seats designated for passengers who are elderly, who are handicapped and who are expectant mothers. This is not favoritism at all, but kind consideration. Everyone understands that some people need special treatments because of their infirmities.

Everyone also understands that no one deserves unfair treatment. This brings us to the reason why we should respect others. It is utterly unfair. We see this in James’ example, in the treatment that the other visitor received. He was different only in his outward appearance from the first one. This visitor was dressed in vile raiment. If only he had been politely ushered to a good seat just like the first visitor, there would have been no favoritism but complete fairness. But what treatment did he

receive? “Stand here! Sit here under my footstool!” Can you see the huge contrast here? Doesn't it show how unfair favoritism is? It makes unjustified distinctions between people. By doing this, it stratifies them unfairly into upper and lower classes.

Aren't we all do sometimes, if not all the time? We look at people's outward appearance and treat them differently? The plain truth is that everyone, including all of us, is just as sinful regardless of wealth, status, race, age, education or gender. As God's Word says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

If we are practicing favoritism, we need to stop it. If we are receiving undue favor in a manner that is unfair to others, we also need to put a stop to it. And if some of us are suffering the adverse effects of favoritism, we need to do something about it. Having faith in God is very personal and private, but practicing this faith is not. We have social responsibilities as followers of Jesus Christ. We need to fight this social evil for God, if not for others. We can have victory over “favoritism” in Jesus Christ who loves all people. There is victory in Jesus. Let us respect others in our speech and actions today. Amen.