

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-15-15 AM NOTES
"THE PROBLEM WITH PARTIALITY"
JAMES 2:1-13
#7 in Series, "James: Practical Wisdom"

Deuteronomy 10:17 (NKJV) "For the Lord your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, **who shows no partiality** nor takes a bribe."

Acts 10:34 (NKJV) "Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that **God shows no partiality.**'"

Romans 2:11 (NKJV) "For there is **no partiality with God.**"

Leviticus 19:15 (NKJV) "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be **partial to the poor**, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor."

Proverbs 28:21a (NKJV) "To show **partiality is not good...**"

Psalms 82:2 (NKJV) "How long will you judge unjustly, and **show partiality** to the wicked?"

1 Timothy 5:21 (NKJV) "I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, **doing nothing with partiality.**"

I. The Command Concerning Partiality (v. 1)

Matthew 22:16b (HCSB) "You defer to no one, for You don't show partiality."

II. The Case Study of Partiality (vv. 2-4)

III. The Contradiction of Partiality (vv. 5-7)

Luke 1:53 (NKJV) "He has filled *the* hungry with good things, and *the* rich He has sent away empty."

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NKJV) "²⁶ For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.* ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence."

IV. The Consequences of Partiality (vv. 8-11)

V. The Coming Judgment of Partiality (vv. 12-13)

"The admonition to speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty is tantamount to saying, 'Live and act as a true believer who has who has been saved by God's grace and who will be judged on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness.' That righteousness frees the believer from the law of bondage and judges him under the redeeming law of liberty, God's Word of the gospel, the New Testament in Jesus Christ, which frees the repentant sinner from the bondage of sin (John 8:31-32)."

—John MacArthur

Romans 8:1a (NKJV) "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."

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When we think about the attributes or perfections of God, we think about His love, His grace, His mercy, His justice, His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnipresence, His holiness, and a host of other attributes. But one attribute of God that seldom appears on any list is the attribute of impartiality. Yet, that attribute is attributed to God several times in the Scripture. By impartiality, I am not referring to the human view of “fairness” (the idea that God treats every individual just alike and as they deserve). Impartiality means that He does not show partiality to one group of people over another. For instance, He does not show partiality one ethnic group over others, or one economic class over another. **Deuteronomy 10:17 (NKJV)** “For the LORD your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.” We read in **Acts 10:34 (NKJV)** “Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.” **Romans 2:11 (NKJV)** “For there is no partiality with God.” That’s just three of many verses that proclaim the impartiality of God. You may be surprised at how often the Lord rebukes partiality and forbids it. **Leviticus 19:15 (NKJV)** “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.” **Proverbs 28:21a (NKJV)** “To show partiality is not good...” **Psalms 82:2 (NKJV)** “How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked?” **1 Timothy 5:21 (NKJV)** “I charge *you* before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.” That’s just a sample of the commands forbidding partiality.

Let me tie in this subject of partiality with the context of the book of James. James makes clear that professing disciples of Jesus Christ evidence the truth of our profession by a pattern of obedience to God’s commands. Last week the message was entitled “Doers of the Word”. The evangelist Dwight L. Moody said, “Every Bible ought to be bound in shoe leather”. That is another way of saying that we are to be busy about being doers of the Word. Talk is cheap, and James is saying that a person who has been transformed by Christ will evidence that transformation in his or her everyday walk. One of those commands that true disciples obey is that we do not show partiality toward people in areas of appearance, ancestry, age, achievement, or affluence. Let’s examine this sin called partiality.

I. The Command Concerning Partiality (V1)

The word translated “partiality” in the Greek literally means to lift up someone’s face. It carries the idea of giving special favor and respect based on external appearance. It is giving preference of one person over another because of their appearance. It is interesting that the word for partiality used here is only found in Christian writings. That is probably because showing partiality was just an accepted fact in the world of that day as it still is today. Our standard, our model when it comes to showing partiality is the Lord Jesus Christ. He showed no partiality based on outward appearance or standing in society. Whether He was speaking to a wealthy Jewish leader or a common beggar, He showed no partiality. Whether He was speaking to a virtuous woman or a prostitute, He showed no partiality. We could say the same thing about the well dressed or the shabbily dressed, the High Priest or a common worshipper. His concern was the soul of the person, not their outward appearance or position in society. Remember how He treated the woman at the well in John 4? She was a Samaritan – a people group hated by the Jews. Not only that, she had been married 5 times and was a social outcast. Jesus saw her as a person worthy of His time. Follow His ministry and you will find that Jesus was more concerned with sinners whose hearts were open to Him than He was with what onlookers thought. He related with people on the basis of what they could become instead of what they were. He was called “a friend of sinners” which was meant as a phrase of derision, but that is indeed what He was and is. Jesus not only reached out to the poor and downtrodden, He reached out to the wealthy as well. Zachaeus was rich and yet a social outcast because of his collaboration with Rome as a tax collector. Jesus called him down from a tree where he had climbed to see Jesus and went to his house and led him to become his disciple. He shared Gospel truth with the prestigious Nicodemus, the most elevated teacher in Israel. Jesus truly was no respecter

of persons. He took the time to heal a blind beggar. He cast demons out of a boy and out of a man who roamed naked through the cemetery scaring everyone half to death. He loved and called unto Himself a rich young ruler and grieved when the young man chose his riches over being Jesus' disciple. At no time was anyone turned away because of appearance, poverty, ethnic background, or mental stability. Rich, poor, prestigious, outcast, young, old, Jew, Samaritan, Syro-Phoenician, healthy, sick, blind, deaf, leper, beggar, or respected teacher all found the Lord of glory to be loving and caring for them in the condition they were in. Even Jesus' enemies said of Him in **Matthew 22:16b (HCSB)** "You defer to no one, for You don't show partiality."

The impartiality of Jesus is commanded of those who say that they are His disciples.

II. The Case Study of Partiality (V2-4)

The vast majority of Christians in the early days of the church were Jewish and poor. Knowing that helps us understand why James picked the examples he did. Here is the scenario. The room where the church was meeting was getting full when two men came in. The ushers sized the two men up by their outward appearance. There was a wealthy man who had gold rings (notice the plural) and an expensive perhaps "Armani" outer garment. The ushers paid more attention to his gold rings than they did to the Lord of glory. The ushers took the rich guy to what was likely the last good seat. There was also a poor man who materially didn't have a lot going for him. His clothes were described as "filthy" ("shabby", "dirty" in other translations). He likely smelled bad and looked undesirable. To him the ushers said "go stand in the corner or sit in the floor".

The example that James gives is not so subtle. Forty to fifty years ago many churches with only white members were not subtle when an African American person visited. That person would be told that there were other churches down the road where they would feel "more comfortable". Today we have developed more subtle ways of showing partiality. We may speak and even shake the hand of people who are dressed poorly or with a different ethnic background, but don't sit with them and surely don't invite them to go eat with us after the service. We often design or re-design our churches with the wealthier attendee in mind concerned that they will feel comfortable. We offer positions or ministries to people in the church because of their prestige in the community. I remember when I had only been in this church about a year and the Nominating Committee was meeting to fill positions on committees and some of the ministries. I remember that one man brought up the name of a man to be on the finance committee. Someone else objected because this man wasn't very faithful in his attendance. The man who wanted him on the committee said that he should be put in this position anyway because he was in a high prestigious position in a bank (I think) and "he has familiarity with handing money." I remember David Patton was on that committee and he responded this way: "He may be familiar with money, but I would rather have someone familiar with the Holy Spirit". AMEN!

Allow me to give you the experience of Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India who influenced hundred's of millions of Indians. Early in his life Gandhi was drawn to Christianity. But when he tried to attend a church in India, he was turned away by an usher and was told that the church was for Europeans only. Later he wrote in his memoirs that if Christianity had a caste system too, he might as well remain a Hindu. Gandhi also once said that he might have become a Christian if it were not for Christians and he was primarily speaking of this sin of showing partiality. Think of the millions that have perished in the clutches of the false religion of Hinduism. From a purely human perspective, think what could have been different if Gandhi had been embraced by the Europeans and God had mercifully saved him?

When I was in seminary the popular church growth movement out of Fuller Seminary in California said that churches grow primarily by using the principle or law of homogeneous units. That means that churches grow best when they target the people who are most like the people in the church. In other words, church growth happens much more quickly when a church of mostly white, upper-middle class members gear their programming and outreach efforts to reach white, upper-middle class families. The leaders in the movement made it clear that this was not necessarily what they thought is right, but it will bring the fastest growth. I vehemently rebel against that with all that is within me. I want us to be "heterogeneous" (consisting of people of many different types) and not homogeneous (consisting of people of primarily the same type). When we are without partiality, and when we have a heart to get the Gospel to the lost, we will be multi-

generational with growth among the Millennials (1980-2000), Generation X (1965-1979), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), and even a senior adult ministry that is bringing to Christ the Builder Generation (pre-1946). I long for us to reach diverse ethnic groups so that a picture of this congregation will remind us of Heaven where people will be gathered around the throne from every tongue and tribe and people and nation. I long to have in the congregation the poor and the wealthy and everything in between. I long to see small groups where side by side there are manual laborers and corporation officers. I long to see side by side former prostitutes and home school moms who were saved at 7 years old. I long to see ex-cons sitting beside police officers who are worshipping the Lord who saved them both. I long for us to be a congregation that mystifies all of the sociologists and church growth “experts” because it is so diverse. I long for us to be a congregation that there is no explanation for what is happening except to just say “to God be the glory great things **He** has done.”

III. The Contradiction of Partiality (V5-7)

While it is just as sinful to show partiality toward the poor over the rich as it is to the rich over the poor, the vast majority of partiality is against the poor. Partiality against the poor indicates that a person is ignorant of what God is doing in the world. The greatest growth of Christianity is among the poor – especially in parts of Africa, Central and South America, and Asia. Partiality against the poor indicates how out of touch one is with what God is doing. God is making these impoverished believers rich in faith and is bringing millions into the Kingdom as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. These materially poor believers have a love for God that puts most of us who have so much, to shame. I have had the privilege of worshipping with believers in Guatemala, Brazil, Ecuador, China, Kenya, Rwanda, and West Africa. They were most all made of people living in dire poverty, poverty that most people in America have never even seen. I can tell you without hesitation that they were blessed and filled with the joy of the Lord. I have to admit that I was envious of them. Why would anyone show partiality against those who God has blessed so much? But let’s leave majority world countries and look right around us. The poor who are sold out to the Lordship of Christ have discovered that Jesus is all they need because He is all they have. It is so much more difficult for the affluent to look to Jesus for all they need. When these truths sink in on us, those who are affluent should long to just spend time with those poor who are wholly surrendered to the Lord Jesus to just let some of their love and rich faith rub off on us. It seems that Christ reverses our status in the world. **Luke 1:53 (NKJV)** “He has filled *the* hungry with good things, and *the* rich He has sent away empty.” Perhaps the clearest passage in Scripture as to how God reverses things and values in the world is **1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NKJV)** “²⁶ For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.* ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

In James 2:6-7 James states a fact of his time that all too often is true of our time. As our nation has become wealthier, we have increasingly dishonored the poor. In James’ day this dishonoring was done through taking away what little the poor had. Isn’t it interesting how Satan works? Today we have dishonored the poor by creating a wicked system that keeps them poor and dependent on the rich by giving them what they have not worked for and making them dependent on government as a substitute god. There is honor in work! I am not talking about those with severe physical and mental disabilities who are incapable of work. I am speaking of those who have been de-motivated from working and many times denied jobs and creating a system that often discourages the poor from wanting to work. The problem is the same today as it was in James’ day – the rich tend to oppress the poor. The word translated “dishonored” in verse 6 is translated “insulted” in the NIV. We have insulted the poor.

Showing partiality contradicts God’s plans and God’s ways. James is saying to the poor in verses 6-7, don’t honor those who are oppressing you and taking advantage of you. Today that would apply to those who insult the poor by motivating them not to live without honorable work.

IV. The Consequences of Partiality (V8-11)

Not only is partiality in conflict with being a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is also in conflict with God's royal law. What James calls, "the royal law" is what Jesus called the second greatest commandment just under the greatest commandment which is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The royal law is loving your neighbor as yourself. Here is the logic James is using. Even if you think you are obeying that commandment, but you show partiality toward others you have sinned and you are condemned by the law as a transgressor. James in verse 10 presents what is called "an all or nothing" approach to the moral law of God. For those who are trusting in their own obedience of God's law to be right with Him, you must be perfect from birth to death to be righteous before God. He is laying the foundation for the hard truth he is going to lay on us in verses 12-13. He is saying that if the only sin you ever committed was the sin of partiality, you would be justly condemned as a law breaker. In fact, the sin of partiality breaks at least two of the 10 commandments. Partiality breaks the 10th Commandment, because it prefers the rich person because it covets the riches that the rich can bestow. It breaks the 8th commandment because it robs the poor of the dignity they deserve. You can make a case that it breaks several other of the 10 Commandments. Here is the big bomb that James drops in verse 10: if you break even one of God's commands you are a law breaker and stand in need of God's mercy. God doesn't grade on the curve. Life is pass / fail with God. Breaking the law of God even once make you a sinner and when it comes to self-earned righteousness, you get an F which stands for failure! Dwight L. Moody compared God's law to a chain of 10 links suspending a man over a precipice. If all 10 links break, the man falls to his doom. If 5 of the links break, the man falls to his doom. If only one link breaks, the man falls to his doom. **James 2:10 (NKJV)** "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all."

You can't pick and choose among God's law. Verse 11 says the same thing as verse 10, but in different words. If you boast in keeping one law and yet break another, you are condemned as a lawbreaker before God. The sin of partiality makes us guilty no matter how many of the other commands of God we have kept.

V. The Coming Judgment of Partiality (V12-13)

Verses 12-13 are difficult to interpret, but here goes. I think that James is primarily writing to Christians, though there is lots of application to those who profess Christianity and are deceived. The two keys to correctly interpreting what James is saying is what he means by "the law of liberty" and what he means by judged. I believe that "the law of liberty" is the Gospel. It is the Gospel that frees those who put their trust in Christ and His taking our deserved wrath on the cross as the satisfactory payment for our sins. John MacArthur says it well. "The admonition to speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty is tantamount to saying, 'Live and act as a true believer who has who has been saved by God's grace and who will be judged on the basis of Christ's imputed righteousness. That righteousness frees the believer from the law of bondage and judges him under the redeeming law of liberty, God's Word of the gospel, the New Testament in Jesus Christ, which frees the repentant sinner from the bondage of sin (John 8:31-32).'" [John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Commentary, James*, page 116].

In verse 13, James is saying that one who shows no mercy is obviously an unbeliever and thereby under the judgment of God for their sin including the sin of partiality. But the person who has received God's mercy will show mercy as evidence of having received God's saving mercy. Having received God's saving mercy enables us to triumph over judgment. **Romans 8:1a (NKJV)** "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."

CONCLUSION

Don't ever minimize the horrible sin of partiality. It is totally inconsistent with one who has received God's saving grace, and for the one who is apart from Christ, this one sin is enough to condemn you as sure as the sins in verse 11 of adultery or murder.