

Faith that Works Refuses to Show Favoritism

James 2:1-13

Favoritism is wrong . . .

- I. Because it violates God's _____ (1-5)
- II. Because it violates God's _____ (6-7)
- III. Because it violates God's _____ (8-11)
- IV. Because it violates God's _____ (12-13)

Because the eighteenth-century Church of England had become so elitist and inhospitable to the common man, in 1739 John Wesley had to take to graveyards and fields to preach the gospel. And thus we have poignant accounts of his preaching to 30,000 coal miners at dawn in the fields, and the resulting saving power of the gospel evidenced by tears streaming white trails down their coal-darkened faces. Wesley was no schismatic, but because there was no room in the established church for common people, he reluctantly founded the Methodist-Episcopal Church.

Tragically, the irony went on (unbelievably, in Methodism itself!) so that 100 years later Methodist William Booth noticed that the poorest and most degraded were never in church. Richard Collier in his history of the Salvation Army, *The General Next to God*, describes Booth's experience:

Those who made part of Broad Street congregation never forgot that electric Sunday in 1846: the gas jets, dancing on whitewashed wall, the Minister, the Rev. Samuel Dunn, seated comfortably on his red plush throne, a concord of voices swelling into the evening's fourth hymn: *Foul I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

The chapel's outer door suddenly shattered open, engulfing a white scarf of fog. In its wake came a shuffling shabby contingent of men and women, wilting nervously under the stony stares of mill-manager, shop-keepers and their well-dressed wives. In their rear, afire with zeal, marched "Wilful Will" Booth, cannily blocking the efforts of the more reluctant to turn back. To his dismay the Rev. Dunn saw that young Booth was actually ushering his charges, none of whose clothes would have raised five shillings in his own pawnshop, into the very best seats; pewholders' seats, facing the pulpit, whose occupants piled the collection-plate with glinting silver.

This was unprecedented, for the poor, if they came to chapel, entered by another door, to be segregated on benches without backs or cushions, behind a partition which screened off the pulpit. Here, though the service was audible, they could not see—nor could they be seen.

Oblivious of the mounting atmosphere, Booth joined full-throatedly in the service—even, he later admitted, hoping this devotion to duty might rate special commendation. All too soon he learned the unpalatable truth: since Wesley's day, Methodism had become "respectable."

This experience, followed by many more similar catastrophes, led to William and Catherine Booth's expulsion by the Methodists, and fourteen years of poverty before founding the Salvation Army.

- R. Kent Hughes