

Faithfulness without Partiality # 10

James 2: 1-9

Our text this evening deals with an issue that we are all familiar with, one in which each of us has engaged at some point in our lives: *Partiality*. Being raised and living in the South, I am well aware of the partiality created by our culture. Most people who have lived here all their lives are very similar. We are often skeptical of those who “are not from around here,” especially those from up North. This attitude is not limited to the South. All people have a tendency to be partial, and even prejudice. Those of the middle class tend to criticize the wealthy. The wealthy tend to look down on the poor. The educated are demeaning to the uneducated. We could list many examples, but the fact remains that humanity is prone to partiality and prejudice.

Now I will admit that all partiality is not a bad thing. I am partial to southern cooking. I am partial to our way of life. I am certainly partial to the church. However, we must ensure that our partiality doesn't stand in our way of fulfilling the work of the Lord and His expectation for our lives. We cannot deny the effects of partiality within the church. Fellowship is a warm and welcoming church to all people, but I can assure you, not all churches are that way. Many congregations have unwritten rules regarding who is acceptable and who is not. This is exactly the danger that James warns of in the text. We must see all people as those loved of God and in desperate need of a relationship with Him, regardless of their color, social status, education, or any cultural preference.

I am sick of opinions. Give me a humble, gentle lover of God and man—a man full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality or hypocrisy. Bigotry is too strong an attachment to our own creed of opinion. How unwilling men are to allow anything good in those who do not agree with them in all things. We must not narrow the cause of God to our own beliefs, but rejoice in goodness wherever it appears.

—John Wesleyⁱ

Let's consider the text before us as we seek to discover the [challenges](#) we face being impartial as we think on: [Faithfulness without Partiality](#).

I. The Tendency toward Partiality (1-4)

A. The Admonition (1) – [My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons](#). James admonished the brethren, the born again in Christ, to resist the temptation of having respect of persons. He urges them not to mix their faith with undue partiality toward men, receiving some and rejecting others.

- Apparently there was an issue with this among the church or it wouldn't have been addressed among the brethren. James knew this was not the example that Jesus had set forth. On many occasions He was moved with compassion for the less fortunate. Jesus tended to navigate toward the lowly and humble, rather than condemning or rejecting them. If we want to be like our Lord, we must not have respect of persons.
- I feel that James was also concerned with how their faith would be perceived of others. He warns against having faith in Christ, professing Him before others, and at the same time revealing partiality and prejudice. How could they possibly be an effective witness if they were guilty of shunning certain people? We must guard our testimony before others, doing all we can to avoid unjust accusation. [1 Tim.5:21 – I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.](#)

B. The Illustration (2-3) – James amplifies this truth with a simple illustration. He speaks of:

1. The Contrast in People (2) – [For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;](#) This is something they would have been familiar with and we are as well. There have always been those who have abundance and those who have less. We see those who dress in expensive clothing and others who dress much more moderately. As we will see, clothes don't make the man, but many times people are judged by their appearance. Society assumes those of abundance are more important or valuable than those who live by meager means. The church is made up of all types of people and we must guard against presumptuous conclusions. I have known many who did not have much in regard to material possessions who were of great benefit to the church!

2. The Characterization of People (3) – [And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:](#) James reveals there is a tendency to characterize people, giving those presumed to be wealthy a place of prominence and desiring those presumed to be poor to be out of sight or in a place of submission.

- Isn't it sad that our nature has a tendency to elevate some and minimize others based simply on outward appearance? Often we judge the book by its cover. We naturally assume those who look appealing are more likely to be of benefit to us. We live in an increasingly diverse culture, and if we aren't careful we will automatically dismiss certain types of people. (*Share recent experience at Walgreens.*) We need the Lord's help as we deal with others. We need to see them as He does, not as culture has taught us to view them!

C. The Participation (4) – Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? James speaks of the danger of such activity. Certainly our Lord is not pleased with such behavior. No doubt we have all been guilty of showing unjust partiality toward certain types of people. We tend to like those who look like we look, think like we think, and dress like we dress. I am in no way advocating that we abandon our biblical standards and embrace the ideology of the world, but we must be cautious that we don't neglect our obligations to all people. Churches are in decline today because they can't find people who fit their mold. We must be willing to reach out to all people, where and how they are, seeking to reach them with the gospel. What kind of life would we be living if we hadn't met Christ? [John 7:24](#) – Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

I. The Tendency toward Partiality (1-4)

II. The Tragedy in Partiality (5-7) – Here we discover the great tragedy associated with partiality.

A. It Involves Dishonor (5-6a) – Harken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Bear in mind James is speaking of how we perceive and treat others, often based on their outward appearance. Sadly many had been judged as being of little value, but they were heirs of God. They had received Christ as their Savior and Lord. They were of great value to Him; He bore their sin on the cross and died for them. Children of God were looked down upon because of their appearance.

- We must be cautious about how we treat others. We may see them one way, but I can assure you God sees them much differently. If they are saved, they are His child. If they are lost, they are loved of Him even so. Any time we bring shame or dishonor to a child of God, we bring dishonor to our Lord. Any time we behave in a way that is contrary to His desire for our lives, we dishonor Him. Who are we to minimize and reject the redeemed of God? [1 Cor.1:26-28](#) – For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: [27] But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; [28] And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

B. It Involves Despair (6b) – Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? James challenges them to consider their own experiences. They too had felt this type of shame.

Regardless of their financial position, they had been mistreated by others. Surely this brought despair to their lives, feeling as if they had been falsely judged without cause. By showing partiality to others, they were engaging in the same activity that had brought pain to their lives.

- Everyone likes to be accepted, made to feel a part of something. Surely we have all felt the pain of rejection. Our Lord knows that pain better than any of us. He was despised and rejected by those He came to save. He was falsely accused and condemned to death. As we consider others, may we be reminded of the pain and suffering our Lord endured and the despair that we too have felt through rejection of others.

C. It Involves Disgrace (7) – Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

Here we find a sobering truth. James is referring to the mistreatment of believers by the world. When those in authority discredited the believer, they were in fact discrediting the name of Jesus. When believers are viewed as worthless, one also views their Savior in the same light. When believers are unjustly treated, Christ is also unjustly treated.

- We are not here to achieve our own agenda. We are representatives of our Lord. When one suffers, we all suffer. When one falls, it reflects upon the entire body. When Christians are mistreated it hurts the body of Christ and brings disgrace to His holy name. May we be careful how we treat the children of God. **Mark 9:42 – And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.** Jesus takes the treatment of His children seriously!

I. The Tendency toward Partiality (1-4)

II. The Tragedy in Partiality (5-7)

III. The Test for Partiality (8-9) – In the closing verses we find the test for partiality, how we can rightly discern it and avoid it. This involves:

A. Submission to the Word (8a) – **If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:** James reminds the brethren of their obligation to God's Word. They are to fulfill the royal law recording in Scripture. This is very simple and yet profound. We need to live our lives according to the Word. If we would commit to living according to the Word we could avoid many of life's troubles and the snares of the flesh.

B. Affection for our Neighbor (8b) – *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well*: It is impossible to show partiality or prejudice when we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. I don't know of anyone who isn't partial toward themselves. Imagine what our churches would look like if we believed and practiced this great commandment. We would seek to provide for the needs of others the same as we do our own. We would be just as mindful of their feelings as we are our own. We would show the same concern for their eternal existence as we have for ours. Loving our neighbor as we love ourselves would eradicate partiality and completely transform our lives and churches!

C. Transgression through our Prejudice (9) – *But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors*. James is very clear and very stern in his assertion of this truth. We cannot be right with God if we have respect of persons, showing partiality to some and lack of compassion for others.

- This test will provide accurate results without fail. We will be one or the other. We will either be obedient to the Word, loving our neighbor as ourselves, or we will continue in the sin of partiality. I will admit that I had never thought of partiality in that regard, but it is right there in the text. If we cannot love all people, we are guilty of sin. That ought to provide the incentive we need to evaluate our lives and check our motives. I want to please the Lord with the life I live.

Conclusion: I know that partiality and prejudice are issues we all face and have had to deal with in our personal lives. Clearly God is not pleased with those actions. They are sin and rebellion against the clear mandate of God. Are there areas in your life that need to be confessed and repented of? Are you guilty of harboring partiality or prejudice toward others? If so, you need to bring that before the Lord and deal with it according to His Word. If you are guilty of ill will toward those in the church, you are working against the body of Christ and the Lord Himself.

We are called to love others as we love ourselves. This is difficult enough walking with the Lord and impossible apart from Him. Do you know Christ as your Lord and Savior? If not I urge you to seek Him in salvation!

¹Tan, P. L. (1996, c1979). *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : A treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications.