

Overcoming Prejudice with Love

James 2: 1-10

There can be little doubt that our nation is facing the greatest division we have witnessed in decades. The level of turmoil we face today has not been experienced since the 1960's. While the racial divide seems to be growing at an alarming rate, the level of intolerance for anyone who holds a different viewpoint than our own is unprecedented. While such behavior is often taken to extremes from those on the far-leaning fringes of particular movements, it is also being modeled for us by those in places of prominent leadership. I have never witnessed the level of division we currently see from those on Capitol Hill. There is clearly a committed refusal to reach across party lines and work together for the good of the nation. Within our cities and towns, certain groups take sides against others, screaming at each other, spewing hatred and division. I am genuinely concerned for the well-being of our nation if this trend continues its current path.

Prejudice and hatred are not new in world history. It was prominent in Jesus' day and it continues in our day as well. Not too long ago, millions of Jews were mercilessly killed at the hands of the Nazi's who hated them simply because of their religious affiliation. In the darker days of our nation, Africans were brought to America and sold into slavery. Unfortunately many viewed them as nothing more than a piece of property, not even viewed as the human beings they were. We cannot deny the racial prejudice that remains in America, not only for African-Americans, but those of any other nationality apart from European descent – Hispanics, Asians, Arabs, etc. Racial slurs are much too common in our modern society.

While all of this hatred and prejudice may be common place in modern America, it is certainly not pleasing unto the Lord. As He came to earth as the atoning sacrifice for sin, there were no racial exemptions regarding salvation. He did not come to save only affluent, white people. In fact, Jesus was not Caucasian. He was a Jew. He possessed love for all humanity, regardless of their race or ethnicity. He went out of His way to minister to a Samaritan woman at the well in [John 4](#), viewed as a half-breed dog by the average Jew. Peter was sent to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile of rank within the Roman army. Philip was called to leave a revival in Samaria in order to share the Gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch in the middle of the desert. Such hatred and prejudice is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and the advancement of the Kingdom. I want to examine the [lessons](#) revealed in our text regarding prejudice as we consider: [Overcoming Prejudice with Love](#).

I. The Practice of Prejudice (1-4) – In these verses James addressed the existence of prejudice within the church. Consider:

A. The Admonition (1) – *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.* James rebuked the church for portraying faith in the Lord while possessing partiality and prejudice at the same time. They were not to honor or favor one particular group above another. They could not have an effective witness for Christ and be prejudice at the same time. Such prejudice would hinder their witness and tarnish the faith.

- This simple truth has not changed and it never will. Like the early church, we cannot please the Lord and provide an effective witness for the faith if we harbor prejudice in our hearts. Our efforts to reach the unsaved and minister to a hurting world cannot be dictated by prejudice.

B. The Consideration (2-3) – *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; [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 offered an example of prejudice and partiality that was taking place within the church. Those perceived as rich and prosperous were treated with respect and welcomed into the services, while those who were less fortunate may have been allowed in, but were expected to stand or sit in a particular place reserved for the poor. Such partiality was based upon preconceived notions and the outward appearance of men.

- Unfortunately this practice remains, even among the church. People are often judged based on the color of their skin, their ethnicity, or simply by their appearance. If they look like us, meeting our expectations, they are welcomed with open arms. If they are deemed somehow inferior, they may be allowed in, but they are kept at arms-length.

C. The Confirmation (4) – *Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?* James continued his rebuke, revealing their active participation in prejudice and partiality. They may not have even realized it, but they had judged others based on appearance or other factors.

- We may not like to admit it, but such partiality remains today. Have we not made an assumption and passed judgment on someone based solely on perception? If so, we have become partial toward specific expectations and engaged in prejudice.

II. The Potential for Prejudice (5-7) – Here James revealed the potential for prejudice within each of us. Consider first of all:

A. The Grace (5) – [Hearken, 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?](#) Some within the church were judging others based on their lack of material wealth, and James declared these were chosen of God. They may have lacked material possessions, but they were rich in faith. The church had been guilty of rejecting those chosen by God. These were rich in faith, possessing the ability to contribute to the church if only given the chance to be accepted.

- I am glad our Lord is not limited or persuaded by the dictates of culture. He sees things from an entirely different perspective. [1 Sam.16:7 – But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.](#) The Lord sees what man cannot. He does not look at the clothes a man wears, the color of his skin, or the money in his wallet – He looks at the heart. What hope would any of us have if our salvation were based on our ability or the acceptance of others? We must learn to view people from a Gospel perspective, not from the tainted view of prejudice and partiality.

B. The Guilt (6a) – [But ye have despised the poor.](#) James did not sugarcoat his rebuke; he revealed their guilt in prejudice. Many had favored the rich and despised the poor. That is a stinging rebuke. The word despised has the idea of “*condemning and mistreating.*” They had condemned and mistreated those chosen of God simply because they failed to meet certain standards.

- Have we not been guilty of the same? Sure we have! We have passed judgment on others based on race, social status, or their reputation before we even gave the person a chance. We have looked on others and immediately passed judgment.

C. The Grudge (6b-7) – [Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? ^{\[7\]} Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?](#) James challenged the church to consider situations within their lives. They had suffered oppression from the same rich people they sought to impress. Those who oppressed them were not interested in their faith, only in what advantage they could obtain. James wanted them to consider how it felt when they had been mistreated. “Remember the pain and despair you felt. It isn’t pleasant, is it? Now, how do you think those you have mistreated feel?”

- While it is difficult for the majority of us to understand the struggles of minorities, we must be compassionate toward their struggles. We have all been in a situation when we felt left out, belittled, or unwanted. We have been opposed because of our faith or other social aspects. How did you feel at that moment? How would it be if we had to endure such despair on a continual basis? May we never be guilty of prejudice and partiality toward others!

III. The Peril of Prejudice (8-10) – Finally we discover the great peril associated with prejudice.

Notice:

A. It is Sinful (9-10) – But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. ^[10] For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

James is very clear – if we have respect to persons, favoring some and discriminating against others, it is sin. We cannot justify prejudice and discrimination. Those who engage in such activity are guilty of sin before God.

- I am troubled by those who try to justify prejudice on religious grounds. I have heard those who try to manipulate Scripture to justify their prejudice. The Word of God cannot be clearer – prejudice and discrimination toward others is sin. If we are guilty of such, we must confess our sin and repent of it. As the church, we must be willing to identify such behavior as sinful, and purge any remnants of it from the body of Christ. We cannot please the Lord with prejudice and bitterness toward others in our heart. **1 John 4:20-21** – If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? ^[21] And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

B. It is Preventable (8) – If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well. James refers to this as the royal law. It is the second of the great commandments Jesus gave us. We are expected to love God and love others as we love ourselves. James knew prejudice and partiality would never survive in the presence of love. He knew if the church loved others as they loved themselves, prejudice would cease to exist. Others would not be discriminated against or marginalized because they would be genuinely loved.

- Herein lies the solution for the current turmoil in our nation today. If we would heed the Word of God and loves others as we love ourselves, prejudice and bigotry would cease to exist. I am not naive enough to believe everyone will do this, but we certainly can and should. Real change in America has to begin on a local level. If communities would begin to love their neighbors, it would impact cities and entire counties. This would eventually impact individual states and make a difference nationally. As long as this world stands, prior to the Lord's return, we will be forced to deal with the curse of sin. Sin is the root of the problem in America. Sin prevents us from loving others as we should. We can prevent additional prejudice through love.

Conclusion: We are never more like our Lord than when we love as He loved. Our loving Lord is not pleased with the hatred and bigotry that has consumed our nation. If you have been guilty, you need to come and repent of your sin. We must love others as we love ourselves. We are all

different, and yet Christ died to save all humanity. Heaven will be filled with those from every tribe, tongue, and nation. May we never be guilty of discriminating against others!