

4-14-24 Finding Community (Growing Together in Christ)

Texts: James 2:1–13, 17–20; 1 Peter 2:12

Topics: Partiality, Mercy, Good Deeds

Big Idea of the Message: Living the Christian life requires movement.

Application Point: Christians are called to live active lives in their communities, exhibiting mercy and good deeds toward others, without showing partiality.

James makes a big point about picking and choosing who gets to sit in a comfortable place, discriminating based on clothing, wealth, how someone presents themselves, or any other factor. We can inappropriately show partiality to people based on how we assume they will respond to the gospel. Many Christians invite people to church who we assume will respond positively because they have some sort of religious background or faith experiences, limiting our welcome to those who pass our mental tests.

Yet God's message is for EVERYONE; therefore, we should be inviting everyone and sharing it with everyone, regardless of how we think they will respond or whether they've passed through any arbitrary filter.

We've all given preference to the preferred while dissing the down and out, haven't we?

What does a Christian look like? You don't know what's inside a person by what they look like. Many people make their decision about a person based upon their appearance, or their color of skin, or their age, or their affluence. Beauty is everything in our world. If you're cute, you've got it made. If you're plain, tough.

As we dive into the second chapter of James, we'll see God gets riled up when we jump to judgment by giving preference to people. Our main point is this: If you want to be obedient and honor God, don't treat people with favoritism.

It's good to hear; it's better to put it into practice. We're not to merely listen to the Word but also do what it says. We're faced today with a call to specific obedience in an area where it's so easy to excuse and rationalize our attitudes and behavior.

Showing partiality/favoritism is inconsistent with...

I. Who God is.

- **Read verses 1-4.**
- Favoritism is contrary to God's character.
- If you want to be like Jesus, you can't play favorites. God loves everybody. If there is one place in the world where there shouldn't be any kind of favoritism or discrimination, it should be the Church. There is discrimination and favoritism everywhere in the World; but there ought to be one place (God's house). No matter who you are or what your background is that you're welcome and loved by God.

Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

- James is the half-brother of Jesus, but he doesn't mention this but instead calls Him **“the Lord of glory.”** Jewish-background believers would have equated this phrase with God's Shekinah glory, which was on display as the Israelites were led in the desert.
- Let's get straight who we are. We are saved sinners who are called to serve Him. And let's focus on who He is. He is the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. Considering who we are and who He is, we're admonished to show no partiality.
- James is telling fellow believers, “To accept the face” of someone. It's the idea of turning toward one and turning away from someone else based simply on outward appearance, economic status, skin color or any other kind of discrimination.
- To show partiality is incompatible with our faith because **Acts 10:34 says: “God shows no partiality.”** God is the ultimate umpire according to **1 Peter 1:17** because He is the **“Father who judges impartially.”**
- In **verses 2-4** James gives all of us an illustration, like a good preacher James makes his points applicable.
- James points out given a choice; we're prone to show partiality to the man sporting some bling.
- **Verse 3** uses the phrase, **“and you pay attention,”** which means to “gaze upon.” It's easy to turn our attention away from the glory of the Lord to the material splendor of someone's clothing, car, or statues.
- When we practice partiality, in essence we've set ourselves up as judges, taking God's judging job away from Him. Here's a news flash – He doesn't need any help running the world.
- **LOOK at verse 4.** Showing partiality (favoritism) has the idea of “separating” people into distinct categories. I believe one reason they fawned over the rich man is they thought he could increase their offerings or would do something special for them. Their motives were all messed up. When we judge others, we have “evil thoughts,” which means we have reached “malignant, malicious and wicked” conclusions about people.
- Let's face it. We tend to judge the better off as better. We're prone to give preference to the pretty or to those who make us look good or can do something good for us. FAM, our focus must be on the true glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and not the passing glory of outward appearances. Since everybody matters to Jesus, everyone must matter to us.

Favoritism is inconsistent with...

II. How God does things.

- **Read verse 5-7.**
- The word **“listen”** is an urgent request and is translated as “to hearken and hear.” James asks four lively questions to get readers to see the contradictions that reside within them. Each question expects an affirmative answer.
- Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (Yes.)
- Are not the rich the ones who oppress you? (Yes.)
- And the ones who drag you into court? (Yes.)

- Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? (Yes.)
- Partiality is inconsistent with how God does things or better stated, His methods.
- Favoritism is unreasonable. It doesn't make sense. James says that God has chosen the poor. He's not saying that it's good to be poor and bad to be rich. He's not saying that only the poor will be saved. Everybody in this room is rich compared to most of the world; but it doesn't make a bit of difference to God.
- Aren't you glad God doesn't check your wallet before He saves you? Aren't you glad your salvation isn't based on your savings account, your credit score, your 401k, or other sources of retirement?

Showing partiality/favoritism is inconsistent with...

III. What God says in His Word.

- **Read verse 8-11.**
- Showing partiality is inconsistent and contrary to scripture, God's word.
- Brothers and sisters, fellow believers in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, it is impossible to truly love your neighbor and show favoritism.

Galatians 5:14 says: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

- I tend to trivialize my own trespasses, thinking my sins don't smell as bad as the sins of others. Some of us excuse our judgmental hearts, thinking it's no big deal.
- I wonder if we secretly congratulate ourselves for not committing certain "big" sins, while shrugging off our "little" sins. It's easy to think because we keep most of God's commands; it's OK to violate a few small ones. But to break one link in the chain is to break the whole chain. **(Look at verses 9-11).**
- Don't miss how repugnant partiality is to the Almighty. Discrimination is not just ill advised or inconsiderate or bad etiquette. In **verses 9-10**, partiality is a perversion of justice and is referred to as **"S-I-N"** and those who do it are **"transgressors"** who are **"guilty"** of breaking the entire law of God.

Conclusion

Read verses 12-13.

Watch your words and adjust your actions. Remember judges will be judged.

Make mercy your message. This passage ends with a message of mercy in the last part of **verse 13: "...Mercy triumphs over judgment."** Mercy is the aspect of God's character that causes Him to minister to the miserable. It's a strong word in Hebrew which means to feel something deeply in the gut. It's the idea of having a deep and tender reaction of compassion. I came across a quote recently: "Never look down on anybody unless you are helping them up!" Failure to show mercy reveals a failure to understand mercy.

Don't you love how God is moved with mercy toward us?

How do we have a church that is growing? A Church that people want to come back to?

We are a Church that loves people. It's love that reaches people. You don't argue people into Heaven. You love them into Heaven.

How do you love them into Heaven?

* Accept people. (I didn't say approve of their actions or life choices, accept them, love them)

* Appreciate people.

* Affirm people.

Let me ask you a tough question. "Would people come back to this Church because of you?"

Together we need to make a commitment that this Church will receive people unconditionally. We don't expect people to act like believers until they are believers. Don't we want our Church to have a reputation for love.