

PARTIAL CHRISTIANS

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Text: James 2:1-13

■ A Chicago bank once asked for a letter of recommendation on a young Bostonian being considered for employment.

The Boston investment house could not say enough about the young man. His father, they wrote, was a Cabot; his mother was a Lowell. Further back was a happy blend of Saltonstalls, Peabodys, and others of Boston's finest families. His recommendation was given without hesitation.

Several days later, the Chicago bank sent a note saying the information supplied was altogether inadequate. It read: "We are not contemplating using the young man for breeding purposes. Just for work." (Hewett)

Today in America we live in a narcissistic and an egotistical society where man is concerned more with appearance than substance—more about his position with men than his position with God. The Jewish society to which James was writing was very much the same. They were people obsessed with receiving honor and glory from others rather than with pleasing God. Not much has changed, has it?

The biggest problem for these first-century Christians, and for some Christians today, is that they felt like since they obeyed the laws and commandments of God it wasn't all that important how they treated others. James wants them to see that they have missed the point entirely. Everything hinges on our love for God and our love for others.

In our text James makes several *points* about the error of showing partiality.

I. WE CANNOT HOLD ONTO BOTH CHRIST AND AN ATTITUDE OF PARTIALITY (v.1).

■ James tells us, "Do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ...with partiality."

■ Or as the NIV renders his words, "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism."

A. Partiality is *inconsistent* with the life of Christ.

It is worth noting that Jesus was never one to show partiality. The enemies of Christ even remarked in *Matthew 22:16*, "*You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.*" (NIV) This was just the way Christ was. He looked at the heart and not the appearance.

■ When He looked at the sinner—He saw what he/she could become.

When He saw Matthew, the publican—He saw a writer of the gospels.

When He saw the sinful woman at the well of Sychar—He saw a great soul winner.

When He saw the murderous Saul of Tarsus—He saw Paul the great apostle.

Jesus refused to show partiality because of what He saw!

If we are to follow the pattern of Christ we must realize that partiality and favoritism is in sharp opposition to God's will.

B. Partiality is *incompatible* with God's acceptance of everyone.

■ One writer commented, "It's important to note that James is not condemning the kind of discernment that comes from a thorough understanding of another's character. What he is dealing with here is our tendency to be prejudiced toward others because of superficial judgments based on outward appearances." (Swindoll, 67)

■ The story is told of "the judge (who) glared down from his bench at the perspective juror. 'And just why is it,' he asked, 'that you don't want to serve on this jury?' The man replied, 'Well, Judge, I'm biased. One look at that man convinced me that he is guilty.' The judge scowled and replied, 'That man is not the defendant, he's the district attorney.'" (Hewett, 431)

Discrimination and favoritism is never to be associated with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THE GRACE OF GOD FORBIDS US TO SHOW PARTIALITY (vv. 2-5).

A. Watch for situations that lead to discrimination (v. 2).

James presents them with a hypothetical situation of choosing how they will treat a rich visitor as opposed to a poor one.

B. Watch for carnal reactions in all situations (v. 3).

If the two come in at the same time and you give the best seat to the rich man and the worse seat to the poor man, would your motives be impure? Good question.

But it doesn't have to be rich and poor, it could be: important and unimportant, attractive and unattractive, educated and uneducated.

C. The Christian should guard against temptations to serve their self-interests (v. 4).

■ Charles Swindoll writes, "Two things are clarified in this verse. First, what was done: The usher 'made distinctions.' He discriminated based on appearances, exalting one and mistreating another. Second, we're told why it was done: because of evil motives . . . motives such as catering to the rich, in hopes of selfish gain or to maintain class distinctions or simply out of pride and contempt."

D. Listen to the wisdom of God (v. 5).

■ James says, "Listen...Brethren...Has God not chosen..."

There are a few things that we need to remember about those God has saved.

1. It is by the grace and mercy of God that we are saved, not on merit.

Therefore it is inconsistent to treat anyone as though they are inferior—especially the poor. It was the poor who made up most of the early church.

2. Those in Christ who are poor in the eyes of the world are actually rich.

They are RICH in faith and they are HEIRS of the kingdom. It is not wrong to be rich, and neither is it wrong to be poor.

■ As William Barclay has noted, "The great characteristic of God is complete impartiality." Barclay goes on to explain, "James is not shutting the door on the rich—far from that. He is saying that the gospel of Christ is specially dear to the poor and that in it there is a welcome for the man who has none to welcome him, and that through it there is a value set on the man whom the world regards as valueless." (Swindoll, 69)

3. God always blesses those who acknowledge Him.

III. PARTIALITY IGNORES THE SINS OF SOME WHILE IT CONDEMNES THE SINS OF OTHERS (vv. 6-7).

A. Those who show partiality dishonor those whom God has chosen.

Concerning their dishonoring the poor and favoring the rich, James seeks to point out the inconsistency of their actions by asking them **3 questions**:

First, "Is it not the rich who are exploiting (oppressing) you?"

Second, "Is it not the rich who are dragging you into court?"

Third, "Is it not the rich who are blaspheming the noble name of Christ?"

B. There is only One who is worthy to be esteemed above another.

IV. PARTIALITY IS AGAINST THE LAW OF GOD (vv. 8-11).

A. "Loving your neighbor as yourself" is the "Royal Law" (v.8).

All of God's other laws dealing with the treatment of others hinge upon the Royal Law.

It does not mean that you have to like everything about the person or have to agree with them. But it does mean you have to treat them the way God has treated you.

B. If you break this law, "the Royal Law," you have sinned (v.9).

The law of God convicts you. It is not the opinion of man.

C. Breaking this law makes one as much of a lawbreaker as anyone who breaks the law of God (v.10-11).

CONCLUSION

There are a few *points* found in v. 12-13 that we need to remember.

■ James said, "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

FIRST: Speak and act in light of the fact that we will be judged by the Word of God.

SECOND: There will be no mercy for those who refuse to show mercy.

THIRD: The only thing that can triumph over the judgment of God is the mercy of God.

■ One a warm spring evening in May 1998, Christopher Sercye was playing basketball with a few friends half a block from Ravenswood Hospital. Three teenage Latino gang members looking for a black target approached and shot young Sercye in the abdomen. His frantic friends carried him to within 30 feet of the hospital and ran inside for help. The emergency room personnel refused to go outside to assist the dying boy citing a policy that only allows them to help those who are inside the hospital. The boys called for nearby police to attend their wounded friend. When the officers arrived on the scene they proceeded to call for an ambulance, but refused to carry the boy inside. While passersby pled with the officers to get the boy into the hospital, he lay in a pool of blood unconscious. When, after several minutes, the

ambulance had not yet arrived, the police gave in and carried Sercye into the emergency room. By then, nothing could be done to save his life.

By holding to standard operating procedures, the "royal law of love" was pinned to the mat. Initially, hospital administration vehemently defended their ER's lack of involvement. Only after a barrage of community outrage did Ravenswood Hospital reverse its policy of treating only those inside its doors.

-- Greg Asimakoupoulos. From the files of Leadership.

In our text James is saying, "So what if you keep the Law of God and the commandments, if you fail to show love you have broken the Law of God and are as guilty as if you had broke all of the commandments."

In the preceding story we could say to those of the hospital, "So what if you obeyed your rules and policies, someone died when you could have done something about it."

If God's impartial love and mercy has been shown to us, shouldn't we show it to others?

References

Hewett, James S. (Ed.). (1988). *Illustrations unlimited*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.

Swindoll, Charles R. (1991). *James: Practical and authentic living*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing.