

Favoritism in the Church

James 2:1-17

God has many attributes that we joyfully acknowledge: kindness, longsuffering, omnipotence, etc. But God is impartial and that is a great attribute although one we rarely take time to appreciate.

In this, God is very unlike us. Human beings are naturally inclined to be partial. We tend to categorize people, to have predetermined opinions about people, to rank people by race, social status, education, material possessions, etc.

Deuteronomy 10:17 – For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.

James is not explaining the gospel. He's explaining what your life will look like if you believe the gospel.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus has died for sinners; by his death, burial and resurrection, making us right with God and able to enjoy him now and live with him forever.

The natural question is 'why' did Jesus have to die?

- 1) God created everything good
- 2) Humanity rebelled
- 3) Our holy God could not fellowship with us as sinners
- 4) In love, He sent Jesus to live the life we could not live and die in our place
- 5) When we believe on him, his good life is credited to us so that God sees us holy
- 6) What God is doing in us, he is doing in all creation, reclaiming everything
- 7) One day, Jesus will return and restore all creation to a right relationship with God
- 8) Until then, it is our joy to share the good news that anyone who repents of their own life and trusts in Jesus can be saved from God's wrath and made whole by God's Spirit

Even though we are Christians, we still in in fallen bodies and in a fallen world. This means we are moving in the right direction but haven't yet attained the perfection God intends for us personally, in the church or for the world. This is why James wrote his letter –

TEXT – James 2:1-17

First: The Model of Impartiality

- a) A community of impartiality

We are all sinners saved by grace. This makes us all equal in the sight of God.

V 1 speaks to discrimination.

Vs 2-4 define v 1 as economic discrimination.

The church is not beyond this

Acts 6:1-7 – *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*

Hebrew Christians were showing partiality to Hebrew widows. The Greek believers complained. How did the church solve it? They elected Greek men to serve the entire congregation. The church empowered the people who felt discriminated against.

b) A community of mercy. 12-13

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Luke 10:25-37 - *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” ²⁷ And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii^[c] and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”*

For God to demonstrate mercy, he must show mercy to people unlike himself since there is no one like God. In like manner, Christian mercy is all about demonstrating God's kindness to people unlike me.

Second: The Motive for Impartiality v 1

V 1 - *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*

Discrimination and faith in Jesus are antithetical
Glory and discrimination are antithetical

a) God is impartial in grace

John 3:16 – *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 - *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

Romans 1:16 - *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

If God is impartial and we claim faith in Jesus who demonstrated impartiality with the world, we too must exercise impartiality with the world

b) Glory = importance or significance

If you understand the importance of Jesus you will do what he has done.

James 3:9-10 - *With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*

- We are all sinners saved by grace. This makes us all equal in the sight of God. We are called to honor people because God honors people with his image.
- God does not discriminate. We are all sinners saved by grace. This makes us all equal in the sight of God. We are called to honor people because God honors people with his goodness,

God does not discriminate against people according to nationality.

c) This is not a universal law – *“in the lord Jesus Christ...”*

Faith in Jesus means we don't place faith in us, in our birth, nation, social status, economics, education, color, part of nation, etc. Our faith is in Jesus who has made us all equal and not in ourselves or others to be more than or less than anyone

Let's say that partiality is what it is....prejudice -

Aristotle believed in natural slavery

16th century Spanish theologian *Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda*, defended the position of the New World colonists, claiming that the Amerindians were "natural slaves."

You see the founding fathers were really influenced by the Bible. The whole concept of the imago Dei ... is the idea that all men have something within them that God injected. Not that they have substantial unity with God, but that every man has a capacity to have fellowship with God. And this gives him uniqueness.... There are no gradations in the image of God. Every man from a treble white to a bass black is significant on God's keyboard, precisely because every man is made in the image of God.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is not common sense to do this. It is contrary to what is normal.

Compassion, pity and charity, as we understand and cherish them, are not objects found in nature, like trees or butterflies or academic philosophers, but are historically contingent conventions of belief and practice, formed by cultural convictions that need never have arisen at all.... Good manners.... should oblige [atheists] to acknowledge that they are inheritors of a social conscience whose ethical grammar would have been very different had it not been shaped by Christianity's moral premises: the ideals of justice for the oppressed the church took from Judaism, Christianity's own special language of charity, its doctrine of God's universal love, its exaltation of forgiveness over condemnation, and so on.

- David Bentley Hart in *Atheist Delusions*

There is no such thing as – there has not historically been and will not be in the future – any fruit of compassion without the soil of God's existence and character.

“... [Nietzsche] had the good manners to despise Christianity, in large part, for what it actually was--above all, for its devotion to an ethics of compassion--rather than allow himself the soothing, self-righteous fantasy that Christianity's history had been nothing but an interminable pageant of violence, tyranny, and sexual neurosis. He may have hated many Christians for their hypocrisy, but he hated Christianity itself principally on account of its enfeebling solicitude for the weak, the outcast, the infirm, and the diseased; and, because he was conscious of the historical contingency of all cultural values, he never deluded himself that humanity could do away with Christian faith while simply retaining Christian morality in some diluted form, such as liberal social conscience or innate human sympathy.”

- David Bentley Hart

d) To discriminate against people is to discriminate against God who created people.

1 John 3:16-18 - *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

Third: The Paradigm for Transformation

a) Remember your Identity vs 7 & 9-10

V 7 - *Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

9-10 - *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.*

What does that mean? If you think you are saved by works, God loves you for goodness or hates you for badness. You are either high or low. But if you believe the gospel – that you are saved by God's grace and mercy – by what Jesus did and not who you are what you do – then the low sister is immediately exalted and the rich brother is immediately humbled.

All Christians are both low and high; poor = high in Christ. High in life = low in Christ.

Our identity in grace changes us, our attitude toward ourselves and toward others!!!

b) Understand your Poverty. v 5

V 5 - *Listen, my beloved brothers, 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?*

Why?

Mark 10:25 - *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."*

The poor know they are impoverished. The middle class or upper class work for everything and expect to work for salvation also. Poor people understand charity. They know poverty of all kinds.

c) Practice good works. 14-17

14-17 - *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

It's not just that you know that you are poor.

You also know that Jesus made himself a poor man –

Isaiah 53:1-3 - *Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected^[b] by men, a man of sorrows^[c] and acquainted with^[d] grief;^[e] and as one from whom men hide their faces^[f] he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Matthew 25:31-46 - *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ ³¹ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

Conclusion:

If God is God and we are sinners then only God is different from us. The rest of us are like each other. This eliminates discrimination, partiality and prejudice.

However, since we are sons and daughters of Adam and Eve who sought to be more than equal with God, we too, naturally strive to be better than others. And so we must fight against our natural tendency to be prejudiced and strive to be Christians who are saved by and exhibit grace while having faith in Jesus.

Community Groups:

- 1 – What does it mean to be ‘partial’ and ‘impartial?’
- 2 – How does James say his audience is demonstrating partiality? Vs 2-4
- 3 – Give an example in Acts 6 of how the early church experienced partiality?
- 4 – How did the church solve the appearance of partiality?
- 5 – How might the modern church show partiality?
- 6 – Have you ever experienced prejudice in a church?
- 7 – What was the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan? **To demonstrate that our neighbor is often someone *unlike* us because there is no one like God.**
- 8 – How does grace eliminate partiality? **There aren’t two or more kinds of people in Christ. We are all equally, equal sinners.**
- 9 – Discuss how atheism has no foundation for mercy. (Evolution is not merciful)
- 10 – How is discriminating against people, discriminating against God? **Everyone is made in God’s image and worthy of that respect and treatment.**
- 11 – How does my identity in Christ shape the way I view others? **I see them as God sees them.**
- 12 – How does acknowledging my poverty change the way I treat others? **No one is less deserving than me (1 Timothy 1:15).**
- 13 – Why is it hard for middle and upper-class Americans to go to heaven?
- 14 – What specific ‘good works’ is James encouraging his readers to practice?
- 15 – What does Jesus say about caring for the poor, weak, etc in Matt 25:31-46? How might this change the way you interact with people?
- 16 – How might I practice James’ encouragement this week?
- 17 – How might our CG fulfil this instruction?