

The Sin of Partiality

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James 2:1-23 (ESV) “¹My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ²For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit down at my feet,’ ⁴have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, 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? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? ⁸If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. ⁹But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not commit murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³For judgement is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgement.”

All around us we see hate and discrimination in the world. We see it on the news every night with the rise of anti-Semitism and discrimination based on race, religion, gender, and so on. The sad thing is that this sin works its way into the hearts of even believers, perpetuated by culture and those around us. While all of us have our biases that we must address, as believers we are called to be like God. He tells us in **Leviticus 19:2**, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” And Paul tells us in **Romans 2:11** that “God shows no partiality.” Therefore, we should show no partiality. As James has pointed out, it is a sin like any other, and we are called to examine ourselves (**2 Corinthians 13:5**) to make sure we harbor no unrepentant sins in our hearts.

Here James uses a situation that was happening all too commonly among the churches at the time. In **Galatians 2**, Paul gives us another example where he personally called out Peter, the head of the whole church, for favoritism of Jewish believers over Gentile believers. Peter had strayed from the truth of the gospel and what he previously knew to be true when he said in **Acts 10:34-35**, “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.”

During His ministry here on earth, Jesus brought into His Kingdom lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, and the like. This, of course, offended the “righteous” Pharisees who looked down on such people, the outcasts and ostracized of society. But Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites and says they will have greater condemnation because of it (**Mark 12:40**). God uses redeemed sinners throughout the

Bible. Matthew was a tax collector, who were the most reviled and despised people in the Jewish nation. They were considered the worst of sinners, traitors to their people who worked with their oppressors and stole from their own people. Yet, despite that, he was chosen as one of Jesus' 12 disciples and wrote the gospel that bears his name. Paul calls himself the foremost of sinners (**1 Timothy 1:15**) due to his persecution of the church. But God changed him and used him mightily in starting churches throughout the Roman Empire and through his letters to those churches that make up around half of the New Testament. Moses was a murderer, King David was an adulterer and had the woman's husband killed to try to cover it up, Joseph was technically a sex offender and was falsely imprisoned for attempted rape. But God used Moses to deliver Israel out of slavery in Egypt, David was called a man after God's own heart, and Joseph was exalted to second in command of all Egypt and saved his family (all Israel) and many others from famine. **1 Corinthians 1:28-29** says, "God chose what is lowly and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

As Christians, we are all children of God through faith, and all one in Christ Jesus (**Galatians 3:26,28**). We are new creations (**2 Corinthians 5:17**), dead to our old sinful lives that have been crucified with Him (**Romans 6:6**), and called sons, brothers, and heirs of Jesus Christ. It is not for us to judge the past lives of believers nor non-believers at all. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 5:12-13**, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside." So, it is the current, unrepentant sins in believers that we are called to judge, so that we can help each other conform to the image of Christ our Lord. Sometimes we have blindspots, so we need each other to help us see things more clearly.

Discrimination, favoritism, and partiality have no part in a true believer's life. We are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves – the greatest commandment next to loving God. We are commanded to love one another just as Jesus loves us (**John 13:34**). We must remember this law of love, law of liberty that has set us free from the law of sin and death and show love and mercy to everyone regardless of the color of their skin, their religion, their past, or anything else.