

Text James 2:1-7

My brothers,^[a] show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and 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," ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 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? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

Main Point

Showing partiality betrays you

Introduction (300)

Hook

Your actions betray you.

Have you ever had anyone tell you that? "Your actions betray you".

You adamantly say something but your actions prove the exact opposite.

You say you are not interested in that girl, but

- you constantly talk about her,
- you try and sit next to her,
- you always “happen” to always go to the same social events.

“But no no no”, you say “there is no special interest there”. But your actions betray you.

Or you say

Today, as we look at the verses, we will see that showing partiality betrays you. You may say you love God and have faith in God.

But if you show partiality, your actions stab your false faith in the back and reveals your true colours.

Your actions betray you.

Outline

To work our way through this passage we are going to look at three points.

Each point showing how partiality betrays you.

1. Partiality shows your evil hope (v1)
2. Partiality shows your evil standard (2-4)
3. Partiality shows your evil allegiance (5-7)

Part 1 – Partiality Shows your Evil Hope

Exposition

Context

So let us begin with our first point – Partiality shows your evil hope.

As you know, James is writing to suffering Christians who are far from home.

And James cares for these people. He really cares for them. He keeps calling them his brothers, his beloved brothers. They are like family to him.

And he cares enough to tell them the truth. He cares enough to say some hard things in order that they can suffer well and receive the crown of life that is in Christ.

James began addressing specifically how we are to respond while in the midst of suffering. And we saw that in every aspect believers are to turn to God instead of to our money, ourselves, or our wisdom. We are to always turn to God.

We are always tempted to be self-sufficient, but we must depend on God in all things, especially in suffering.

Next James turns his attention to true religion. He had been hearing reports that some in the congregation were using “faith in Christ” as a license to sin. Using it as a license to do whatever they want instead of obeying God’s commands.

We saw last week the contrast between one who has no control over his tongue and one who has true religion as they live out their faith. True religion was *“to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” James 1:27b*

In the next few verses, James continues this flow of thought about true religion. This is really his main thought in Chapter 2. *“Saving Faith is never alone”*. Mere belief in correct doctrine is a dead faith and will not save you.

In verse 17 we read

¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

We are going to explore this in much more detail later in the chapter, but in these few verses we turn to a specific example of this dead faith. The example of showing partiality.

Partiality

Look at verse 1 with me again.

My brothers,^[a] show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Notice James’s loving appeal, “my brothers” before he gives his instruction. His instruction comes from a heart of care, concern and love.

The word Partiality literally means “receiving the face.” – It refers to making a judgment at face value. All you receive as data about the person is their face.

It is talking about showing favouritism, or discrimination based on external appearances. James uses the example of what people wear, but partiality

could be based on skin colour, physical appearance, age, gender, or any other outward appearance.

And partiality is no minor ethical concern.

Partiality against God's character

We learn of many attributes of God in scripture. And one of those is that God is impartial. He is not partial. Whether it be salvation, judgment, or discipline, God's standards are the same.

Let us look a few of passages which highlight this for us.

Look with me at Deut 10:17-18 (let them find the text)

When we understand how God in his very character, is impartial, we will begin to understand the point James is making here.

Notice from this passage how intrinsic this is to his character

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. ¹⁸ He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

Impartiality is part of who God is.

Now turn with me to 1 Pet 1:16-17

Here again we have Peter talking to suffering Christians. And similar to James it is a plea to live holy lives as God is holy. And Peter brings front and foremost how God is impartial.

¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." ¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father

who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,

We are to be impartial because God is impartial.

Now, finally, let's look at Romans 2:9-11

Even as we think of the chosen people of God, God shows no partiality.

⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

Impartiality is not just an ethic. It is part of the very character of God.

Faith is a commitment to follow

So we can understand why James says:

*show no partiality as **you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.***

Truly holding, or believing, the truths about Christ will reflect the character of Christ. It will reflect the Character of God. It will reflect impartiality.

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. He is the Lord of Glory. He is impartial as the Father is impartial.

James is saying "if you are truly holding or believing the promises of God, truly holding to the truths about Christ, there is no place for partiality".

The one who holds the Faith in Christ will turn from sin and imitate Christ.

If you are showing partiality, you are “holding” something else. You are believing something else. You are not holding or believing The Faith. You may be holding a myriad of false beliefs all with “biblical basis”, but it is not *the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*,

True hope – Gospel Plea

If you are continually practicing partiality, it shows you are holding an evil hope. It is evil because it is no hope at all. It is a false hope that will only lead to death.

If you find this to be true of you, see it as a grace from God that you realise this now. But don’t frantically try to be fair to all people in a hope to be right with God.

First turn to Christ. First confess that you are a sinner, in need of saving. Confess those desires, thoughts and actions which are offensive to God.

Then cling to his sacrifice which is able to pay for your sins. On the cross he took the payment your sin deserved. Cling to that. Accept that.

and then finally ask him for grace to change. Ask him for grace to love all people as Jesus loved all people.

And then form this genuine faith, form this genuine repentance, you will find that the character of impartiality will flow into your desires, thoughts, and actions as you are conformed to the Image of the Son.

You will grow in impartiality as you grow in your likeness to Jesus.

Link

Now we have seen the general command not to show partiality. Next, James shows us what partiality could look like and sheds light on the root cause of partiality.

He explains what is really happening when you show partiality. And it is much worse than bad seating arrangements...

Which brings us to our second section. How does partiality betray you? Partiality shows your evil standard.

Part 2 – Partiality shows your evil standard (2-4)

Exposition

The scenario

In verse 2-3 James depicts a scenario of partiality.

Verse 2 says:

² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,

So our setting is a place of worship. The place where these group of Christian were gathering to worship.

And lo and behold, some new people come through the door. They may be visitors, or they may be new converts who have recently heard about the Good News of Jesus and are seeking to fellowship with his people.

One of these people is well dressed. A thick coat. A clean tunic. Well-groomed hair. A ring or two on his fingers. This may indicate he is a land owner, but at the very least it shows he has wealth and enough to spare. Maybe he could give work to some people in the church.

But the other visitor is quite the opposite. His clothes are filthy and old. He is unkept and from the smell you wonder if he has bathed at all this year. You wonder if he has only come for a free feed and a place to stay warm.

Message sent

And the scenario continues. In verse 3.

³ and 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,"

Let's just pause there,

Remember, in the first century, where you sat at a gathering was a way to bestow honour or to remind people of their place.

So it is not as if the poor person happens to come late and the only place left to sit was on the ground.

There is a deliberate decision to show honour to the rich man and publicly dishonour the poor man.

The poor man is tolerated, but the message is clearly sent that he is of lesser value and there is a hierarchy in place.

Now this would have been the normal practice in the first century. No one would have beat an eye lid. This is what everyone did. Even the poor would have expected this. But this is not acceptable for those who hold the faith in Jesus Christ.

This is a big deal

The scenario James is depicting is not an usher trying to do his job and running out of seats.

The scenario shows favouritism or partiality based on financial status. And this is a big deal. Something that would have been dismissed as a normal cultural thing is abhorrent. Something seemingly insignificant reveals the true nature of the heart.

Notice what James says is happening when you show partiality. Verse 4 says:

⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Evil thoughts

Showing partiality, even in something as simple as seating arrangements, makes you just as bad as evil judges. Just as bad as undermining justice for selfish gain.

You have become judges with evil motives and evil standard. You are judging with regards to what you could get out of it.

And you are judging based on some faulty standard of justice. A crooked measuring stick or wrong scales. In this case the faulty standard is what these two men are wearing and their financial status.

Showing impartiality in seating is like being an unfair judge. You use your authority for selfish gain based on a crooked standard.

Evil judges

This comparison to unfair judges is weighty. God has much to say against unfair judges, against judges with evil thoughts and standards.

Lev 19:15 says:

¹⁵ “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

It should be no different in the house of worship.

Listen to this passage from *Mal 2:8-9*. Notice the judgement God promises to evil judges.

⁸ But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, ⁹ and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction.”

And then to really drive the point home in *Prov 17:15* we read:

*He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous
are both alike an abomination to the Lord.*

Impartiality is a big deal. And the smallest of actions betrays the state of our heart.

Those who consistently show partiality reveal that they have no saving faith because they have no desire to become like Christ, no desire to be impartial as God is impartial.

Application

How do we show Impartiality – Personally

Today we may not be partial based on wealth, and show honour based on seating, but there are many ways to treat people differently in the hope of selfish gain, and make judgements on them because of social cues.

All of our interactions with other people become an opportunity to imitate Christ. An opportunity to be impartial just like he is impartial.

So when are you tempted to show partiality?

- At home towards your children?
- In the workplace towards your colleagues and clients?
- On the sports field?
- In the craft room?
- At band practice?
- At a social gathering?
- And the list could go on. Any time you interact with people.

But the place we must watch ourselves closely is as we gather as the Church.

We are all prone to show partiality, but how much more must you cast it off as you gather to worship the Impartial God.

- Maybe you tend to talk only with your friends?
- Maybe you tend to ignore the newcomer?
- Maybe you hope someone else will talk to the visitor?
- Maybe you avoid that person who takes so much effort to talk to?
- Do you only show interest and concern to those you may receive something from?

We cannot be all things to all people, but we must check our hearts and we must turn from our sin if we have become “judges with evil thoughts”.

Link

James wants us to feel the weight of the sin of partiality. And so he does not stop with comparing those who are impartial to evil judges.

He continues to drive his point home by showing that partiality betrays where your allegiances lie.

Which brings us to our third and final point: Partiality shows your evil allegiance.

Part 3 – Partiality shows your evil allegiance

Exposition

The ones who God has chosen have been dishonoured

Look at verse 5 with me.

Again, notice the tone is one of a humble, mature Christian who wants the best of his listeners. “Listen, my beloved brothers, my family, my friends”.

Listen, bend your ear, take note, pay attention

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? ⁶ But you have dishonoured the poor man.

James points our attention to God’s work and God’s way. God has chosen the poor, so do not exclude them as if they were second-class citizens.

Does not exclude Rich

Now of course, God has also chosen some rich to be saved too, and some poor not to be saved. The point James is making has nothing with the extent of God's saving Grace

You are reading way too much into this text if you want it to say that God only saves the poor and if you are rich you need to feel guilty and distribute it in order to be saved. Some wish to read this text this way to push a liberation agenda, but reading this text in context keeps us on track.

The poor are highlighted here because they are being marginalized in this congregation.

Rich in faith

The plea is to stop showing discrimination to the poor, by reminding the congregation that God has saved the poor. He has given the poor saving faith. He has chosen the poor to be heirs of his kingdom.

They too are rich in faith. They too have been given abundant faith to enter the kingdom of God.

They too have riches beyond imagination because they are heirs of the kingdom.

God has made no distinction, and neither should we. This spiritual mindset, or spiritual lense, is echoed in *Rom 10:12*

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

Where there may appear to be a distinction as far as the world is concerned, In Christ there is no distinction.

To dishonour the poor is to dishonour God

The Christian man who happens to be poor has been shown great honour by God. How can we then turn to that same man and dishonour him in the very assembly of worship? Not only are they acting at odds with God, but additionally to dishonour the poor is to dishonour God.

In Prov 17:5 we read

*Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker;
he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.*

Loyal to God?

How can you claim to be loyal to God, that is holding the faith, when you act so differently from Him?

In fact when you show partiality, you show who you are really being loyal to. And it is not God. Your actions betray you.

The choice to honour the rich, simply because they are rich, is proof of your loyalty to your own selfish gain. You honour them in the hope of what you can gain from them.

But your loyalty to yourself and then to the rich is futile. The temptation is there because it seems they have the power, but it is futile.

Look at the second part of verse 6 and verse 7:

Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones

who blaspheme the honourable name by which you were called?

Those who blaspheme God are honoured

The rich oppress you. They own the land and treat you like slaves.

The rich drag you into court. They may be in the wrong, but they have the lawyers to crush you and the bribe money to get good results

The rich even blaspheme the name of Jesus.

And yet you show a person special honour simply because they are rich, and you show contempt to the other man, simply because he is poor.

This makes no sense! Open your eyes, James says.

Showing partiality shows your evil allegiance. It shows you are more concerned with material things that perish than with eternal things which last.

It shows you are more concerned with pleasing man than pleasing God.

It shows your loyalty is with Self rather than with God.

It shows, ultimately, that the faith you hold is dead.

Partiality betrays you.

Application

What lens do we have when we interact with people?

How we interact with people shows the condition of our heart and the condition of our faith.

So when we interact with people, in the church, out of the church, everywhere, we must put on our spiritual

glasses. We must put on our reality glasses. Our sight is warped and we need correction. And God's word gives us that correction.

Now some glasses are pink-tinted, some glasses make you see upside down and some glasses blur your vision.

But we put on our spiritual glasses to get a real view of the world, not to distort it. Those of you with sight glasses know what I am talking about. Our glasses give us a correct view of the world.

That is what James is saying here, that is what he want's us to listen to.

When you see other through the word of God:

- You will see the poor for who they are.
- You will see the rich for who they are.
- You will see yourself as who you really are.
- And more importantly, you will see God for who he is.

Fear of man driving our actions or the fear of God?

And when you allow the Word to correct your vision,y our decisions and actions become much easier.

Your loyalty changes.

You stop being trapped in loving yourself above everything else.

You stop interacting with people in the hope of what you can gain.

The fear of man will no longer drives your decisions.

The fear of man no longer tempts you to act partially.

The fear of God becomes the driving force.

The fear of God enables you to act impartially
Your allegiance lie with him and so partiality is no longer an option.

Conclusion

Friends, we have seen three ways that showing partiality betrays you.

Partiality shows your evil hope. Impartiality is part of the very character of God. If you truly hope in Him, you will seek to follow, imitate and be transformed into his image. Partiality shows you are hoping in something else.

Partiality also shows your evil standard. Partiality shows you are making judgements about people based on what you can get from them. Judgements based on outward appearances with the intention of selfish gain. No different to evil judges.

And partiality show your evil allegiance. If your allegiance does not lie with God it will lie with Self. Your self interest becomes the reasons for your actions and interactions. Partiality is the outworking of an evil loyalty.

So does partiality betray you?

James loved his listeners enough to tell them this. He hoped to wake them up so that they would turn from their evil hope, turn from their evil standard and turn from their evil allegiance, and turn to Christ.

As you see your sin, you must not try to fix it in your own strength. You must turn to Christ. You must repent. Even if it is for the 100th time.

- Confess your sin to him
- Accept and affirm his sacrifice for your sin
- Ask him for the grace to change.
- Ask him for the grace to be impartial.

And then in all your interactions, you will be able to be impartial as he is impartial. You will be able to be holy as he is holy.

Let us pray