

## James: Impartial Faith

James 2:1-13 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. (2) For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, (3) and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," (4) have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (5) Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (6) But you have dishonoured the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? (7) Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? (8) If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you do well; (9) but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (10) For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (11) For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (12) So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

ILLUS – Some time back they did an experiment that went something like this: They sent a rather attractive young lady into a pharmacy. And they filmed to see what kind of response and the service she'd get. She went to the counter, asked for a particular product, and the person behind the counter smiled and said, "Certainly madam, no problem." So they took her down the aisles, found the product for her, and answered her questions. When she asked for another product, the staff member took her straight to it. Nothing was too much trouble. Next, they went to work on this young woman, and through the use of good make-up, they made her look like an old woman. She hobbled into the same store, went to the same counter, and asked the same person for the same product. The attendant pointed and said, "Just over on that counter," and kept working. Through her persistence, she finally got the staff member to accompany her and show her where the product was. When she asked for another product, the attendant rolled their eyes, sighed, and with bad grace took her to where it was.

It was very interesting to see the difference in service that an attractive young woman would get, as opposed to the kind of service a withered old woman would get.

We're continuing in our studies in the book of James, and our topic is Impartial Faith.

### 1. Keep Your Faith Impartial

The first thing we see here is that God says to us, "Keep your faith impartial."

This is a hot issue today; it is very relevant to our culture and our time, because discrimination is a major issue of the day.

We even have antidiscrimination laws to try and prevent people from showing partiality which can be based on a range of different things.

And so it's very important today in our culture.

ILLUS – Back in 1959, a man by the name of John Howard Griffin a white journalist, cut his hair. Under the directions of a dermatologist, he went on a course of drugs, and spent as much as fifteen hours a day under a UV lamp, so he could look as much like a black man as possible. During a six-week period, when he spent travelling through the south of the United States, where discrimination, segregation, and racial issues were really hot, he discovered first-hand what it was like to be a black man. As a result, he wrote a book called *Black Like Me*. His experiences were amazing as he discovered what it meant to be a black man in a white

man's culture, where black people were often considered to be, and treated as, less than human. He even received death threats just for writing the book.

But of course, he could escape that life; he was only doing it for six weeks.

Discrimination is a hot issue today, but God says, "Keep your faith impartial."

So what does that mean?

## **2. Don't base value judgements on appearances**

Have you ever noticed how we tend to base our judgements of people on how they present?

We judge people on how they look, how they talk, how they dress, how much money they have, what sort of car they drive, and a whole range of other issues that God says aren't important.

Did you hear that? These things are externals, and aren't important in the sight of God.

ILLUS – An African man was sitting next to an Englishman at a conference dinner. When the food was served the Englishman leaned over and said, "Eat! Yum, yum, yum. Good, eh?" When the drinks were served, he turned to the African again and said, "Drink! Slurp, slurp, slurp. Good, eh?" After the meal, the speaker was invited to the platform. To the Englishman's surprise, the African man, who had two Ph.D.s, spoke impeccable Oxford English, and had represented his country in the U.N. for three years, got to his feet, went to the platform and delivered his message. When he had finished, he went and sat down and as he did, he leaned over to the Englishman and said, "Talk! Blah, blah, blah. Good, eh?"

We judge people based on the way they look, their appearances.

And this isn't just a white man issue.

ILLUS – Back in 1994, you may remember the genocide that took place in Rwanda. What was that all about? This wasn't black against white, or white against Asian, or Asian against black. This was one black tribe against another black tribe. It was the Hutus against the Tutsis. And in less than 100 days, they estimate that between 500,000 people and 1 million people were killed. Why? Because they belonged to the other tribe.

Have you ever considered the possibility that you might be prejudiced against a particular group of people?

Maybe it's based on their race, maybe it's their education (or lack of it), maybe it's just the way a particular group of people might talk.

It's easy to be prejudiced, to discriminate against, to show partiality.

ILLUS – One time, God spoke to one of the prophets as He was about to choose the next king of Israel. And a man named Jesse brought out his sons, and one by one they passed before the prophet Samuel. And when Samuel saw the first son, he saw that he was a strong, impressive, fine-looking man. His name was Eliab. And Samuel looked at him and thought, "Surely this is the Lord's anointed! Surely this must be the next king of Israel." And God spoke to him some very powerful words and said, "The Lord does not see as man sees. For man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart."

What does God look at?

He doesn't look at the way you look, He doesn't look at your face, He doesn't look at height or anything like that.

He looks at what you are like in your heart.

James gives this example: If a man should come into your assembly with gold rings...

Actually, the original Greek says a gold-ringed man, and what it's referring to is a common practice in those days where wealthy people would wear up to six rings on each finger.

Why would they do that? To show off their wealth.

And this wealthy man enters the assembly, and it says literally, that he's wearing shining garments – this is one classy dude!

And just before he arrived, another man enters the building; he's dirty, he's smelly, he's got nothing.

And he sits down, and people look at him like he just crawled out of a sewer.

So when the wealthy man comes in, they walk up to the poor guy, and say, "Excuse me, you're going to have to get out of that seat because somebody important is here now."

"But where do you want me to sit?" says the poor guy. "The whole place is packed."

"Well I don't know. You can sit on the floor, or you can go stand at the back. You just can't sit here. This spot is reserved. Somebody get some wipes please."

And James is saying, "You treat this wealthy man as a better person, just because he's got more money."

God says, "That's wrong."

It's a value judgement based on appearances.

ILLUS – I remember when I bought my first piano. I was about 19 years old, and I went to a store that specialised in pianos. And I was just looking around when the salesman approached me and started talking to me. But the funny thing was, he kept talking to me but he was looking off to the side somewhere. And I thought, "Man, this guy must be dishonest. He can't even look me in the eye." You should be able to look somebody in the eye when you're talking to them. Right? I just knew he was going to try to swindle me. Anyway, I bought a piano. I made sure that I checked it out; it seemed okay. A couple years later, I was talking to somebody and he asked, "Where'd you buy your piano?" I told him where I bought it and he said, "Is that that guy with the eye problem?" I said, "The what?" He said, "He's got an eye problem." "Really?" I said. "What sort of an eye problem?" He said, "He can't look you in the eye. He's got no direct vision if he looks straight ahead. If he looks over to the side, he's looking at you."

I learned a lesson: How quickly we judge people based on the way they present, based on the way they look.

But God says, "Don't base value judgements on appearances."

ILLUS – I was interested to notice the other day as I walked through the local shopping centre, there's a sign at the local optometrists there which says, "77% of people believe that glasses make you look professional."

Can you believe that?

### **3. Church is a class-free zone**

There is no place for partiality in church.

We don't have different classes, some which are more acceptable than others.

When we accept people, we accept them unconditionally.

Fellowship with another Christian can never be based on the colour of their skin, the size of their bank account, their gender, their status, how old they are, how tall they are, how good-looking they are.

If we want to be like Jesus, we have to see as God sees.

And look right past the externals.

Eph 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The barriers were broken down by the cross; the church is a class-free zone.

To act differently means to be a judge with evil motives.

#### **4. Impartiality reflects God's nature**

Deut 10:17 For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.

God shows no partiality.

He is not impressed with how we look, how much money we've got, how intelligent we are, how great.

He is totally impartial.

Lev 19:15 You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbour.

In this verse, God has something to say about positive discrimination and negative discrimination.

On the one hand, He says that we are not to give preferential treatment to the mighty – the rich and the powerful.

There's no doubt that in the worldly system this happens all the time.

But it should never happen in the church.

On the other hand, God says that we should never look at the disadvantaged and allow our judgment to be swayed based on the fact that they don't have much.

God has compassion on the poor, but He doesn't give them a free pass when it comes to issues of righteousness.

#### **5. God has a different measuring stick**

ILLUS – A new housing estate was completed. When it was opened to the public for inspection, people began to comment that something seemed to be not quite right. Everything seemed to be just a little smaller than it should be. The ceilings were a little low, the doors were low, the windows were smaller. No one could quite figure out what had gone wrong. Finally, they realised what had happened. Someone had sabotaged the measuring sticks used by the workmen. They sneaked in under the cover of darkness and cut an inch off the end of each one. Naturally, all the workmen using the sticks had assumed that they were the correct length, since it was the measuring sticks that were used to gauge the accuracy of everything else.

Interesting thought, isn't it?

Are we using the right measuring stick?

Because God's measuring stick is clearly very different from the world's measuring stick.

Is 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

That certainly doesn't sound like God thinks in the same way that we do.

In fact, James says, "Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?"

Who would choose the poor as recipients of such honour? God does.

What we have to remember is that God's measuring stick is vastly different from ours.

Love and faith are the currency of heaven.

And when God looks at a person, that's what He's looking for: Love and faith.

Let's not get caught up in the world's system of values.

Let's not judge people based on the things that are unimportant to God.

We are children of the Kingdom of God, with a different culture, different values, and different vision.

And we need to keep ourselves impartial.