

Wednesday Night **BIBLE STUDY**

Wednesday, June 29, 2016 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

GETTING PRACTICAL WITH YOUR FAITH
A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES
“The Problem of Prejudice and Partiality”
James 2:1-13, Selected Scriptures

“If you judge people you have no time to love them.”
~ Mother Teresa

“He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: But he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.”
~ Proverbs 14:21

Our world today is plagued by issues of racism, prejudice, discrimination, showing favoritism, and partiality. We hear charges of “racial profiling” and “class distinction” being made, and issues of segregation and racial equality still plague us.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION 2016 RESOLUTION ON RACISM

WHEREAS, SBC President Ronnie Floyd has rallied Southern Baptists to “rise up and cry out against racism that still exists in our nation and our churches,” recognizing we are in a “desperate hour” that calls us to “replace these evils with the beauty of grace and love”; and

WHEREAS, In 1995, the Southern Baptist Convention repudiated “historic acts of evil, such as slavery,” and committed “to eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry”; and

WHEREAS, In more recent resolutions the Southern Baptist Convention called “all Christian men and women to pray and labor for the day when our Lord will set all things right and racial prejudice and injustice will be no more” (2014) and expressed continued grief “over the presence of racism and the recent escalation of racial tension in our nation” (2015); and

WHEREAS, More than 20 percent (nearly eleven thousand) of our cooperating Southern Baptist congregations identify as predominately non-Anglo and for the last two years more than 50 percent of Southern Baptist new church plants are predominately non-Anglo...

RESOLVED, That we acknowledge both the importance of remembering family heritage and sacrifice, as well as the urgency of pursuing a unified Body of Christ and racial healing in America; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we urge fellow Christians to exercise sensitivity so that nothing brings division or hinders the unity of the Body of Christ to be a bold witness to the transforming power of Jesus.

A PLACE TO START THE DISCUSSION

6 Biblical Foundational Statements About Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Partiality: *A Christian world-view and Biblically centered and accurate understanding is essential to addressing issues that plague us today with race, prejudice, discrimination and a whole host of related issues.*

1. **There is on one race, the human race** - The first thing to understand in this discussion is that there is only one race—the human race. Caucasians, Africans, Asians, Indians, Arabs, and Jews are not different races. Rather, they are different ethnicities of the human race. All human beings have the same physical characteristics (with minor variations, of course).
2. **All human beings are equally created in the image and likeness of God** - More importantly, all human beings are equally created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to lay down His life for us (John 3:16). The “world” obviously includes all ethnic groups.
3. **God shows no partiality or favoritism** - God does not show partiality or favoritism (Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9), and neither should we. James 2:4 describes those who discriminate as “judges with evil thoughts.” Instead, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (James 2:8). In the Old Testament, God divided humanity into two “racial” groups: Jews and Gentiles. God’s intent was for the Jews to be a kingdom of priests, ministering to the Gentile nations. Instead, for the most part, the Jews became proud of their status and despised the Gentiles. Jesus Christ put an end to this, destroying the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14).
4. **All forms of racism, prejudice, and discrimination are affronts to the work of Christ on the cross** - Jesus commands us to love one another as He loves us (John 13:34). If God is impartial and loves us with impartiality, then we need to love others with that same high standard. Jesus teaches in Matthew 25 that whatever we do to the least of His brothers, we do to Him. If we treat a person with contempt, we are mistreating a person created in God’s image; we are hurting somebody whom God loves and for whom Jesus died. Racism, in varying forms and to various degrees, has been a plague on humanity for thousands of years. Brothers and sisters of all ethnicities, this should not be.
5. **Victims of racism, prejudice, and discrimination need to forgive** - Ephesians 4:32 declares, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Racists may not deserve your forgiveness, but we deserved God’s forgiveness far less.
6. **Those who practice racism, prejudice, and discrimination need to repent** - “Present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:13). May Galatians 3:28 be completely realized, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

It is impossible to judge another person’s motives. Although that’s true, we go on doing just such a thing, thinking our judgments are accurate; then we establish a way of relating to an individual on the basis of what we “think” is real. One cannot determine the heart of a person in a first-time encounter. That’s the message of James 2. That’s the reason prejudice and partiality is so wrong. A word of caution is in order: Prejudice and partiality are different from discernment. The latter is a necessary part of our maturity. But in this portion of James’ letter and in our study, we are dealing with the matter of initial impression. Because built-in and

traditional prejudices are based upon surface impressions, God says such conclusions and attitudes are wrong, unfair, even careless, reckless and dangerous... in fact, they are sin.

THE PRINCIPLE STATED (James 2:1)

The issue is introduced in verse 1, illustrated in verses 2-4, explained in verses 5-11, and applied in verses 12-13.

In James' words, here is the principle stated in verse 1 of our passage: *"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality."*

If we turn this statement around and express it another way, we can say state the principle this way:

James' Principle on Partiality: Faith in Christ and partiality, (prejudice, favoritism or whatever you want to call it) are incompatible.

The term "partiality" (favoritism) used by James comes from two Greek words combined to mean "to receive by face" and has the thought of accepting or welcoming someone by face value alone. He's not talking about the importance of character study so as to exercise discernment, but about favoritism shown another person on the basis of an initial encounter and externals.

Interesting Observation: The term "favoritism" or "partiality" is found only three other New Testament locations, and in each instance it is made clear that God does not respect faces. Whereas man judges by the face (externals), God judges by the heart (internals). This is "good news" why? God doesn't love us, accept us, receive us, hear us, respond to us, save us based on how we look on the outside, by the color of our skin, or how we look, or how we dress, or what our ethnicity is. He loves us all equally and receives us all equally. He judges the heart, not fleshly externals.

THE PRINCIPLES ILLUSTRATED (James 2:2-24)

This illustration is comprised of three elements. We will briefly look at each:

3 Elements of James' Illustration of Partiality:

- 1. The setting (v.2)** – The believers had met for worship, and the usher at the door noticed two different people looking for seats: one was a wealthy man, the other poor. The text literally says of the first man that he was "gold fingered," suggesting that he was wearing many rings. Also, we're told that his clothes were exquisite. The latter individual, the poor one, was dressed in dirty clothes. The usher was faced with a choice: Where does he seat these two people? Matthew 23:6 helps us better understand the situation by telling us that here were chief seats in the synagogues. The Pharisees loved the chief seats... apparently located down in front... because they could enter the place of worship in their elegant robes and march toward the front, calling attention to themselves. There was nothing wrong with these people being wealthy, but these wealthy people happened to be the ones who persecuted the Christians (See James 2:6-7, *"⁶ But you have dishonored 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?"*)

2. **The response (v.3)** – Faced with the decision of seating one or the other in the available seat, the usher yielded to a judgment based upon externals only. While the rich man was given the seat, the poor man was given the choice to sit on the floor or to stand off to the side.
3. **The motive (v.4)** – James describes the motives for such a decision as “evil,” in turn leading to the making of distinctions between the two individuals. That’s discrimination. The motives are not specifically named by James, but they could include the developing of class distinctions, the catering to the wealthy for what one thinks one will get in return, the fostering of pride to elevate oneself above others.

Seeing It God’s Way: If there is one place where class distinctions should break down, it is in the place of worship where color, political persuasion, type of Christian experience, money, status, rank, name, apparel, smell size, and age mean nothing.

THE PRINCIPLE EXPLAINED (James 2:5-11)

James not only states that prejudice and superficial judgments are wrong, but he give us three impressive arguments why they are wrong.

3 Arguments Against Prejudice and Partiality:

1. **A Theological Reason: Prejudice is inconsistent with God’s methods (v.5)** – James asks a question in verse 5, “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?” A careful look at James’ thoughts reveals that from God’s perspective the real issue is not wealth or poverty, but the condition of one’s soul. God looks at the heart. We ought to ask ourselves, “If God were welcoming men and women on face value alone, would He have accepted me and asked me to be part of His family?”
2. **A Logical Reason: Prejudice ignores the universality of sin (vv.6-7)** – James asked a second question in verse 6. He says, “⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?” The people in James’ audience were strangely exalting the very ones who were bringing them pain and injury. Subsequently, James called his readers’ attention to the real violation of these people in verse 7, “⁷ Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?”
3. **A Biblical Reason: Prejudice is sinful because it is inconsistent with Scripture (vv.8-9)** – Here is James in verses 8-9, “⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; ⁹ but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” One well-known law given to Moses and repeated by Jesus Himself said, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The exercise of partiality was an outright contradiction of that law. Such a contradiction between standard and behavior James called sin... transgression of the Law. If we rearrange James’ words into a personal message to ourselves, we can say, “If I show partiality or prejudice because of face (surface) relationship, I sin!”

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED (James 2:12-13)

God knows how hard it is for us to change these feelings and attitudes built into us from the day of our birth, but He expects the change to occur... as a matter of fact when we come to Christ, and if we are genuinely saved, there will be change. No change, no Jesus! We are new creature (2 Corinthians 5:15)! We have been and to be being transformed (Romans 12:1-2)! That’s

biblical Christianity! We are to be different and be changed, and be being transformed. How can we change? Let's put it into personal terms.

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. – James 2:12-13

How to change deeply ingrained seed of prejudice and partiality?:

1. **Let the Scriptures, not your heritage (upbringing, culture, circumstances) be your standard (v.12a)** – *¹² So speak and so do (act) as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.* In both the Old and New Testament, God's revealed, inerrant, sufficient, and comprehensive Word is called "law" (see Psalm 19:7, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, rejoicing the heart."*) God's Word or Perfect Law is the standard by which we will be judged. We are to adjust our lives to God's Word and His standards revealed there, no matter what we think or the how we've been raised, or how culture has affect our thinking, or how our upbringing has conditioned us to see things.
2. **Let love be your law (v.12b)** – So here it is again in verse 12, *¹² So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.* What is *"the law of liberty"* spoken of by James in verse 12? We've already said it is a reference to the Word of God, but it is also referenced back up in verse 8. It is what James there calls *"the royal law"* of Scripture. It is "love"... or specifically at verse 8 says, *⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well.* As Paul says in Romans 13:10, *"... love is the fulfillment of the law."* True love of God expressed through us will never, never see anyone else with anything else but free and unconditional love, not matter what exterior differences may exist. Prejudice and partiality is impossible!
3. **Let mercy be your message (v.13)** – Look at verses 12-13 one more time, *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.*