

“THE PERIL OF PARTIALITY.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

November 16, 2014, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: James 2:1-13

Introduction.

Suppose you and a good friend are meeting over coffee and during the conversation your friend gently points out one of your weaknesses, maybe a character flaw, perhaps one of your persistent sins or a place where your words and actions don't match up, some hypocrisy.

What happens in the next moment is really important. You could be offended or angry, you could quickly point out one of your friend's weaknesses or sins to balance the scale. Or you could internalize it and get depressed or feel worse about yourself than you already do. Or you could just blow it off, dismiss it or deny it.

There is also another possible response. You could receive correction as a gift, as the truth being spoken in love. You could receive it in the spirit of Proverbs:

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Proverbs 25:12 Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear.

Proverbs 28:23 Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue.

Flattery is nice, it makes us feel good, but it also denies the truth. The truth is I am a sinner saved by grace, but my sin still clings closely. I am blind to many of my most deeply ingrained sins. A real friend cares about our souls.

The man in this world who will tell you I am his best friend will tell you that the day I became his best friend was in June of 1985 when I pulled him aside and confronted him about a sinful behavior. He received it as an expression of real love and friendship. And we have been doing that for each other ever since.

If we are wise we should not only receive correction and rebuke, we should invite it. If you don't have a friend like that you need to prayerful seek one out. A true mark of growth in godliness is a desire to have our faults and sins brought out and when they are we should thank the person who dared to do it, even when they do it poorly.

The book of James is God's gift of a wise friend to all of us. James is that wise, older, more spiritually mature brother who sits down with us over coffee and speaking the truth in love

inflicts wounds as only a truly faithful friend can and should. We are going to come away from James each week tested and convicted, but better for it if we have ears to hear.

The goal of James is not to make us feel bad about ourselves, but to make us mature in faith.

James 2:1-13

Our text this morning is another test of true religion and true spiritual maturity. How do we treat others and why do we treat them the way we do? Do we practice the golden rule with all people and all kinds of people?

Are we conscious of status of any kind, national (Dutch and non-Dutch, ethnic background), social class (lower, middle, upper class), political party leanings, financial status, intellectual ability, the truck you drive (Chevy, Ford, Dodge), where you live, where your kids go to school, personality (awkward, interesting, outgoing), those who are different in some way?

James makes the case for why we should not practice partiality or favoritism or discrimination. True religion, a religion of hearing and doing, will guard our hearts and our mouths when it comes to how we think about and treat others, especially in the household of God.

He gives at least *four reasons* why we should show no partiality.

The Glory of Christ, James 2:1-4.

James 2:1-4 My brothers, 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?

James begins with one of the most common and natural kinds of partiality and discrimination. We are attracted to the rich and the famous, the beautiful people. Why is *People Magazine* so popular? What are the magazines most sold in the checkout line? Why do we watch TV shows like *Entertainment Today* or interviews with rich or famous people? There are countless blogs and webpages about celebrities and the latest gossip and news.

It's human nature to judge by appearances. Favoritism is our default mode. It's a constant in our society. Humans play favorites, teachers have pets.

James challenges our profession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Beware of how and where you look for glory and assign glory.

The glory and splendor of Christ should outshine all the world's glories. Having seen Jesus we should be less impressed by the things the world is impressed with.

Partiality grows out of seeking glory in the world. We show partiality to gain glory for ourselves by association. But if you know Christ's glory then you have all the glory you need. From that place you won't have a need to show partiality or make discriminations or try to establish a pecking order, you are free from that and can show love to all.

When we put one over another or give preference to one rather than another, we are denying Christ, we are being deceived, blinded by the world, forgetting the truth about Jesus and about ourselves.

The Grace of God, James 2:5-7.

James 2:5-7 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?

James makes a double argument here against favoritism. ***First***, God chose the poor and by His grace they are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.

I Corinthians 1:26-29 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But ***God chose*** what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; ***God chose*** what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 ***God chose*** what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Doesn't God often put His greatest glory in the humblest of places and vessels? Isn't that one of the great messages of Christmas, God's glory in a baby in a manger to poor parents? And who fills the church? Who of you when called were wise, strong, rich, famous?

What do we have that we have not received from God? Who can boast in themselves and in what they have done or accomplished or gained in this world? Are we not all in the same boat, so why do we exalt one and put down another?

The rich and the poor have a common maker and the image of our maker is stamped on every one of us. The rich and the poor have what they have from the hand of God. Did you and I chose to be born in the US, to be born with the advantages we have? How can we boast? How can we look down on others?

Proverbs 22:2 The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all.

God shows no partiality (Romans 2:11), we are all sinners and we are all only saved by grace.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross. By sin we all deserve the same punishment. By grace we who are orphaned all receive the Spirit of Sonship. By grace God has chosen the poor in this world to inherit heavens riches.

Second, James points out that often the rich and the famous will be the ones who do the most harm to Christians and the church.

James asks three questions to show the folly of favoring the rich and powerful.

Are they not the ones who are exploiting you?

Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?

Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name?

God will expose the folly of our favoritism by having it turn against us.

The Word of God, James 2:8-11.

James 2:8-11 If you really fulfill the **royal law** according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

What is the royal law, how is the law of God summed up?

Love your neighbor as yourself! The pinnacle of Scripture is, love your neighbor. True religion is visible, tangible. Partiality violates the royal law, the Word of God, Scripture.

Faith and favoritism are incompatible. Favoritism is bad religion. Favoritism is not neighbor love. Favoritism breaks the Law of God. It is sin! We are as guilty as the murderer.

Favoritism though seemingly a small sin compared to some other sins, reveals major flaws in our faith and in our view of God and His ways. It denies God’s grace is for all people. It denies that in our fallen condition we are all poor, it denies the law of love.

What James is saying is that favoritism is a way of winking at part of the law while we keep the rest and that won’t fly. The whole law is a reflection of the righteousness of God. God’s law is of a piece, it is one whole.

The Judgment of God, James 2:12-13.

James 2:12-13 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.

What is the law of liberty?

It's what James said in verse 8, and what Paul said in Galatians:

Galatians 5:13-14 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

If we are in Christ then we are set free from sin and sin's dominion over us. Being set free we are free to love, to love others as we love ourselves, to put others ahead of ourselves, to treat others with the same love and acceptance Christ has shown us.

James heightens the teaching against favoritism by showing that our judgment against others will be judged and we will be judged with the same judgment.

How we speak and act will be judged. By what standard do we want to be judged? If we give others no mercy, we will receive no mercy. Favoritism is evidence of a lack of mercy.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.

In repentance and humility we receive mercy, and by His grace we can extend mercy and kindness rather than judgment.

Application and conclusion.

True religion isn't just not committing adultery or murder or theft. We can feel pretty good about ourselves there. True spiritual maturity is seen in something so basic as how we treat each other and those around us, especially those who are greater than us and those who are lessor than us.

Do we have equal regard, love, respect, mercy and grace for the least, the last, the lost and the lonely? For those who are different from us, don't do things the way we think they ought to be done? Let us test and examine our hearts and our attitudes and our ways. Let us invite a friend like James to speak the truth to us in love in the sincere desire that our faith be real and a real reflection of our Lord and Savior.

We can apply the standard of true religion from last week's text, James 1:26-27 to partiality:

First, True religion helps the poor, favoritism discriminates against the poor and insults the poor.

Second, True religion is unstained by the world, favoritism follows the world, it's how the world acts.

Third, True religion controls the tongue, favoritism speaks poorly of the poor and disadvantaged.

How do we treat those poor in personality, in social skills?
How do we treat those poor in mind, in intellect, the unschooled?
How do we treat those poor in body, old, overweight, sickly?
How do we treat those poor in skills or abilities, unskilled labor?

Do we bridle our tongues when talking about Hispanics or East Indians or Canadians or democrats/republicans or blacks or Muslims? Make your tongue an instrument of grace and mercy and goodness and kindness.

Glory to God that He has shown no partiality in accepting us and making us part of His family through repentance and faith. Glory to God that He has torn down the dividing walls of hostility between us and each other. Glory to God that before His throne there is no distinction, no rich or poor, no Jew or Gentile, no male or female, we are one in His salvation and grace. Glory to God that heaven will be filled with rich and poor, lame and handicapped, black and white, red and yellow, young and old, literate and illiterate, all humbled by the grace of God.

Glory to God that He has made all of us different and that He has purposefully placed a great mix of people in our lives to teach us how to love as He loves, to teach us how to show grace to those who don't deserve it just as we have received what we don't deserve from God. Glory to God that mercy still triumphs over judgment. And glory to God that He cares so much for our souls that He sends us a friend like James.

Let us pray.

Our Father and our God, we know that you are no respecter of persons. Among every tribe, tongue and nation, those that fear you and seek righteousness are accepted by you (Acts 10:34-35). Grant that we would do no less. From the blood of one man you have made all the peoples of the earth and from the blood of one man you have redeemed those that are yours. As your redeemed make us bold to love you and one another. Forgive us and cleanse from all our hearts, prejudice, arrogance, pride, jealousy, hatred, fear and whatever evil lurks there. Establish in our midst, justice, righteousness, love and reconciliation. Jesus, by your Holy Spirit, enable us to walk together in peace and harmony for your name sake to the glory of God the Father.