

# PREJUDICE IN THE CHURCH!

(James 2:1-13)

## INTRODUCTION:

Do you have a problem with prejudice? Are you prone to favor some people over others?

*A Chinese man and a Jewish man sat down to eat lunch one day in a restaurant. They didn't know each other but sat so that they could see each other. Suddenly, without warning, the Jewish fellow got up, walked over to the Chinese guy, and blessed him out in no uncertain terms. The Chinese man stopped him and asked, "What in the world do you have against me?" And the answer came back. "That was for Pearl Harbor!" The Chinese man replied with astonishment, "Pearl Harbor? I didn't have anything to do with Pearl Harbor! It was the Japanese that bombed Pearl Harbor!" But the Jewish guy just responded, Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese--they're all the same to me.*

*And with that they both sat down again. But before too long the Chinese man got up, walked over to the Jewish man, and blessed him out in even a more severe way. After a few minutes, the Jewish fellow stopped him and asked, "What are you doing that for?" And the answer came back, "For the Titanic!" "For the Titanic, Why, I didn't have anything to do with the Titanic!" But the Chinese man just responded, "Goldberg, Feinburg, Iceburg..They're all the same to me."*

It is so easy for us to draw unfair conclusions about people! First-hand initial impressions are very seldom right. Preconceived unfavorable opinion about someone is called 'prejudice' and prejudice is always so wrong.

## THE PROBLEM: HOLDING THE FAITH WITH PREJUDICE.

In James' day he saw this problem even in the church . He called it partiality. He writes, **"Do no hold the faith with partiality."**

The literal meaning of the word "partiality" in Greek is "to receive face." I would paraphrase it to be "To base you acceptance or rejection of someone by outward appearance." The Good News Bible translates verse 1 this way: **"My friends, as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, you must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance. "**

The problem seems to have been that the church was treating certain people better than others based solely on outward appearance. James describes it in verses 2-4:

**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?**

Two visitors to the church, one rich and the other poor. Which one would you pay more attention to? Which one would you make to feel more important? Since I don't know any rich persons personally, it is difficult for me to give a personal illustration, but suppose someone like a successful medical doctor started coming to church here and at the same time a homeless person off the streets. Which one would you make to feel at home? Which one would you invite to your house and encourage to return?

*The following incident happened many years ago in a church board's meeting in a certain church. The pastor said, "Did you notice that the new doctor in town was in the service again Sunday? Let's really go after him. With all his influence, think of what he could do for the cause of Christ and for our church."*

*Later in the same meeting, the men were talking about busing kids from the inner city to our midweek children's program. "What about follow-up in the homes?" someone asked. "Don't work on it too hard," another answered. "You know how those people are. They'll keep the benevolent fund empty." No decision about follow-up was made to the inner city kids.*

This issue of partiality, favoritism, prejudice may be a more real issue than we think. And it may be more serious than we think. James comes down hard on it. It calls it "evil thoughts." Why?

## **IT MAKES YOU THE JUDGE OF WHO BELONGS IN GOD'S KINGDOM**

First it makes you the judge of who belongs in God's kingdom. Verse 4: **"have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"**

The church is to be a place where all are accepted equally before God. The church should reflect on earth how the church looks in heaven. How does the

church look in heaven? The Apostle John had a vision of the church in heaven in Revelations. What did he see? Listen to Revelation 5:9

**(Rev 5:9 NKJV) And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,**

In heaven there will be persons from every tribe, tongue, ethnic group, and nation. If we only want those who are like us to make up our congregation in what are we doing? We are trying to take the place of God in judging how His kingdom should look like! We are limiting the scope God's love and the make-up of God's kingdom. That is evil!

To show partiality in church can actually keep people out of the kingdom by driving them away from Christ.

Many may have heard why Mahatma Gandhi refused to become a Christian. It is a true story and it shows the evil of prejudice among Christians.

*In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned, "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu." That usher's prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior.*

Showing partiality or prejudice in church is evil! It keeps people out of the kingdom. Wouldn't you say that that is evil? Yes.

## **IT DISHONORS THE POOR**

The second reason James gives for prejudice in the church being evil is that it dishonors the poor. Verses 5 and 6:

**(James 2:5-6 NKJV) 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 dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?**

If you reject a person because of outward appearance, that dishonors them. That is saying that they are 2<sup>nd</sup> class in God's kingdom. That is evil!

God loves poor people. I believe that it was Will Rogers who said, "*God must love poor people more than others because he made so many of them!*"

God delights in taking a poor person and making him rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God. God delights in taking common people and giving them very uncommon lives. God loves to pick up a broken life and use it to the marvelous dismay of those who say that life is finished. He loves to take those the world says are weak and show through their lives his strength and power. That's the kind of trophy God likes. For it points people to him and his grace.

When we show favoritism to the rich we are dishonoring the persons whom God delights in giving faith and heirs of his kingdom.

## **IT VIOLATES THE ROYAL LAW**

Another reason why prejudice in the church or in your heart is evil that it violates God's Royal Law. Verses 8 & 9:

**If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.**

The Great Commandment according to Jesus is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself. This is the royal law. This is the law that reigns over all others. This is the law that Jesus said, if you keep it, you will keep all the law. If you show favoritism you break the most basic law of God – love one another.

We are called to live this royal law of love to all persons equally. We not have the prerogative of being selective in whom we show love. The end purpose of God's will and God's work in our lives is that we might receive His love and show His love to others. Any deviation from this is to fall short of living a life pleasing to God. Living a life displeasing to God is serious business.

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

## **IT MAKES YOU A LAW-BREAKER OR TRANSGRESSOR WITHOUT MERCY**

Finally prejudice in your heart makes you a law-breaker or transgressor who will receive no mercy at the judgment. Verses 10-11.

**(James 2:10-11 NKJV) 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.**

Prejudice in the church is sin and puts a person on the level of adulterers, murders, and thieves in being judged a law-breaker. Is this where you want to be? This is serious business!

Prejudice and partiality reveals a heart that has no true mercy. Verses 12-13:

**(James 2:12-13 NKJV) 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.**

It you have ever been in a court of law and know that you are guilty, your only hope is that the judge will be merciful. Well, God tells us that if we practice prejudice in the church or have prejudice in our heart, we are not showing mercy to the poor, we are judging them as not worthy of our love. Therefore when we stand before God as guilty law-breakers, He will judge us with the same kind of mercy we have shown.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Now do you understand why prejudice in the church is not only bad, but it reveals an evil heart. It is evil.

What can you do if you struggle with the sin of prejudice? First, agree with God that this is a sin. Then, choose to believe the truth that in God's kingdom 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. Finally, practice receiving others as equals in the kingdom of God.

The bible says:

**(Rom 15:7 NKJV) Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.**

*The story goes that there was a simple laborer who decided to trust Christ and he was saved. Then he decided to join a local church. The first church he visited was an impressive-looking structure. The minister was a splendid orator, and the choir was famous for its musical ability.*

*The poor man didn't realize that most of the congregation were people of high social rank. At the close of the service no one stopped to shake his hand because they saw his thread-bare suit and didn't want to be identified with what they considered his low-class standing.*

*Week after week he was politely ignored. Although he frequently expressed a desire to become a member, the preacher never called on him. One night after praying about the matter, he fell asleep and dreamed he met the Savior and confided to Him his problem. The Lord gently replied, "My son, don't let it trouble you. I myself have been trying to get into that church for years without success!"*

A Church that is not a loving, accepting church, is one that doesn't have the Lord. What a terrible indictment that is.

Amen? Amen!