

GOD IS NOT A RESPECTER OF PERSONS

TEXT: JAMES 2:1-9

INTRODUCTION:

1. James 2:1 reminds us that God is not a respecter of persons (cf. 2:9).
2. Over and over in the Bible, it is stated that God is not a respecter of persons.
3. The conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion in Acts 10 was a turning point in the book of Acts, and in the history of Christianity.
4. Acts 10:34-36 says, "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)."
5. "He is Lord of all" -- Lord of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Lord of all peoples and all nations.
6. Romans 3:29 says, "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also."
7. Romans 10:12 and 13 says, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."
8. First Peter 1:17 says God, "without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work."
9. Ephesians 6:9 says, "knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him."
10. Romans 2:11 says, "For there is no respect of persons with God."
11. Therefore, since God is not a respecter of persons, we should be the same way (James 2:1; cf. Scofield margin).
12. Deuteronomy 1:17 says, "Ye shall not respect persons in judgment."
13. Favoritism and prejudice are worldly and unscriptural, and should be avoided by believers. A black pastor friend of mine used to receive phone calls from white pastors recommending he follow up on some nice black families who had visited their churches.
14. He'd always ask them the same question: "Pastor, why don't you follow up and receive them into your church?"
15. There will be none of this in heaven (cf. Rev. 5:9; 7:9).
16. Prejudice can kill a church. By the way, this isn't simply a "black and white" problem. For example, I heard about Spanish-speaking church out on Long Island that was dominated by Puerto Ricans, and they did not like it when people from El Salvador started coming to their services.

17. Sometimes, it has nothing to do with social status or income, or different people groups, or skin color, or languages, etc. Sometimes a few key people or key families can control a church. And these church "cliques" oftentimes can ruin a church. There is absolutely no place in Christianity for prejudice, snobbery, cliques, or favoritism.

I. WE OUGHT NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF APPAREL (2:1-4)

1. The word "discriminate" is often misused. For example, a few weeks ago during a panel discussion, Gov. Andrew Cuomo was asked if he found any persuasive arguments against so-called "gay marriage."
2. Gov. Cuomo was quoted as saying, "There is no answer from the opposition. There really isn't. Ultimately, it's, 'I want to discriminate.' And that's anti-New York. It's anti-American."
3. That is a terrible thing to say about people who simply believe the Word of God. And the Word of God condemns homosexuality.
4. And the Bible also condemns men and women living together as man and wife when they have never been married. I mention this because Gov. Cuomo and his mistress are not married but are living together.
5. Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."
6. The word "discriminate" simply means, "to recognize a distinction." We must use discrimination all the time, but what James 2 teaches is that it is wrong to look down upon a poor person or to flatter a rich person.
7. Discrimination is not always wrong, but in the context of James chapter 2 it is clearly wrong.
8. Some churches make a big ado when visitors come wearing fancy clothes and jewelry, driving an expensive car, and so on. The Bible clearly condemns this (2:1-4).
9. I worked one time with a Korean fellow who saw this firsthand and was put off by it. He told me that the church he attended only selected rich men to serve as deacons. I know for a fact that some American churches operate the same way.
10. This does not just apply to church ushers or pastors – all Christians need to be careful in their dealings with other people. We should make all visitors feel welcome and at home.
11. This passage does not mean that it is commendable to come to church wearing shabby clothes. Nowadays, many people (especially some young people) seem to pride themselves on how sloppy they dress. Unfortunately

some pastors do the same, getting in the pulpit wearing jeans and sandals, no necktie, etc.

12. These worldly pastors are sending a message -- "Anything goes."
13. Furthermore, James 2 does not mean that it is wrong for a church to have dress standards. I was once talking to a pastor who told me it was wrong to have standards in a church. I replied, "You need money for your building program. Why don't you have bingo games? It works well for the Roman Catholics?"
14. He said, "No, we couldn't do that."
15. Then I said, "So you do have standards, it is just that your standards are not as strict as those of other churches."
16. Even the weakest and worldliest churches have some dress standards. Most of them would not approve of women coming into the service wearing a bikini bathing suit. But there is no question that dress standards have changed, and not for the better.
17. Pastors are wise to have dress standards for church workers. That is not what James 2 is talking about. What it means is that we are not to give preferential treatment to those who come in wearing expensive attire, and we are not to be rude to those who are poor "in vile raiment" (2:2-4).

II. WE OUGHT NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF MONEY (2:5-7)

1. Job 34:19 says, "How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands."
2. Abraham Lincoln said: "God must surely love poor people because He made so many of them."
3. This was apparently a joke but there is much truth in it. The Bible says, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom..." (2:5).
4. This is a Biblical principle.
5. Our Lord said in Matthew 11:5, "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."
6. Mark 12:37b says, "And the common people heard him gladly" (cf. Matthew 19:23-26).
7. Unfortunately, most rich people are very self-satisfied and materialistic. They would rather trust in their money than in God (cf. I Tim. 6:6-10).
8. According to the Bible, it is better to be neither rich nor poor (cf. Prov. 30:8, 9). But most poor people are anxious to get rich (e.g., look at the gambling craze that has taken over America).

9. In Bible college, we were advised to start churches in middle-class areas because the very rich and the very poor were both difficult to reach with the Gospel.
10. However, having said all that, let me emphasize that there have been some wonderful Christians who were well-off. John Wesley and George Whitefield had a wealthy friend named Lady Huntington. She used to tell people that she was saved by an *m*. She explained that if I Corinthians 1:26 had read "not any wise, not any noble are called," then she would not have been saved. But it does not say "not any" but "not many." "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called."
11. Next, James reminds his listeners that the rich oftentimes oppress the poor and even drag them into court (2:6). Historically, judges have given preferential treatment to those who were well off.
12. Furthermore, when Christians do this, they blaspheme the "worthy name" of our Lord (2:7). How absurd it is to toady to wicked people because of their wealth!
13. I remember back a few years ago when certain preachers were defending boxer Mike Tyson during his rape trial. It was no surprise to find out that he had given them a lot of money! And then after he was sent to prison, Tyson converted to the Muslim religion.

III. WE OUGHT NOT TO DISCRIMINATE BECAUSE IT VIOLATES "THE ROYAL LAW" (2:8, 9)

1. James defines "the royal law" as, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Leviticus 19:18 says, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."
2. In Matthew 5:43, our Lord said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy."
3. The Bible does not say, "and hate thine enemy," but the scribes and Pharisees were guilty of adding to God's Word.
4. In Matthew 19:19, our Lord said, "Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."
5. Our Lord said in Matthew 22:37-40, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
6. In Mark 12:31, our Lord said, "There is none other commandment greater than these."
7. The apostle Paul says in Romans 13:9, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

8. And Paul says in Galatians 5:14, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."
9. This is why it is called "the royal law."
10. It is called the royal law because it is the king of all laws, a summary of all the laws in the Bible pertaining to man's relationship with other men.
11. Our Lord said, "There is no greater commandment" (cf. Mark 12:31).
12. This royal law gets down to where the rubber meets the road. Too often our actions are based upon the wrong motives. Even Christians can be selfish and worldly.
13. That is why many Christians cater to the rich – they are looking for some kind of reward, either financially, socially, or materially.
14. A prominent charismatic pastor told a preacher friend of mine that he intentionally went after wealthy people.
15. My wife and I heard about a missionary who did the same thing. He deliberately targeted wealthy people.
16. Some Christians and some churches ignore poor people because they feel that there is nothing to gain by it because they can't give much.
17. To this selfish behaviour, the Bible says: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (James 2:8). One time, a man asked our Lord, "Who is my neighbor?" and our Lord answered him by telling one of the most well-known parables in the Bible (Luke 10:29-37).
18. In other words, our neighbor is any person who has a need that we can help to meet.
19. To be a respecter of persons is a sin, and to commit even one sin is a serious offense in the eyes of a holy God (2:9, 10).

CONCLUSION:

1. There was a preacher in England by the name of Wilson Carlile who became friendly with King Edward VII, the son and successor of Queen Elizabeth.
2. Wilson Carlile went to visit the king as he was dying, and as he stood by the king's bedside, King Edward said to him, "Carlile, tell everyone that kings and tramps need the same Saviour."