

LifeWay Family Bible Series for April 10: Christ's church should show an impartial love_40405

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Christ's church should show an impartial love

James 2:1-13

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In 1991, actor William Hurt played the role of Dr. Jack MacKee in the drama *The Doctor*. MacKee was a no-nonsense sort of doctor who treated his underlings and patients as though he were the reason for their existence. He was cruel, unkind and impatient with anyone he thought beneath him.

However, his entire attitude began to change the day the doctor became the patient. He was diagnosed with cancer, bringing both a sense of humility and shame about his past behaviors. With one dreaded affliction, the playing field was leveled, and he learned the need for compassion.

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Compassion may very well be the attribute James is trying to convey to his readers in James 2:1-13. His direct appeal condemns the self-serving favoritism of the wealthy yet encourages compassion for the less fortunate of life. In direct correlation, James points out the sinfulness of catering to the elite and shunning the poor. The context he uses to make his point clear is the behavior revealed during worship.

The question James poses must have shocked his readers, even as they read it. He directly asks them if they “believe” in the Lord Jesus Christ, as they express their favoritism. It is a condemnation not only of their action, but also of their faith. There certainly seems to be a suggestion that the way one practices his faith reveals the spiritual commitment within. This underlines the previous words of James, when he wrote, “Faith without works is dead.”

James supports his allegation with an example of the church's behavior. The church must have been showing favoritism when a wealthy member of society came into its assembly. As the golden- laced individual strolled into the assembly, the people of the church were falling all over themselves to make provisions for their wealthy visitor.

The church offers opulent members places of excellence, while asking the poor to stand or to sit on the floor, a direct insult to poor people's economic status. The two approaches were appalling to James, and according to the

Apostle, appalling to the Lord as well.

James reminds his readers that God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. The poor should not be treated as animals unworthy to sit at the table. In fact, James jogs the memory of his readers by asking them about their persecutors. Weren't the wealthy those oppressing the church and dragging them into court? Wasn't it the wealthy chiding the name of Jesus in the public square?

Then, James lays out the importance of his teaching with the words of Jesus himself. He quotes the golden rule to them, calling it a royal law. The Apostle strongly professes this teaching as much more than a suggestion to be followed when convenient.

He makes it a way of life to be obeyed. Loving your neighbor is equal to loving God, and loving God is the same as loving your neighbor. To display favoritism to a neighbor just because they wear gold in their ears is a sin against God himself.

Understanding the relevance of James' statements for today's church context is not a great stretch of the imagination. There are many cases when churches think about doing something to increase their numbers. Most of the ideas that flow from that premise center on bringing the privileged into the congregation. From marketing schemes to programming, many churches cater to the privileged of society. The church of today could be found guilty of the sin James condemns.

The church must reclaim its compassion for the poor. As affluent Christians have flocked to the suburbs, many churches and denominations have followed. Many churches today have forgotten their roots of a poverty stricken faith maintained through prayers and benevolence. We mustn't forget the words of Scripture.

God shows no partiality; he loves all. Nowhere in the little gospel does it

say, “For God so loved the suburbanites ... or the rich ... or the privileged ... or the correct political persuasion ... he sent his son.” God so loved us all that he gave us the gift of eternal life. Jesus walked away from no one, making the poor and afflicted his friend. We would do well to remember Matthew 9:36: “When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Just as the Lord, may we show no partiality!

Discussion questions

- ◆ Why are people poor? How do you know?
- ◆ What are some derogatory statements that Christians say about the poor?
- ◆ Does your church cater to the rich and neglect the poor?
- ◆ Do you think you would recognize Jesus if you were to come across him? Why or why not?

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