

Sermon Notes

FAVOURITISM IS INCONSISTENT WITH OUR GLORIOUS FAITH

James 2:1-9

Introduction

1. The principle (v.1)

- Christ is the glory of God revealed (2 Cor 4:6).
- Our values, priorities and activities must ever be governed by the definition of true glory displayed in the person, conduct and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- So this is the principle: we cannot claim that we have the faith of Jesus Christ, the very God of glory, and at the same time having respect of persons.

2. Why believer in Christ must not be partial?

- (a) Because God is impartial (v.1): 2 Chronicles 19:7; Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34; Ephesians 6:9.
- Being partial mean to judge someone by the face or based on what appears on the outside.
 - We tend to put everyone in some kind of stratified category or cast based on their race, gender, outward appearances and social status.
 - But all those outward factors are non-issues with God. They are given by Him and from Him. God judges the heart.
- (b) Because it usurps God's sovereignty as the Supreme Judge (vs. 2-4).
- James illustrates the principle with an example.
 - The first visitor is "*a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing.*"
 - The second visitor is a poor man.
 - The common thing about both men is that they both need a Saviour and should be equally welcome.
 - the issue is not about the visitors, their appearance or how they dress up.
 - The issue is given in verse 3, the ushers "*pay attention*" to or their eyes are focused on the rich, rather than be fully occupied with the Lord in His glory, and, furthermore, they humiliate the poor man. It is the sin of partiality.
 - Why is it a sin? Verse 4 says, "*have you not then made distinctions [better translated as *been inconsistent*] among [better translated as *within*] yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"*
 - What does this mean? It means that we have divided loyalty, being inconsistent and double-minded.
 - Do we put the Lord's glory first in our scale of values or do we allow ourselves rather to be led by the standard of this world to judge what is worthy and worthwhile?

- To depart from the Lord's glory is to set up ourselves up as judges.
 - Our 'wrong reasoning', according to James, is due to 'evil thought' or wrong motives or selfishness.
 - Deuteronomy 1:17, "You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's."
- (c) Because it usurps God's sovereignty as the One Who chooses (vs.5-7).
The ushers had made two mistakes:
- (i) The poor (socially or economically poor) they despised are the chosen people of God.
- How could God just choose the poor?
 - James was certainly well acquainted with Leviticus 19:15. The Lord told Moses that he should not favour either the poor or the great which may include the rich.
 - There are many rich folks are chosen by God: Abram (Gen 13:2), Job (Job 1:3), rich Christians in the New Testament church (1 Timothy 6:17)
 - James' purpose here is to teach general truth/principle.
 - In general, it is overwhelmingly true, especially during the time of James, that the elect of God are dominated by the poor.
 - The general truth: "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. 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; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)."
 - Two promises given to the poor chosen by God: (1) to be rich in faith, (2) heirs of the Kingdom.
 - The poor is chosen not because they are rich in faith, but to be rich in faith (v. 5). So when a person exercises his faith in Christ and loves Him, he gives evidence of having been chosen by God to be heir of the Kingdom.
 - God's choice is not based on the social status of a person or what he does, in exercising his faith, but on condition known only to Him alone and for His own glory and pleasure. The glory belongs to God who chooses.
- (ii) They were favouring the enemy of God. They have chosen the rich who could show their worldly glory, instead of the poor who show the true glory displayed in the person, conduct and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They have violated the general truth James taught.
- (d) Because it violates God's royal law of loving your neighbour (v 8-9).
- If the royal law is obeyed, there will be no partiality.
 - A neighbour is anybody (not depending on their outward appearance) laying in my path with a need (Lk 10:30-37).

3. What partiality is not.

- (a) It does not mean we cannot choose and honour someone over another.
- We are to honour, respect and be subject to governing authority or emperor. (1 Peter 2:13, 15; Romans 13:1,7).
 - We shall stand up before the elderly (Leviticus 19:32).
 - Caution: choosing always involves judgment; there are always grey-areas. We should not be quick to condemn, but each one should seek their own motives and judgments against the Scripture. Is our choice of whom we favour based on love, is it based on the needs of the person, is it not against the Word of God?
- (b) God predestined who will be saved and who will be lost regardless of what a person does, does not make God a respecter of persons.
- All outward appearances are given by Him.
 - What we do is all enabled by Him who gives the talents, opportunities and capabilities to all, unevenly.
 - Hence, God's choice and election cannot be based on anything on us, for nothing really comes from us.
 - Common sense tells us that God chooses unconditionally not just in the matter of salvation, but also in our present life in this world.