

Skin Color, Partiality and the Power of the Gospel

I have a favorite coffee shop that I go to, and as different people come and go, I can easily find myself making conclusions about them based on their dress or demeanor.

Tight skinny jeans, unique slick hair cut, maybe a beard—he must be a hipster.

Cowgirl boots, mini-skirt, big hair—maybe she's a country singer (I live in Nashville; you never know!).

We often sum people up by outward appearance. Yet we easily do this with ethnicity as well. Unfortunately, our wrong assumptions and cherished preferences can affect the way we treat others, even our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Sin of Partiality

James challenged Christians about the particular sin of partiality. These Christians preferred the rich in the assembly over those who were poor. They would pay attention to the visitors who arrived in “fine clothing” and “gold rings,” giving them preferential treatment, and essentially ignore the person who came in “shabby clothing.”

James clearly rebukes them, saying,

“My brothers, have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, without partiality ... If you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as sinners” (James 2:1, 8-9).

The problem for James wasn't that these visitors were rich.

Wealth isn't a sin. The problem was that some in the church thought that the rich were better than the poor. They elevated these men above others. Their preference wasn't motivated by showing honor to welcomed guests; it was motivated by pride. They would rather have had the rich in attendance, and their treatment of the poor made this clear.

But God doesn't view man by these worldly standards. James explains,

"Listen, my beloved brothers. Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5).

God is the Creator who made us equally and in His own image. Then, He sent His son to die for us—the rich and the poor. Besides the fact that Jesus loved the poor, orphan, widow, tax collector and prostitute, He died for those who weren't His friends. His impartiality is the absolute extreme example. His death wasn't for His friends or for those like Him (though we know there's no one like Him). Jesus laid down His life for His enemies. Amazing.

Our outward appearance and status has zero bearing on the gospel. In Galatians we read, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (3:28). These verses are often misinterpreted, and I can see why. But Paul isn't saying that these various roles or descriptions (Jew, Greek, male, female, etc.) no longer exist. Instead, in Christ, we are all equal in the midst of our roles.

In the gospel there is no superiority.

In the gospel there is no color.

The gospel ushers in the new covenant that no longer requires believers to become Jews or follow the Mosaic Law—the

ceremonies do not save. In other words, “neither Jew nor Greek” means there is no distinction in the gospel. We are equal in creation and equal in redemption.

The Gospel Smashes Partiality

So James challenges the Christians by asking if they love these people like they love themselves. The commandment to love your neighbor as yourself and the implications of the gospel on humanity should crush our sinful pride of partiality. Understanding God’s creation and how it applies to the gospel should have an effect on how we view and interact with others. But as most things are, it’s easier said than done.

The gospel frees us to pursue change by honestly asking ourselves if partiality is something we tend to struggle with.

In my opinion, there is no one who is immune to this temptation, including myself. Theoretically, we know that God created each of us with equal value and worth. We know that the gospel—the good news that Jesus came to seek and save the lost—is for everyone who would believe (Luke 19:10). Yet:

- Are we living out these truths?
- When we think about inviting a friend over for lunch, for example, what does that friend typically look like?
- Do your friends look like you?

If you answered “yes,” you are not alone. Most of us would too. The good news is we can fight this temptation. We can look to Jesus and love our neighbors as ourselves by laying down our comforts and reaching out to those unlike ourselves. We can repent of the sin of partiality.

God says if we confess this sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us and purify us (1 John 1:9). This will not be easy, but it is part of the mission. God’s Spirit will enable us. We

must step out in faith, but God will supply the grace. We must make the effort, but God is our strength.

Fighting Partiality

If you find yourself resonating with this post but are unsure of what to do, here are a few ideas for fighting the sin of partiality.

1. **Pray:** Pray that God would give you opportunities to reach out to those unlike yourself. Pray that God would give you his loving eyes for others.
2. **Evangelize:** Ask God to provide opportunities to boldly proclaim Christ to those around you. Get uncomfortable.
3. **Hospitality:** Pursue diversity in your home. If you are tempted to only associate with “certain types of people” this might be a great opportunity to love your neighbor as yourself and invite others into your life.

How will you begin fighting partiality today?

Taken from Trillia Newbell's blog post "Skin Color, Partiality and the Power of the Gospel" at t. Used with permission. This post and these ideas have been adapted from Trillia's new book United: Captured by God's Vision for Diversity (Moody Publishers, 2014).