The Evil of Favoritism in the Church, Part 1
Scripture: James 2:1-4
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As you know, we are studying the great epistle of James. And I want you to open your Bible to chapter 2 of James, a very very wonderful section of Scripture and we're going to begin to look at it tonight. James chapter 2 verse 1 through 13, James 2:1 through 13.

By way of introduction, let me say to you that when we think of the attributes of God, when we think of what God is like, His characteristics, the elements of His nature, what makes up His person, we think of holiness and we think of justice and we think of wisdom and omnipotence and omniscience and omnipresence. We might think of immutability that is that God does not change. We might think of eternality. We might say sovereignty. We might list His love, His grace, His mercy, His faithfulness, His goodness. And you could probably think of more than just those.

But there is another attribute of God that we don't very often talk about and yet is very often spoken of in Scripture and that is God's impartiality. That is that God is absolutely and totally impartial in dealing with people. And in that way He is utterly unlike us. We are very partial. We tend to put everyone in some kind of stratified category, higher or lower than other people. It has to do with their looks. It has to do with their wardrobe. It has to do with the kind of car they drive, the kind of house they live in; sometimes it has to do with their race, sometimes with their social status, sometimes outward characteristics of personality. All of those things with God are non-issues. They are of no significance at all. They mean absolutely nothing to Him.

A person's education, a person's economic status, a person's looks, a person's wardrobe, a person's social relationships, a person's job, a person's fame, prestige, a person's earthly honor, all of those collectively and individually mean absolutely nothing to God. They are non-issues.

In 2 Chronicles 19:7 it says, "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons." In Deuteronomy 10:17 it says, "For the Lord your God is a God of Gods and a Lord of Lords, a great God, a mighty and an awesome God." And that is a great statement. Let me read it again. "For the Lord your God is a God of Gods and Lord of Lords, a great God, a mighty and an awesome God," and then it says this, "who regards not persons." Amazing, that verse really amazes me. When Moses wants to say that God is a God of Gods and Lord of Lords and a God who is great and mighty and awesome, he says it by saying God has no respect of persons. That sets Him far beyond any

man.

In Malachi 2:9 the Scripture says, "I also made you contemptible and base before all the people because you have not kept My ways but have been partial." God says I judged you because of your partiality, because you had respect to persons.

Scripture speaks of God's characteristic of impartiality many, many times. But just from the New Testament alone, Peter for example in Acts chapter 10 in presenting the gospel to a Gentile was acknowledging that God is impartial with reference to the universality of saving grace to any race. And in Acts 10:35 it says, "But in every nation he that fears Him and works righteousness is accepted with Him because God is no respecter of persons." In other words, because God has no partiality, anyone in any nation who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. Social status, educational ability, looks, wardrobe, financial bank account, all of that is insignificant non-consequential.

Paul the Apostle also acknowledged that God was impartial with particular reference not so much to the universality of salvation as Peter did in Acts 10, as to the universality of judgment in Romans 2. In Romans 2 Paul says, "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek. But glory, honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek for there is no respect of persons with God." In the matter of judgment there is no respect of persons. A man will be judged purely on the condition of his soul. In regard to salvation, there is no respect of persons. A man will be accepted purely on the basis of his soul.

Paul also acknowledged that God was impartial with reference to social status in the matter of employment. It was inconsequential to the Lord whether you were a slave or whether you happen to be the slave owner...whether you are the boss or the employee. And in Ephesians 6 where the Apostle Paul writes to slaves, to employees, and masters, employers, he says your master is also in heaven and neither is there respect of persons with Him. He doesn't have greater affection for, love for, blessing for a manager, a President, a vice-president, an executive, a boss then He does for the humblest of all slaves. That by the way is repeated in Colossians 3:25, in Colossians 4:1. In the matter of salvation God is no respecter of persons, in the matter of judgment He is no respecter of persons, in the matter of social status and employment He is no respecter of persons.

Furthermore Paul also tells us in 1 Timothy 5 that in the matter of sin and discipline He is no respecter of persons. Paul says, "Against an elder receive not an accusation but before two and three witnesses." That's no different than Matthew 18, that's the way it should be for everyone. Just because you're an elder in the church doesn't give you any particular privilege to sin. "And the ones that sin rebuke before all that others may fear. I charge you before God and by the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without preferring one another, doing nothing by partiality."

God is not partial when it comes to disciplining sin; God is not partial when it comes to chastening. He looks only at the sin and only at the soul and He holds nothing back because you're wealthy or successful and He adds nothing because you're poor and somewhat unsuccessful by worldly standards. That is a non-issue to Him. So whether you're talking about salvation, judgment, job status, or sin and discipline, the standard is always the same. God deals purely with the soul.

Peter affirms the impartiality of God with reference to His holy standard for all of God's children in 1 Peter chapter 1. Listen to verses 16 and 17. "Be ye holy for I am holy. And if you call upon the Father who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." In other words, if you're a believer and you're calling upon the impartial God, then conduct your life in a manner that gives Him proper worship for you will be judged by Him on the basis of your heart and that alone, no matter who you are.

Now in our text James speaks to the same issue. Only James focuses on the impartiality of God with reference to a person's social status, economic status. Peter and Paul focused on salvation primarily...primarily on spiritual issues with the exception of Paul's reference to the employee situation in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3. But James takes a good look at this matter of partiality for economic and social reasons. And he is dealing with us in a very practical way in the life of the church. We don't like to admit it but in the church of Jesus Christ we tend to be because of our humanness and our fallenness very partial to certain people. We are impressed with their bank account. We are impressed with the car they drive. We can be impressed with their wardrobe, their jewelry. We can be very impressed with the job they hold, the profession they're in. We can be impressed with their reputation. We can very impressed if they have a lot of degrees at the end of their name. God is not impressed with any of that. It is utterly of no consequence to Him whatsoever in the matter of evaluating the worth of a soul. It's inconsequential. They're non-issues. God judges and God evaluates and God estimates your worth and my worth and the worth of everyone purely on the basis of the inner person.

To put it simply in Old Testament terminology, man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. God is not interested in your bank account, your wardrobe, your jewelry as any kind of commendation of your character.

On the other hand, God is not disinterested in you because you are poor or because you don't look so good, or because you don't have so many clothes, or because you have a common job or you don't have any degrees or any reputation or any social standing. He is not disinterested in you because of what you lack, nor is He interested in you because of what you possess. And frankly, we who belong to God and say we are the children of God should certainly manifest these same characteristics.

Look with me for a moment to the Old Testament. Leviticus chapter 19, Leviticus chapter 19 and I want you to understand this attribute of God and in understanding it know what it is that we are to see in our own lives. Leviticus 19:15 and here there are many laws being given, regulations for behavior. And in verse 15 he says, "You shall do no unrighteousness as in judgment." In other words, be just and fair. "You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, you shall not respect the person of the poor nor honor the person of the mighty but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor." In other words, when you're dealing with truth and justice you take no thought for whether a person is poor or wealthy, that is again I say a non-issue.

Look over at Deuteronomy and I would just have you focus on one verse in chapter 1...Deuteronomy chapter 1. "You shall not respect persons in judgment but you shall hear the small as well as the great, you shall not be afraid of the faith of man for the judgment is God and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me and I will hear it." In other words, here you have Moses passing on to the people the responsibility to judge a just judgment without regard for a person's externals.

Chapter 15 of Deuteronomy enriches our thought along these lines beginning with verse 7, "If there be among you a poor man of one of your brethren within any of the gates in the land which the Lord thy God giveth you, thou shalt not harden thine heart nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he lacketh. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart saying the seventh year, the year of release is at hand and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother and thou givest him nothing." In other words, the debts are all going to be cancelled in the seventh year, you've given something and the next year's the seventh year and he won't have to pay it back...so you hold it against him, you don't give it to him. That would be a sin unto you, he says. Verse 10, "You will give it to him, your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him because for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, in all that thou putest on hand to do for the poor shall never cease out of the land therefore I command thee saying thou shalt open thine hand wide to thy brother, to the poor and to the needy in thy land.

The only issue at stake here is the need. Without regard for social status when we find one in need, we are called to meet that need. Chapter 19 of verse 6...verse 19 of chapter 16 says, "Thou shalt not distort justice, thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a bribe for a bribe that's lined the eyes of the wise and pervert the words of the righteous." And again the emphasis on not respecting persons and that means not being partial, not respecting one person over another for some external reason. Obviously there's a proper place for due respect to a king, to one in authority, to someone who is your elder. But the idea here is regard related only to externals.

Proverbs 24:23 says, "It is not good to have respect of persons." It is not good to have respect of persons. Basic spiritual principle. Proverbs 28:21, "To have respect of persons is not good." Same thing.

So clearly from just those particular passages we are made very much aware of the fact that God does not respect persons, nor are we His children to have respect of persons. Now let me say something to you in reference to James, let's go back to James. We said that basically what this epistle is intended to do is to lay out a series of tests for living faith. James wants you to examine yourself to see if you're for real. He wants you to examine yourself to see if you're genuinely saved, redeemed, born again. If the life of God really beats in your heart. And so James is giving a series of tests for you to determine whether your faith is real.

The first test was how you respond to trials that will show you whether your faith is real. The second test was how you respond to temptation that too will show you whether your faith is real. The third test was how you react to the Word of God that too will reveal the genuineness of your faith. And here is the fourth test, are you partial? What is your reaction to the poor? What is your reaction to the needy? Do you show favoritism? Mark it, folks, every trial that comes through your life is a test. Every temptation that comes through your life is a test. Everything you learn from the Word of God is a test and the poor and needy who cross our paths are a test to demonstrate whether or not our faith is real for if we are the children of God and the life of God beats within our soul, then we will react in a measure like God would react because we're His. John put it this way, 1 John 3:16, "By this perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. And whosoever has this world's good and sees his brother have need and closes up his compassion from him, how dwells the love of God in him?" You flunked the test. You can say the love of God is in you but if you don't treat someone in need like God would treat them, then the love of God is obviously not there.

First John 4:10, "Herein is love not that we love God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the covering for our sins." God is love. God has poured His love in us. And then verse 11, "If God so loved us, we ought to also to love one another. And if we love one another, God dwells in us," verse 12, "and His love is perfected in us."

So, how we react to people is a test. And if we are like God we will not be favoring certain people because of their status, education, money, fame, prestige, looks or whatever. There's no place for favoritism in the heart of God and there's no place for favoritism in the heart of His people and therefore there's no place for favoritism in the church.

Now looking at James chapter 2, James is going to divide this section for us into five features, five thoughts. First of all, he will discuss the principle in verse 1, then the example, then speak of the inconsistency, then the violation and finally he ends up in verses 12 and 13 with an appeal...the principle, the example, the inconsistency, the violation and the appeal.

Let's look at the principle in verse 1; this is just really very very helpful. Verse 1, "My brothers, my brothers, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ...literally...the glory with respect of persons." That's the principle. Saying that I hold the faith of Jesus Christ and at the same time having respect for persons is contradictory.

Now to understand the principle we need to understand initially that the greatest number of converts to the faith of Jesus Christ were among the poor, obviously. If you know anything about the New Testament, you know that to be the case. In fact, even if you read materials that are outside the Bible you find many things that mock the church because it was made up of poor people. Around 178 A.D. or so Celsius wrote his diatribe against Christianity and his whole attack on Christianity was based upon the fact that Christians were such common insignificant poor people. He attacked the commonness of believers, portraying them as uncultured, portraying them as ignorant. Not a very complimentary article but it isn't anything different really than what the disciples heard in Jerusalem when they mocked them and here were the disciples proclaiming truth and preaching with great power and they said of them, "Aren't they uneducated Galileans?" Remember that? How could they be having anything significant to offer?

Most of the church was poor. Most of the church was common people. There were many common people. In fact, when the church in Jerusalem was really born on the day of Pentecost, so many of those people were poor that the few that had anything it says in Acts 2 were selling their possessions, getting the money and distributing it to the poor. It repeats that same thing in chapter 4 verses 35 to 37 how that people in the church were selling their goods and belongings and possessions to get money to support the poor. The church was poor. The first big hassle in the church came over the whole matter of trying to supply food to poor widows, remember in Acts 6? Do you remember 1 Corinthians 1:26? Do you remember how Paul defines the church in that verse? Listen to what he says, "You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble but God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base." There aren't many mighty. There aren't many noble. There aren't many wise, just the common people.

Look at James 2:5, you're in James 2 look at verse 5, "Listen, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which he's promised to them that love Him?" The majority of people in the church have always been the poor...the common people.

Now having said that let me say that not everybody's that way. Even in the early church there were some people who weren't particularly poor. Do you remember John chapter 19 verses 38, 39 and it says Joseph of Arimathea being a disciple of Jesus but secretly and so forth...now Joseph of Arimathea was very evidently and obviously a wealthy man. He provided some supplies for the burial of Christ as well as a garden tomb which indicates his wealth. There must have been some wealthy people in the early church because whoever was selling things to get the money to give to the poor

must have had something to sell. In Acts 6 verse 7 it says a great number of priests were obedient to the faith when the Word of God began to be multiplied and not all of those priests would have been poor, although the priests for the most part did not have much they wouldn't have been among the beggars of their society.

In the eighth chapter of the book of Acts in verse 27 there was the wonderful conversion of a man of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was the eunuch, the chamberlain, the financial manager of this queen of Ethiopia. He, too, would not have been a poor man. Cornelius the first great story of Gentile conversion in Acts 10 was a centurion of the band called the Italian band....he, too, must have been a man of some means who owned his own home and had quite a number of folks who were a part of his home. The thirteenth chapter of the book of the Acts would tell us as well in verse 7 there was a deputy of the country, a high-ranking official by the name of Sergius Paulus, a prudent man who called for Barnabas and Saul and desired to hear the Word of God. He believed, it says in verse 12, so there was a believer who was not among the poor. We find in chapter 16 also in verse 14 Lydia, a converted lady was a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira. She, too, undoubtedly operated her own business, not a poor person. Chapter 17 and all the way on through that ministry of the Apostle Paul as he preaches and teaches we can assume that both rich and poor heard the gospel. It says in verse 4 of chapter 17 of the people that believed some of them were chief women, key women in the society of that city of Thessalonica.

And so it goes. Chapter 18, Priscilla and Aquila had their own business. They made tents like the Apostle Paul. So I just say all of that to let you know that not everybody in the church was poor but far and away the vast majority of the people came from the common folks who had very little. And you'll remember that it was necessary for the early church to provide funding and relief. In Acts 11:28 to 30 there was a famine throughout all the world and the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who dwelt in Judea. The poor saints of Jerusalem were a concern to Paul who was ever and always collecting money for them. Do you remember that all the churches of Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8; Paul characterized all of them as poor, didn't he? He said they gave abundantly out of their deep what? poverty.

Now I took you on that little trip through Scripture just to point out that the majority of the church was poor but interspersed in the church were those who had means. Aquila and Priscilla, I neglected to say, had a church meeting in their home which means they were of some means to have a place where believers could congregate. But for the most part the church has always been composed of common folks with a few of the uncommon rich.

And so there is the potential in the church for a stratification of people based upon their social standing, economic capability. It's important then that James point out how unlike God that is, and that's what he does with this principle. Let's look more specifically at it.

"My brothers," he uses this particular introduction frequently, very frequently. Sometimes he uses it just for the sake of saying it, such as in verse 5 of this chapter, "My beloved brethren." But very often when he uses it he uses it to introduce a new and forceful exhortation. He's about to say something very strong like in chapter 1 verse 2, "My brethren..." and he launches off into this whole matter of trials and temptations. In verse 16 of chapter 1, "Do not err, my beloved brethren," and then he's got some things to say about how you respond to the Word of God. Now in chapter 2, "My brethren," and a new section dealing with the matter of impartiality. Chapter 3, "My brethren," and a whole discussion about the tongue. Chapter 4 and verse 11, "Speak not evil of one another, brethren," and he launches into an exhortation about how we speak to one another. Chapter 5 verse 7, he exhorts them to be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. So though he uses it sometimes just for its own sake, on occasions in this epistle it appears to be a breaking point about to introduce a forceful and important exhortation.

Now let me tell you how the Greek order in the verse goes, it goes like this..."My brethren," and the next phrase is, "with respect of persons." That's the very next phrase. In the English it comes at the end of the verse, in the Greek it comes at the beginning and the Greek put it in the beginning because it's emphatic so let me talk about it first. "My brothers," he says, "with respect of persons, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the glory." That's the Greek text.

What does he mean by "respect of persons?" Well actually the word means "partialities," plural, it's a plural word. The roots of the word mean to lift up somebody's face, to raise the face of someone, to elevate them, to lift up their face. The idea is to judge someone by the face or to exalt them strictly on a superficial level...superficial evaluation of a person's worth based on nothing but what appears on the outside. People, I can't impress to you enough how we do this. We tend to judge people by what they look like, their clothes, their hair, where they live, what they drive, their economic situation, that's just built into our fallenness. And so the emphatic phrase at the beginning is, "My brethren, with respect of persons...that is with preferential treatment based on race or wealth or dress or rank or social status...hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ to the glory." And that's an imperative command. Don't you hold the Christian faith and hold alongside it partiality. In fact, the verb carries the idea of "do not be in the practice of partiality." It is absolutely inconsistent with being a Christian. You see, the whole of our faith is based on the fact that God looks on the heart...the whole of our faith. Everything we know to be true about God is that the value of a person is based upon the value of their soul. And this attitude of favoritism disregards the basic truth of our faith. And the basic truth of our faith is that the gospel is for everyone and God judges everyone on the basis of the heart. The soul of the person is the issue, not their outward appearance. And any favoritism that judges a person on the outside that plays up the people because they dress fine or they're wealthy, any of that kind of thing is sin. James 2:9, look at it, "If you have respect of persons you commit what? sin and you are convicted of the law as a transgressor."

Now the underlying substructure through James...the whole epistle, the underlying substructure on which principles of Christian living are built is a substructure of soteriology, or salvation. Everything is measured against our salvation. In other words, being partial is in total conflict with our salvation, with what our faith teaches. If we are saved, if we are children of God and if we're saved we are, so since we are children of God we ought to act like God acts, and He's impartial and we should be impartial.

Now I know Peter says honor the king. I know Paul says submit to those that are in authority. That's different. Submission and honor to the proper person for their office is one thing, partiality purely on the basis of external appearance is something else.

Now notice how he makes this point very strongly. He says with respect of persons; do not practice holding the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the glory. And he just really emphasizes by giving that little phrase and apposition "the glory." It's tagged on to the end. "Doxa" in reference to Christ speaks of Him as the glory of God revealed. He is the divine presence of God. That's what he's saying to his Jewish writers, they would know what he meant. Glory was Shekinah. The glory was in the garden. The glory was in the tabernacle. The glory was in the temple. The glory was in Christ. We beheld His glory, John 1:14 says. The glory is the Shekinah, the presence of God. And what he is saying is look; you cannot hold the faith of Jesus Christ who is the glory of God and violate the nature of God with your impartial...with your partiality. That's his idea, that's his thought. Jesus came as God in flesh, glory veiled in flesh. He took on our nature, He bore our sin. He took our curse. He was the glory of God in human form. But Jesus truly revealed the nature of God; get this, in that Jesus was without partiality.

Even His enemies knew it. He did not esteem anyone different than anyone else on the basis of their externals whether they were a ruler or a beggar. Matthew 22:16 just listen to it. The Pharisees sent unto Him their disciples with the Herodians saying, listen to this, "Master, we know that you are true and teach the way of God." What is the way of God? "Neither carest Thou for any man for Thou regardest not the person of men." They saw that. It was of no consequence to Jesus whether a woman was a virtuous mother or a harlot in terms of the worth of the soul. It was no consequence to Him whether a man was a high priest or a beggar, whether he was an external religious man or an utterly irreligious man, whether he was a law abiding citizen or a criminal. It made no difference to Him in terms of the worth of the soul whether the man was educated or uneducated, whether he was handsome or ugly, whether he was rich or poor. Those things were of no concern to Him whatever.

And even His enemies saw it. He was the glory of God. And if one of the attributes of God is impartiality then He who is the glory of God, the shining presence of God, would also demonstrate the same impartiality. And He did. He is so impartial. He is so utterly and absolutely and totally impartial that some day when you and I no matter who we are or what we have been in the human sense, when we go to be with Him in glory, 1 John 3:2 says, we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He

is. Whatever we are, whatever we've done, whatever we haven't done in the fullness of the grace of salvation, He will make us every one to be exactly like Himself.

Furthermore, we remember the wonderful parable in Matthew 20 where it says the first shall be last and the last shall be first and no matter how long you work, how much work you do, how much of the burden you bear, at the end of the day we all receive the same eternal reward. He's utterly impartial. How then can believers who say they are the children of God and who say they hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious God incarnate, ever have respect of persons? And yet churches have racial stratification, economic stratification. There are churches where you will be judged perhaps almost totally on how you look. This ought not to be. This is not just a small problem, this is sin. This is a transgression of God's law.

Let's look at the example. This is very interesting. Verse 2, here's the example, this is a hypothetical situation with a third-class conditional meaning it's possible, it's probable. "For," and the word "for" is leading us into the illustration, sort of justifies the principle of verse 1, "For if there come into your synagogue, “sunagogo,” “sunagogos”, synagogue, if there come into your assembly," literally the Greek says "a gold- fingered man in shining bright apparel and there come in also a poor man in shabby clothes..." Stop there, here's the picture. Pretty vivid, huh?

Your assembly, as I said, is the word sunagogos, it means synagogue. You say, "Well, does this refer to the church?" Sure. You say, "Well, why wouldn't they use the word "ekklesia?" They do use this word; James does, in chapter 5 verse 14. He uses the word "church," let the elders of the church so he knew that word. What you have to realize is that these are Jewish believers. Their whole heritage understands the assembling of God's people together as a synagogue. It's a word that means a gathering together, sun being the preposition together. But it still refers to a church service. They were Jews and they probably called their church service "church." And emphasizing they were called out they probably also called it "synagogue" in that they were assembled together. This also gives us a good idea that James was written at an early date in New Testament literature because they had not yet fully transitioned over to the use of the word "church." They were still using church as in 5:14 and here they're using synagogue.

So, this is a church, a church meeting. And into the church meeting comes a visitor. The first visitor is a gold-fingered man in shining clothes. Let me tell you about this man's fingers, all right? You say, "How do you know anything about his fingers?" Just listen. Rings were customary among Jews, very customary. Gold rings were not so customary because of their expense but the Jews commonly wore rings. Luke 15:22, you remember the father wanted to put a ring on the son...on the finger of his son as he came back, the prodigal son. But very few poor people could afford a gold ring. So here comes a man the text says who is gold-fingered, not just one ring but he's got them all over his fingers. The most ostentatious of people in the ancient world would wear rings on every finger except the middle finger. I mean the thumb and all the others. And when they really wanted to put on a display, we have

sources that tell us there were ring rental businesses where they would go and they would rent rings. Now this is where you showed off your economic status. So here comes Mr. Gold Fingers. He's got them everywhere.

By the way, Clement of Alexander some time later said Christians should only wear one ring and on that ring it should have a dove, a fish, or an anchor to be used as a seal. That was a reaction against some of this abuse. So here is a man with a fortune on his fingers.

Not only that he comes in and he has fine apparel. The word is "lampros," it means bright shining. It can mean loud colors. It can mean glittering sparkling brilliant with ornamentation. It is the same term used of the gorgeous apparel that Herod Antipas wore and which the soldiers put on Jesus to mock Him. It is also used in Acts 10:30 of the shining garments of the angel who appeared to Cornelius. So it's sort of knock-out clothes. Everybody else is wearing their normal drab stuff and here comes a guy with gold all over his fingers in some brazen flashy loud ornamentation in his clothing.

Now there's no problem with that, this guy's an unbeliever. No big deal. You don't stop him at the door and throw a pile of sackcloth on him, you let him in. There's no problem with that. The man is welcome, he's an unbeliever. He needs to hear the gospel. He's not condemned for his dress. That's not the issue here. This is not a section of Scripture teaching about dress. The sin has nothing to do with that. So it's fine for that man to come.

Then also comes another man. This is a poor man in, and this is a real poor man, tokos means he's so poor he has to beg. This is a beggar. Undoubtedly he only owned one. One robe. And my dear friends, a beggar with one robe is not a happy happy sight. He's at the lowest level of social strata. He stinks. Vile means filthy smelly dirty shabby, any of those terms. Here comes this common guy with this filthy thing that's the only piece of clothing he owns. He sleeps in it, he sweats in it, he works in it, he lives in it. And he came in. No sin here. He's not condemned for not dressing up. Nobody stops him at the door and says go home and get a tie or you can't be here. Nobody does that. They didn't throw sackcloth on the rich man and they don't throw some special robe on this guy. That isn't the issue. It is nice to be thoughtful when you come to worship the Lord and fellowship with His people. It's nice if you're clean. It's nice if you dress up with some respect for those you'll be with and even for the Lord so that you've given a bit of attention to the exercise of worship. But when someone comes who has not any option for that, they're just as welcomed. That's not an issue here.

You say, "Where's the issue?" Verse 3, "And when they come you have respect to the one that wears the fine clothing and you say to him, Sit here in a good place." Stop there for a minute. What does it mean to have respect? It means to look upon with favor, to look upon with respect, to look upon with attention. Boy, he attracts everybody's attention. Wow, they're all sitting and saying, "Look at this guy, whoa-wee, look at this guy. Fine clothing, dripping with gold." Somebody rushes over and says, "O Sir, sit here in a good place." This is the kind of guy we need. Boy, maybe we can get something from

him." Sit in a good place, comfortable, prominent place of honor.

A little social climbing here. A little hoping for his favor. A little desire to get under his influence, get a little of his money. Give him the seat in a comfortable place with proper deference to him as a guest. You want to know something? There's really nothing wrong with giving him a good seat, nothing wrong with that at all. By the way, in the synagogues and assembly halls of that day there were very few benches. Sometimes there would be benches around the outside wall and maybe a couple of benches in the front and everybody else sat cross-legged on the floor. So to put this man in an elevated seat was something special because most people, as I said, just stood...that's still true in many synagogues...or sat cross- legged on the floor. They had a choice. But this man, they do everything they can to make sure he gets in the very best place. This would be the chief seats which the Pharisees were always wanting to take.

That's not wrong. I think that's nice to do that. You say, "Well, where's the sin if it's not in the outlandish clothes and it's not in the shabby clothes and it's not in giving the rich man a seat, where's the sin?" Here it is. Verse 3, "You say to the poor guy, Stand there or sit here under my footstool." In other words, I don't really care where you go, fella, but please get where you're going to be, will you? Sit there or sit beside my footstool. Just a couple of notes here. When it says "under" the word “hupo” could be translated "beside." It's a little hard to get under a footstool. If the footstool here is really literally a footstool then somebody's got both a chair and a footstool and he won't give the chair to the poor guy and he won't give the stool to the poor guy. He says sit down beside the stool, I want to sit where I'm sitting and I want my feet to be where they are. Just get out of the way, will you? You have a choice, my friend, stand or sit, just do it. That's the sin.

Now why would you do that to a guy just because he had shabby clothes? Because there's something built into our fallenness that's partial to people who look nice, smell nice, and are dripping with gold. It's just how it is. Now the beginning of the example came in verse 2, "If...and here comes the then in verse 4, this is what we call the apodosis and the protasis for you Greek students. So if the man comes in with a gold ring and if the poor man comes in and if you say to the man with the fine clothes, sit here, and if you say to the poor man, out of the way fella, then, verse 4, "Are you not...what's the word?...partial?" Are you not making distinctions in yourselves? Are you not separating? Are you not dividing? And the answer is what? Yes...you're guilty of being partial. You're guilty of favoritism. You're guilty of evil discrimination. And the issue of such behavior is that it's not godlike. God isn't like that. It is serious sin because...look what he says at the end of verse 4..."You have become judges with evil intent." The word "evil" means vicious. You're just like a sinful world. You're motivated to cater to the rich and the prominent and shun and slight the poor and the common. That's anti-Christian behavior. This is the carnality of the flesh. This has no place in the people of God.

Well, this is so basic and so important for all of us. When Paul was concluding Romans, look at chapter 15 verse 5, he said, "Now the God of patience and comfort grant to you to be like minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." Treat everybody alike. "So that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus," now notice verse 7, "Wherefore receive ye one another," with open arms is the implication, "just as Christ has received us to the glory of God." And how did He receive us? "Without respect of persons," right? The body of Jesus Christ is going to be made up of mostly common folks and a few uncommon ones. It's not...it's not sinful to have much if God has prospered you. May God help you to help those who have little. If it weren't for people who had much we couldn't help people who had little. It's not wrong to have much if you're a faithful steward of it. It's not wrong to have little. God makes no discrimination in regard to those things, nor should we. And if you show favoritism, verse 4 says, you are partial. And that means you are not like God and you are not like Christ. But on the other hand, you have become a judge with vicious intent and your behavior is anti-Christian.

The inconsistency of this will now be pointed out beginning in verse 5 and you're going to see some things that are just rich in understanding but that's for next week. Let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, it seems like time goes by so fast, so many things are on our hearts to say and I ask You, Lord, work in my own heart and may it be that I do not sin the sin of partiality. Help me not to esteem people better than others for any external reason but help me to see the worth and the value of the soul. Help us as a church to love everyone the same, to be likeminded one toward another and to receive one another with open arms even as you have receive us without partiality. Thank You that you’re not respecter of persons, that one of the glorious majestic awesome characteristics of your eternal perfection is that you are not partial. Help us, Lord, to be like you. May it be said of us even by our enemies that we care for no man's person. We do not prefer anyone over another because of any external superficial reason. Give us a heart that loves all equally that we may be like you and therefore make you manifest, for the Savior's sake we pray. Amen.

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