

Lesson 3: The Sin of Partiality¹

The Book of James

Scripture Passage: James 2:1-13

Growing Connected (10 min)

Take turns sharing one surprising thing that people may not know about you. As a group, spend time thanking God in prayer that he knows us completely, even when others don't always see the full picture.²

Introduction (2 min)³

Nobody likes to miss out because of someone else “playing favorites.” Maybe you’ve been accused of “playing favorites.” Maybe you’ve been the one who was unfairly treated. Whatever it may be, it doesn’t feel good. Sometimes, this happens in relatively smaller ways, like noticing that a sibling or a cousin got more dessert than you. Or maybe you notice it when you’re watching your favorite team, and it seems like the referee keeps making calls in favor of the other team. But it also plays out in larger ways. It plays out when society consistently favors one group of people over another. It plays out when two people are treated differently based on outward factors like status and appearance. These are all examples of the word “partiality.” Partiality has been the cause of much pain in our lives and in our world.

And sadly, partiality has also been the cause of much pain in the church. The church has “played favorites” in painful ways, and made divisions that God does not make. As a result, the witness and power of the church has suffered. And yet God shows us a different way. He has a beautiful design for the church. The church can be a place where all people are treated as being made in the image of God, with equal dignity and value. The church can be a healing witness against the pain of partiality in the world. The church can be a people marked by love for their neighbor. In light of this, we must learn what the book of James teaches us. In this lesson we will learn that:

Big Idea: Partiality is an ungodly practice.

PLAY VIDEO- PT. 1- Video Notes

Think Tank (15-25 min)

This lesson emphasized that partiality can and does exist in the church. Therefore, it is important for us to honestly reflect on how we treat one another. Take time to process this teaching in small groups. Please note that this might be a sensitive topic for people, and therefore be sure to practice respectful and gracious listening.

Small Group Activity in Zoom Breakouts (Groups of 2-3). Discuss the following:

1. Read through James 2:1-13 slowly together.
2. Place yourself in the scenario described in verses 2-3. Imagine yourself in that local church and noticing these two individuals enter. What do you think your response might be? What would you like your response to be?
3. Verse 4 states, “*you have become judges with evil thoughts.*” What negative thoughts about others lead to the practice of partiality? Why is partiality considered ungodly?
4. Verse 1 connects having “*faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*” with turning away from “*partiality.*” How does our faith in Jesus teach us to turn away from partiality? In other words, when we believe the gospel, what does that lead us to believe about ourselves and others?

*Large Group Discussion*⁴

1. Ask two or three people to report back what they learned from the small group activity.

PLAY VIDEO- PT. 2- Video Notes

Group Training (20-25 min)

The teaching concluded with a charge to do the opposite of partiality, which is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” As believers in Jesus Christ, we are motivated to love our neighbor because God has shown us mercy and compassion. And we are empowered to love our neighbor because we have been set free to serve God in his Kingdom.

Individual Activity | Reflect on the following (10 minutes):

1. Do you sense there is partiality in your life? If so, spend time confessing that God, acknowledging that the practice of partiality breaks God’s law (verse 9).
2. Remember God’s mercy for you through the Gospel. Spend time thanking God for his forgiveness and compassion.
3. What steps can you take to turn away from acts of partiality in your life?

Group Discussion (10 minutes).⁵

1. As the teacher pointed out, mercy can be understood as acts of forgiveness or acts of compassion. What then would be some examples of showing mercy to others?
2. How does the gospel lead us to show mercy to others?
3. How can we actively take part in the church being known for being compassionate, loving, and merciful?
4. Instead of maintaining partiality in society, what would it look like for a church to be a part of the solution to partiality in society?

Training Session Wrap-Up (2 min.)

Summary: Partiality is an ungodly practice. And sadly, it exists in the church. However, the Gospel leads us to turn away from the practice of partiality. Instead of partiality, we are freed and empowered to be a people known for loving our neighbor and showing mercy.

*Closing Prayer:*⁶ Ask someone in the group to pray that God would grant conviction where partiality might exist, remembrance of forgiveness through the Gospel, and power to show mercy to others.