

Sermon Series: Pressure Points
To be used with: Session Three; The Pressure of Partiality
Sermon Title Possibilities:
 Performance or Mercy?
 Whose Your Favorite Christian?
Scripture: [James 2:1-13](#)

Connection to Unit Theme: We are naturally drawn towards those that are either similar to us or that we believe might do us some good. Even in Christian circles we seem to rejoice more—as if our cause will strengthen--when a celebrity becomes a Christian than when a poor widow does. Jesus seems to have a different heart.

Introduction: In his book, [The Cross and Christian Ministry](#), D.A. Carson asks a few probing questions:

Why is it that we constantly parade Christian athletes, media personalities, and pop singers? Why should we think that their opinions or their experiences of grace are of any more significance than those of any other believer? When we tell outsiders about people in our church, do we instantly think of the despised and the lowly who have become Christians, or do we love to impress people with the importance of the men and women who have become Christians? Modern Western evangelicalism is deeply infected with the virus of triumphalism, and the resulting illness destroys humility, minimizes grace, and offers far too much homage to the money and influence and ‘wisdom’ of our day. (Carson, 29)

Our drive to place Christian celebrities on a pedestal is nothing less than the partiality that James decries in his second chapter. Our preferential treatment of those that we believe can benefit our cause is opposed to the cross-centered faith that we proclaim.

In James 2:1-13 we are told not to show preferential treatment. This is no minor exhortation—it is at the heart of the gospel. There are three reasons why we are to not show partiality.

I. We must stop showing partiality because it is inconsistent with God’s redemption

The word for partiality is one that combines two Greek words, one meaning “to accept” and the other meaning “judge according to one’s face”. Showing partiality then has to do with giving someone preferential treatment based upon their status within society.

- a. The example of the rich and the poor (v1-3)
- b. God pursues the unworthy and give them His riches
 - God rescues those with nothing to give
 - God’s riches are what make one truly rich (v5)
- c. Those that we assume will benefit us often do the opposite
 - We not only usurp God’s authority to judge but show ourselves to be miserable judges of what truly matters (v4)

- Rather than helping the cause of the gospel those who are highly esteemed by the world are the ones that oppress them and blaspheme Christ (vv. 6-7)

It is our natural bent to assume that man gives things to God instead of the other way around. Therefore, it is no big leap for us to assume that those who have the most to give are the ones that are most pleasing to God. God's pattern of redemption seems to be the opposite. Rather than helping those who help themselves, God seems bent towards helping those that have nothing to offer. We must reflect Him in this.

II. We must stop showing partiality because it is inconsistent with God's law: Likely "royal law" is a reference to the "Torah as fulfilled and expanded by Christ"¹. Those that have been redeemed by Christ will be inclined to follow after the heart of Christ. The summary of this is to "love your neighbor as yourself".

a. Discrimination breaks the Old Testament law

- "The entire law" is likely a reference to the OT law
- Showing favoritism is willfully breaking the law of God
- Breaking one point in the Law makes on a law-breaker guilty of all

b. Discrimination breaks the law of Christ

- The "law of freedom" is likely a reference to the law of Christ (similar to the royal law of verse 8)
- Believers must act and speak according to the freedom that Christ has purchased for them. Discrimination would be inconsistent with the speech and action that define this "law of freedom"

III. We must stop showing partiality because it is inconsistent with God's mercy

The activity of those who discriminate is judging upon outward appearances and what people have, it is the exact opposite of showing mercy. Judging according to mercy reflects a heart changed by the gospel. Judging according to performance reflects a heart that knows little of mercy.

- The cure for our discriminatory hearts is to plunge deep into the mercy of God
- The mercy of God triumphs over naturally judgmental hearts
- Those that are redeemed must live consistent with the mercy they've been shown

Conclusion: John Newton once said, "Let us not measure men, much less ourselves, by gifts or services. One grain of grace is worth abundance of gifts." James would agree.

Do you measure others by grace or by performance? The answer for our judgmental hearts is to become enamored by the mercy that we have received. This is also the answer to hearts that want to pedestal certain believers. The gospel levels. May we measure ourselves by Christ and not performance!

¹ Blomberg, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 116

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