

## **Pride and Prejudice (James 2:1-4)**

*Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on August 30, 2009*

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I want you to imagine that it's about 20 minutes ago; church is about to start. A few of you are in the lobby in the back, many of you are already seated, and up the driveway comes a limousine – a stretch Hummer limo no less (undoubtedly the coolest vehicle ever to touch this driveway). The sun reflects off the shiny chrome in a way that almost blinds you and when the car stops near the entrance to let out the guy inside while his driver parks, the rims keep moving while the tires are stopped. The guys from youth group can't hold back audible expressions of awesomeness, and the guys who are a little older try not to blurt out the same things as the kids, but they're thinking the same things inwardly, knowing the tires alone on this car cost more than many of us men in this church have made so far this year. Even mature senior ladies are making comments to each other and some of the elders can't help but wonder as much as anyone else who's behind the tinted glass.

The guy steps out in a white suit that must cost thousands (I don't know what brand that would be, so I won't even try). He looks familiar, many think, maybe they saw him on TV, they're not sure but he's definitely somebody. The greeter (we won't tell you who was our greeter that morning) is all smiles, and comes out the sidewalk to welcome him: "Good morning, sir, welcome to Gold Country Baptist Church" and he warmly shakes the visitor's hand, which incidentally has several gold rings – probably more gold than some who first came to this "gold country" area in the 1850s actually found and made around these parts in the gold rush days.

The usher sees him coming and quickly scrambles to find a good seat, asking one of the long-time attending families to scoot in and have one of the kids sit on mom's lap to make room in the best section. The usher is supposed to be closing the door at start of the service as the choir mounts the platform, but instead he opens the door and whispers (but many hear it) "I've got a good seat for you right up here," and as the guy walks in, almost everyone stirs and looks at this guy who looks like a million bucks. No one says it out loud, but more than one person can't help but think "Boy, if that guy stays around and gives any percent of his income to the church, that could really help our church in this economy!" Even some of the choir who is coming onstage is distracted by his appearance and one of the guys looking while he's walking actually trips going up the stairs (we won't name him either)!

As we all stand in unison to read Scripture, a few glance at the new guy. This continues as we sing the opening hymn, "All Things Bright and Beautiful." More than one person keeps glancing across the way at him and thinking, "I know I've seen him recently on TV or some magazine cover – Fortune 500 CEO special, GQ cover? Maybe he's a congressman, senator, lawyer or lawmaker from Sac or SF? Whoever he is, he sure must be somebody important." We feel like Daddy Wharbucks has just visited our little orphanage.

As we sit down and listen to the choir sing "In Christ Alone," on the doors on the other side another visitor has also wandered in, off the street (not just an expression). His clothes are pretty raggedy and though we don't say it, we think "dirt poor" and "white trash." His hair is uncombed, face is unshaven, and clothes are unwashed.

The dutiful usher quickly intercepts this man before he could get very far, and he keeps him back by the door for a while, careful not to touch him. Others in the area can't help but notice this visitor, whose appearance makes them uncomfortable. The usher whispers "sorry, we're so full this Sunday – there's no seats except in the lobby where you could just listen by speaker, or you can stand back here in the corner ...". The visitor explains he's tired from his long walk to church, and he was hoping he could sit. So the usher offers him a place to sit on the floor next to a stool that the usher needs to put his feet on. "Sorry, I would let you sit on the stool except the doctor said I need to keep my feet raised."

Thankfully the 2nd visitor sits low enough in the back that he's not seen by anyone and therefore not distracting. The last hymn we sing before the sermon is "We Are One in the Spirit ... they'll know we are Christians by our love" and then all sit down again and the usher puts his feet up on his footstool as the visitor sits on the floor next to it. I begin the sermon reading our text, James 2 <sup>1</sup> *My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.* <sup>2</sup> *For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,* <sup>3</sup> *and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"* <sup>4</sup> *have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?*

How often do we judge people by externals, and determine who we will pay attention to or talk to at church based on what will benefit us rather than what the more needy and lonely among us might benefit from? I don't just mean financially, but spiritually, even emotionally and practically, who do we exclude from our attention and why? To apply the context (1:27), do you pay attention to and want to talk to a widow or single mom or lonely elderly person?

When James wrote this letter originally, he didn't write in numbers for verses and chapters anymore than we do when writing a letter or email. The chapter and verse divisions were added by translators in more recent centuries for convenience, and I bring that up because this section is not a new unrelated topical message for James but is very much tied to what he said at the end of chapter 1, v. 27: *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

As we saw last Lord's Day evening, keeping unstained by the world includes keeping ourselves from thinking like the world, and without missing a beat James in the next verse tells us we must not think like the world does in regards to what people look like and talk like and dress like. Don't judge others sinfully and choose whether or not we talk to them or give attention and care to them based on externals and how much they are like me and what's in it for me in getting to know this person, who my friends are, etc.

For some people, the word "worldliness" is limited mostly to how some girls dress and talk, or guys who may have more tattoos and body piercings than you thought was humanly possible. But James is also concerned with *our attitude towards people like that* on the heels of his warning about the world's stain. Nothing is more worldly than judging by outward appearances - that's what man does according to 1 Samuel 16:7, but God looks at the heart.

From cover to cover, this book doesn't want us to judge a book by its cover, or to judge people by outward appearance like the religious elite Pharisees in Luke 18 who Jesus said "*trusted in themselves that they were righteous and viewed others with contempt*" (v. 9). A Pharisee walks into the place of worship and at the same time another wanders in -- by his outward appearance it's obvious to all he's a tax collector. "What's he doing here?" many wonder, not knowing his heart but making a judgment about him in their hearts.

Thankfully the tax collector / publican is afar off in the corner, out of sight and out of mind, not taking a place from the pure religionist Pharisee who in center stage, with every eye on him begins his public prayer (Lk 18:11-13): "*God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*" And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but [beat] upon his breast, saying, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other ...

The one who is declared righteous in God's eyes, true religion, real Christian, is the one written off by those who think themselves to be religious but actually deceive their own hearts, as James 1:26 says. Then chap 2 says even if a guy who doesn't fit in wanders in to our place of worship, and even if he isn't a Christian yet (which you can't know from afar off) he is still in need of grace just like us. James 1:27 is saying don't let the world corrupt your thinking and color your glasses in the way you view or judge others *positively or negatively* based on outward appearance, whether you say it out loud or, as 2:1 says, even an inner attitude of favoritism.

God is not impressed with or pleased by the religionists that tithe mint and herbs (1:27, Lk 11:42), tithing from the kitchen spice rack while they neglect the massive concerns of God's law for love and mercy. God is not impressed with or pleased by the religionists who fast twice a week while appetites for greed are unrestrained in devouring widows and their houses financially, making some feel they must literally give all that they had away, with nothing left to live on, like the widow's mite, literally giving her very life (Lk 21). That was not a command of God in OT to give 100%, but she bankrupted self on them. Jesus said *she gave more than the others* (they probably gave 10% of their income as OT law required) and that she in poverty gave all that she had to live, which many good men interpret as the point that Luke 21 is a good example of what we should do too. But in the text Jesus doesn't say "go thou and do likewise" as He does in other places. What He *does* say right before is "woe to those who...devour widows" and then to that temple that takes all their money, He says it's coming down. Jesus was not angry *at the widow*; He was angry at religious men who took advantage of poor and took all they had from the destitute and helpless, and who turned God's holy temple into a den of robbers. Jesus had compassion and love for this widow doing what she thought was right in a corrupt system. But a religious *place or people* that mistreats needy people rather than being merciful to them is something our Lord hates. He absolutely abhors it.

So then James says: 2:1 *My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.* (some translations have "partiality," others have "prejudice" – the literal Greek has to do with based on looking at someone's face). How you treat others less fortunate than you or more fortunate than you, based on how they look, is a big deal to our Lord, who shed His very precious blood to wash away our partiality and prejudice.

OUTLINE:

1. The Instruction against Christian Prejudice (2:1)
2. The Illustration of Christian Prejudice (v. 2-4)
3. The Inconsistency of Christian Prejudice (v. 5-9)

**1. The Instruction against Christian Prejudice (2:1)**

In the grammar of v. 1, many scholars argue that the language assumes prejudice or partiality or favoritism is already taking place in the churches and must be stopped. And it's important we start here as well, lest we become those who pray "God, I thank thee that I am not like the Pharisee over here ..." James aims to confront this sin in your heart and in my heart that we tolerate and don't think is sin. We Christians still have this tendency within.

The gospel doesn't record our Lord's rebuke of the Pharisees just as a unique historical snapshot of a religious movement before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., but also because of us Gentile Christians in 2009. Jesus warned His disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees that spreads within and grows and ruins the whole. Disciples also must beware of it. When we look in the mirror of the Word, as James 1 says, we should see not only the Pharisees in the gospels, we should see us. Psychologists today want us to discover our inner child, but James wants us to discover our inner sinner.

In v. 1, James is addressing fellow Christians. We know that because He calls them "brethren" (common NT term for fellow believers) and the verse goes on to explicitly call them believers in the Lord Jesus. I think the term "brothers" also was chosen in this command, because he writes to those who are all equally children of the same Father, same level, same family, same Lord.

One commentator explains: 'James wrote to a very "partial" age, filled with prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. In the ancient world people were routinely and permanently categorized because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, [man or woman, married or widowed, classes of worker, Samaritan vs. Jews, division within Jews; religious parties, tribes you descended from, Hellenists vs. Hebrew/Aramaic Jews, Galileean, Nazareth, etc.]. A significant aspect of the work of Jesus was to break down these walls that divided humanity, and to bring forth one new race of mankind in Him (Ephesians 2:14-15). The unity and openness of the early church was an astonishment to the ancient world. But this unity didn't come automatically. As this command from James shows, the apostles had to teach the early church to never *hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . with partiality.*'<sup>1</sup>

"Partiality" has extra emphasis in the original language word order. It's treating people better or worse than they deserve based on sinful biases or superficial judgments or simply selfish reasons (unlike orphans and widows who can't repay); judging by appearances, preferential honor of some while dishonoring others, favoritism, discrimination, dishonor, partiality, pride, prejudice. Jane Austen, author of *Pride and Prejudice*, is one of the most widely read and beloved writers in English literature (at least among women). Several of her books deal with social standing and economic stability in relation to men/women and classes of people in a British culture marked by elitism as an art form; to this day still many size each other up by what family you're from, or what area you're from, what education or accent you have, etc.

We have the movie versions in multiple editions which take up most of a shelf in our DVD / VHS drawer. “Pride and Prejudice” itself takes up about 14 inches in its video series (the *real one*, my wife tells me, the A&E edition, not the recent movie version or lower-budget BBC edition). Whenever I’m ministering to her by watching one of those movie versions, I have to keep asking her what’s going on in the plot as I miss the subtleties of British films (esp. when multi-tasking on my laptop at same time). If I remember right, Mr. Bingham and Bixley, and the families of the Bennett girls and others are in much drama because of pride and prejudice in their culture. Elizabeth Bennett (or Lizzy to those who know her) and Mr. Darcy are kept apart from courtship by ... pride and prejudice; they are from different classes of society.

What James is talking about is not limited to fictional literature or Pharisees – it’s a problem the church has had through its history.

Kent Hughes records: ‘Because the eighteenth-century Church of England had become so elitist and inhospitable to the common man, in 1739 John Wesley had to take to ... fields to preach the gospel ... Wesley was no schismatic, but because there was no room in the established church for common people, he reluctantly founded the Methodist-Episcopal Church. Tragically, the irony went on (unbelievably, in Methodism itself!) so that 100 years later Methodist William Booth noticed that the poorest and most degraded were never in church ... Those who made part of Broad Street congregation never forgot that electric Sunday in 1846: the gas jets, dancing on whitewashed wall, the Minister, the Rev. Samuel Dunn, seated comfortably on his red plush throne, a concord of voices swelling into the evening’s fourth hymn:

*Foul I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die*

The chapel’s outer door suddenly [came] open, engulfing a white scarf of fog. In its wake came a shuffling shabby contingent of men and women, wilting nervously under the stony stares of mill-manager, shop-keepers and their well-dressed wives. In their rear, afire with zeal, marched “Wilful Will” Booth, cannily blocking the efforts of the more reluctant to turn back. To his dismay the Rev. Dunn saw that young Booth was actually ushering [them] ... into the very best seats; pewholders’ seats, facing the pulpit, whose occupants piled the collection-plate with glinting silver.

This was unprecedented, for the poor, if they came to chapel, entered by another door, to be segregated on benches without backs or cushions, behind a partition which screened off the pulpit. Here, though the service was audible, they could not see nor could they be seen.

Oblivious of the mounting atmosphere, Booth joined full-throatedly in the service ... [but] the unpalatable truth: since Wesley’s day, Methodism had become “respectable.”

[Hughes says] This experience, followed by many more similar catastrophes, led to William and Catherine Booth’s expulsion by the Methodists, and fourteen years of poverty before founding the Salvation Army.’<sup>2</sup>

4 common categories of partiality are still very much around today, sadly even in some churches:

- Economics
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Externals

I wonder how many American churches would turn away John the Baptist at the door for his ragged looks and clothes and hair that had never been cut in his life and his breath that smelled like he's been eating nothing but honey and bugs like locusts. I wonder what type of treatment they would give to his cousin Jesus if He came in and they didn't recognize Him because He doesn't look like the storybook pictures we have of Him. Verse 1 says not to hold our faith in Jesus with personal favoritism or partiality. Think of Jesus:

His economics – no place to lay His head, He has no home like foxes or birds; He's poor and "home-less"

His education – limited education, most of life in carpentry

His ethnicity – can anything good come from Nazareth? We know His mother is Jewish but there's rumors His father was not (John 8:48) and that He was born of fornication (v. 41) since Joseph wasn't His dad.

His externals – nothing attractive about Him physically (Isa. 53 says). His buddies are fisherman, riff-raff; His reputation is hanging out with poor, lowly, etc.

But if you look at v. 1 again, we're reminded that though Jesus was lowly by choice while here on earth, this one we put our faith in is also "*Lord of glory / the glorious Lord.*" Those who saw Him come into their synagogues may not have seen it, but Jesus as Lord

- was actually in economics rich beyond measure as God
- in education, the carpenter son exceeded all rabbis as a boy and is as God the source of all wisdom and knowledge
- in ethnicity the ancestor of King David through His mom and through His heavenly father was the King of Kings
- in externals, when His true nature was transfigured or unveiled, the glory and splendor was dazzling and blinding

Calvin: 'For so great is the brightness of Christ, that it easily extinguishes all the glories of the world, if indeed it irradiates our eyes. It hence follows, that Christ is little esteemed by us, when the admiration of worldly glory lays hold on us. But the other exposition is also very suitable, for when the esteem or value of riches or of honors dazzles our eyes, the truth is suppressed.'<sup>3</sup>

Boice summarizes the argument of v. 1: Jesus 'was and is the Lord of glory. But if he had acted on the basis of who was important, either himself or others, he certainly would never have come to earth to die for us. What he did do was lay his glorious prerogatives aside so that he might identify with and save people like you and me, people with no [innate] importance whatever'<sup>4</sup>

Deuteronomy 10:17-18 "*For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God [cf. "Lord of glory"] who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. "He executes justice for the orphan and the widow ...*

Our God is not only high and mighty and glorious, but He stoops down to visit orphans and widows impartially in their distress – how can we think we're too high and mighty or better than others?!

J. B. Phillips paraphrased James 2: *Don't ever attempt, my brothers, to combine snobbery with faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ! Suppose one man comes into your meeting well-dressed and with a gold ring on his finger, and another man, obviously poor, arrives in shabby clothes.*

*If you pay special attention to the well-dressed man by saying, "Please sit here - it's an excellent seat", and say to the poor man, "You stand over there, please, or if you must sit, sit on the floor", doesn't that prove that you are making class-distinctions in your mind, and setting yourselves up to assess a man's quality?*

## **2. The Illustration of Christian Prejudice (v. 2-4)**

Hendriksen: 'Instead of looking at the incomparable glory of the Lord, they are staring at the splendor of a gold ring and fine clothes. Instead of honoring Jesus Christ, they are paying respect to a rich man and despising a poor man. And instead of accepting persons on the basis of faith in Christ, they are showing favoritism based on appearance and status ... Since time immemorial, justice has been depicted as a blindfolded lady who holds scales in her hand. The blindfold prevents her from seeing anyone so that she is able to serve impartially the cause of justice. Within the context of the Christian faith, practicing discrimination is the exact opposite'<sup>5</sup>

James 2 (NIV)<sup>3</sup> *If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"<sup>4</sup> have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges*

The language of v. 4 has Greek terms for judging and the courtroom, and it seems to be that James is pulling this in because even the secular courts do not do this, so he says: why should the church? No just and decent judge would let you get away with that in a court of law, why do you think God's law will let you get away with such discrimination and partiality? It won't (see v. 8-10).

In v. 3-4, the spiritual judging taking place 'is not a fair trial. Jewish law demanded that both parties either sit at the same level or stand. It also demanded that if one were rich he either dress the poorer man as he dressed, or dress himself in shabby clothes like the poorer man. If the church accepted and responded to the economic differences between these two men they would be showing favouritism ... The church that claims the glorious Jesus Christ as its Lord would have become an unjust, partial judge!<sup>6</sup>

I've never met someone who likes unjust judges who give people a pass if they look sharp and then who mistreats innocent poor people purely because of their looks. Neither does God like it.

This is the scene in v. 2: a visitor enters the "assembly" (literally the *synagogue*). I haven't been to Israel, but I've heard from those who have seen ruins of ancient Jewish synagogues from this timeframe. Some had rows of benches or seats around the interior walls, and then a seating area in the middle on the floor. The gospels mention the Pharisees loved the most important seats, probably either closest seats or maybe even those on the elevated platform where the Torah was read. Their pride of appearance fostered prejudice of externals in the people.

*Our Daily Bread* tells the story about a plainly dressed man who entered a church in the Netherlands and took a seat near the front. A few minutes later a woman walked down the aisle, saw the stranger in the place she always sat, and curtly asked him to leave. He quietly got up and moved to a section reserved for the poor.

When the meeting was over, a friend of the woman asked her if she knew the man she had ordered out of her seat. “No,” she replied. Her friend then informed her, “The man you ordered out of your seat was King Oscar of Sweden! He is here visiting the Queen.”<sup>7</sup>

The Church of England not long ago had people who would pay the church good amounts of money to secure themselves a good seat on the Lord’s Day. They actually had a pew that was theirs that had a key with a lock only they could open to make sure no one sat in their row. Visitors or people who couldn’t pay for their own pew or who wouldn’t, had to sit in the “free area” (less than cheap seats in stark contrast to other VIP seats). Some of you secretly are thinking to yourself that might not be so bad an idea – you wouldn’t mind having your name on a pew and some of you wouldn’t mind being able to close the door off to your aisle!

Our partiality today may be more subtle and inward, but it’s there. That’s why I began the sermon with the illustration that I did. As v. 2 begins, the text says shiny-clothes man comes in with gold rings, literally gold-finger, in other words, probably multiple gold rings on multiple fingers. In that society, it wasn’t the rims on your car but the rings on your left hand that impressed people. There were places in the Roman empire where you could rent a set of gold rings for a special occasion! In our day, a good comparison is the Golden Globe awards where celebrities are decked out and people fawn over their expensive clothes and roll out the red carpet for them. Sadly, James says Christian churches can do much the same.

If your culture watched TV in the 80’s, the guy who just walked in looks like he’s fresh off the show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, or here comes a guy with more gold chains around his neck than Mr. T. If your culture was immersed in 90s MTV, here’s a guy with more gold rings than any ostentatious gansta rap artist. Here’s a guy whose place you saw featured on *Cribs* last week. Today we would say he’s got a lot of bling, bling, rings, things.

The other guy who comes in looks the exact opposite in every way. Verse 2 says he is poor and has dirty clothes (same word as 1:21 for filthy garments which anyone who could afford would want to lay aside and wash, but this is probably the only clothes he has).

The distinguished Broad Street congregation all may have been religiously singing the words

*Foul I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

But the poor who William Booth brought in during that hymn may have sung those lyrics most truly with all their hearts.

Which guy in v. 2 would you be inclined to pay attention to or even talk to after the service? Some of you don’t talk to any visitors after the service, but don’t think you’re off the hook either! If you don’t talk to anyone or anyone you don’t know yet, that’s not right either and can be pride and partiality in a different way.

If you aren’t an usher, you’re not off the hook either. This passage isn’t really about ushering, or what seat someone else gives others, and it’s not just about rich vs. poor. That’s just one example James gives to get to the point of v. 4: *have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives/thoughts.*

Whether the segregation is physical or mental, it's not right. That's the problem – distinctions or discriminations of partiality and judging with wrong or sinful thinking. Verse 3 doesn't say it's wrong to show attention to and make someone feel welcome and special, but the problem is the preferential partial treatment based on what's valuable in the world's eyes while prejudicially ignoring others who have equal value, if not greater, in God's eyes (v. 5).

When we attended Grace Community in L.A., my friend and former roommate Mike Penberthy was playing on the L.A. Lakers at the time and attending our church and the same SS class. I could tell it was really awkward for him to come to church, because so many would fawn over and fall over themselves to be friends with his wife or would walk out of their way to talk to him, and would make him late to church, or would even talk to him during Sunday School while worship was supposed to be taking place.

A friend of mine would always ask “Hey, have you talked to Mike lately ...” I actually rarely did intentionally, to give him a break. It shouldn't matter in the church whether you're ordinary Joe or “Senator Joe” or a “sloppy Joe,” Joe Millionaire or Joe the Plumber. If we're giving V.I.P. treatment, let's remember that all who Christ shed His precious blood for are very important people. Let's remember that every unbeliever who is not yet redeemed by faith in Christ's death is a very important person to show Christ's love to, beloved.

Nothing wrong with smiling and welcoming and being friendly to visitors (in fact some of you should do that instead of just rushing to make sure no one's taken your seat). But we should equally, if not especially, be looking out to those who may not fit in or who we don't really see talk with others, or who may be lonely, or who may be in need of a kind word, or smile, or an encouragement.

The church is not a club or a clique. It is a collection of people who are different on the outside, but who have the same faith on the inside in the same Lord (v. 1). A church is a group that can be close but not so close that it doesn't extend outward to include others who are different, who aren't in the “inner circle.”

Diversity with unity can be one of the most special things about a church. I don't want to be in a church where everyone starts to look the same, has the same thoughts, talks and walks the same, has the same Bible version, or has all the same convictions about public school, homeschool, charter school, and all the subcultures within those. I don't want to ever hear that this church is being segregated in any way; old guard looking down on the newer younger group, whoever judging the elder's motives or reasons for decisions, or anyone's grudges against another within the body, or young people dishonoring the older generation, or homeschool families who don't let their kids be around other families who are not homeschoolers, or even more strictly, divisions w/in types of homeschool or curriculum, or judging others who have different convictions. It's ok to have personal convictions, parenting, etc. but don't be a crusader, and don't judge others who differ there.

Many church splits are not over doctrinal statements, but simple disobedience to James 2:4. May Christ keep us in unity in Him.

I know our community is not the most ethnically diverse, 90+% white American (?), but I hope that our church would be equally welcoming to those of African American, or South American descent or Asian or Middle Eastern or Indian descent, or even the various caucasian subcultures and socio-economic spectrums.

‘In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu.”<sup>8</sup>

Probably none of us in this room have ever verbally turned someone away from church, but have we done so non-verbally?

A. W. Tozer said: ‘It is in the realm of religion that contempt finds its most fruitful soil and flourishes most luxuriantly. It is seen in the cold disdain with which the respectable church woman regards the worldly sister and in the scorn heaped upon the fallen woman by the legally married wife. The sober deacon may find it hard to conceal his contempt for the neighbor who drinks. The evangelical may castigate the liberal in a manner that leaves slight doubt that he feels himself above him in every way. Religion that is not purified by penitence, humility and love will lead to a feeling of contempt for the irreligious and the morally degraded. And since contempt implies a judgment of no worth made against a human brother, the contemptuous man comes under the displeasure of God ... We should hate sin in ourselves and in all men, but we should never undervalue the man in whom the sin is found.’<sup>9</sup>

He said in another place: ‘We are to be a church of the living God, and not a gathering of the influential and the big shots. The big shots can come if they get on their knees—a big shot on his knees isn't any taller than anyone’<sup>10</sup>

Romans 12 <sup>9</sup> *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.* <sup>10</sup> *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor* [nothing wrong with preference, as long as it's not just to “one above the others” but is instead to “one another” – all] ... <sup>13</sup> *contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality ...* <sup>16</sup> *Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.*

This is the Word of our Lord of glory? How are we doing beloved?

‘The Greek word for favoritism or partiality literally means, “to receive the face of another in an evaluating way.” In other words, you check out another person, and then form an opinion based upon what you see [what they look like, wear, etc.]

*Full many people go to church, As everyone knows;  
Some go to close their eyes, and some to eye their clothes.*

The fact is, we live in a society that routinely judges people according to their age, size, race, gender, physical attractiveness, clothing, education, community status, intelligence, bank account, and neighborhood, just to name a few.

Like it or not, everybody is not equally intelligent, good looking, and on the ball. And almost without thinking, we size people up, and judge them accordingly

... But we ought not, dare not, assign lower and higher values to folks based on what we see. In the church of Jesus Christ, it is Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father, who occupies the best seat in the house. And the rest of us, including the preachers, sit shoulder-to-shoulder, side-by-side on that perfectly level ground at the foot of the cross ...

[A pastor named David Hughes tells] the story of the old, dignified deacon who served in a large, downtown church in the 1960's. One Sunday, when the church was packed, a long-haired, bell-bottomed, barefoot hippie walked into the service. Finding nowhere to sit, the hippie sauntered down the center aisle before an usher could stop him. In fact, he walked to the front of the sanctuary and sat cross-legged on the floor before the pulpit as the pastor preached.

Then, the dignified, senior deacon serving as Head Usher that day sprang into action and strode to the front of the church. The entire congregation tensed as they awaited the inevitable confrontation between this impeccably dressed pillar of the church and the "flower child" hippie. Folks were confident the kid would be shown the back door in a hurry. You can imagine their surprise when the deacon came alongside the hippie and sat down, cross-legged, in his three-piece suit, next to the unexpected visitor for the rest of the service. There was not a dry eye in the house.

And the pastor of the church smiled. Because he realized that day that Jesus, and Jesus alone, had the best seat in that house.<sup>11</sup>

Jane Austen wrote this prayer: 'Look with mercy on the sins we have this day committed and in mercy make us feel them deeply, that our repentance may be sincere and our resolution steadfast of endeavouring against the commission of such in future. Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts, and bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls ... Have we thought irreverently of thee, have we disobeyed thy commandments, have we neglected any known duty, or willingly given pain to any human being? Incline us to ask our hearts these questions oh! God, and save us from deceiving ourselves by pride or vanity.'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary*, James 2.

<sup>2</sup> Kent Hughes, *James*, 88-89.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, p. 197.

<sup>4</sup> James Boice, *Exposition of James*, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, James, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> *New Bible Commentary : 21st century edition*. (4th ed.) Downers Grove, Ill., Inter-Varsity Press, 1970.

<sup>7</sup> *Our Daily Bread*, December 3, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> *Our Daily Bread*, March 6, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Of God and Men*, 96, 97.

<sup>10</sup> Tozer, *The Counselor*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> *RevExp Journal* 97:2 (Spring 2000) p. 225-27

<sup>12</sup> C. Pollock (1996). *The book of uncommon prayer*. Dallas: Word, p. 10.