

“WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH YOUR FAITH?” #4

“Believers Must Not Show Favoritism”

Matthew 7:1-6, Acts 15:5-21, James 2:1-13

September 24 & 25, 2022

“A man rushed into the house in a panic-stricken state. His wife looked at him, and said,

‘What’s wrong?’ He said, ‘We’re in deep trouble.’ She said, ‘What is it?’

“It’s the car.’ What’s wrong with the car?’

“Water. There’s water in the carburetor. It won’t work.’ What!’

“There’s water in the carburetor, and the car won’t work.’

“His wife cocked her head to the side and narrowed her eyes a bit. ‘Now, you don’t have a mechanical bone in your body. You know nothing about automobiles. How in the world do you know the problem with the car is water in the carburetor?’

“The husband hung his head and said, ‘The car is in the swimming pool. There has to be water in the carburetor.’

“The man’s problem was a lot bigger than what he said. A lot of us are more messed up than we look. We may simply say that there’s water in the carburetor, when our whole life is in the pool. But we can dress it up, fix it up, tweak it up, talk it right, and lay it out, trying to make it look like there’s only a little water in the carburetor.”¹ Yet in order for us to get our life straightened out, we must address the issue that we’re in the pool.

Perspective is an important issue for us as Christians. How we see things determines how we will act or react to the different events in our life, and it will reflect how we go on in our life after those events take place. Just a little water in the carburetor is vastly different than a whole car being in the pool. Perspective will also determine how we treat others around us.

If we see a person as being “less than valuable,” we will treat them as such, much to our disgrace. We could easily say to the man in the opening story, “What an idiot! Why’d you drive your car into the pool?” We could easily rebuke him and disgrace him with our judgment upon him. Yet,

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 226, #688)

what if the car's breaks went out and there was nothing he could do about the car running away from him and into the pool? **We can judge a person inaccurately because of their situation, and find ourselves looking like the idiot instead.**

But if we treat them as having "greater value" than they need to have, we also treat them in such a way that will bring us disgrace. We could say, "You're such a good driver all the time. Someone else must have been driving for that car to go into the pool." Thereby we fail to take into account that accidents do happen. And we see this condition of judgment in our Scripture lessons today.

In Matthew 7:1-6, **Jesus challenges us not to be judgmental toward others until after we have evaluated our own life.** At first glance we might look like we're doing pretty good, but if we take a closer look, we are really no better than the next person. Jesus puts it well to us, "*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?*" (7:3-4)? We are not to be judgmental to another unless we are free from judgement ourselves. And that means we must seriously look at our own life first before judging another.

But it's so natural for us to judge each other. It's what our society focuses our attention on - what our differences are compared to one another. Yet, because each of us are so different, there's no way that we can really make a standardized person, one who is "normal." There is no such thing as NORMAL. We are all unique, each with our gifts, our skills, our flaws and our failures.

Now, there are several ways that judgment works in our lives. **We often judge a person based upon what nationality they originated from.** Color of skin, facial features, and style of clothing are immediate judgment factors for us. We judge a person based upon the differences in their body characteristics, and we determine their value as to how we relate to those characteristics. It may come from our upbringing, based upon how others of that nationality were viewed by our parents and other family members. It may come from prior experience with persons from that nationality. Our judgment is thrust upon a person because of their nationality.

But how many of us got to choose what nationality we were born into? How many of us got to pick what color our skin would be, or what hair color we'd have, or whether we're short or tall, or what our facial features look like? No, none of us got to go through a checklist of "desired features" before we were born so that we could be "acceptable" to others. But we want to judge one another based upon where they're from or what characteristics they have.

And while we're at it, judging a whole class of people based upon the actions of one or a few is totally unacceptable. You judge me based upon what another white-male-European-American-red-headed-clergy-triplet son of parents from North Carolina living in central Wisconsin does, and not only will you be so wrong in your evaluation of me, you'll miss out on all that the Lord God has blessed me with to offer to you. Don't judge someone based upon the details of where they're from and those general characteristics they may have, but rather what you know about them as an individual as you experience life with them as a child of God. An old Native-American proverb states it well, "Never judge a person until you've walked one moon in their moccasins."

A second way we judge others is based upon how a person speaks. Someone using proper English is treated quite differently than someone speaking crude English or broken English. If a person can't put together a complete sentence, we often deem them ignorant. On the contrary, if a person speaks with precise sentence structure and very descriptive language, using many long or scientific words, they are seen as highly educated. Yet, education does not adequately judge a person's character. So we can mistakenly judge a person by how they speak and miss the opportunity to learn from a true genius or find encouragement from a person of deep faith.

One author states it like this: "Now let me explain something to the "edu-ma-cated." Whether you have a PhD or a GED, you have come into the kingdom through the same door. God did not look at your resume before He brought you into the kingdom. He didn't see whether you had a BS, MBA, or PhD. He wanted to give everybody in here a BA - born again.

"Praise God if you got to go to school on a government grant. Praise God if your parents could

pay for it. Praise God if you had to work like a dog to get it, and praise God for the person who had the tenacity to go back after dropping out. Praise God if you never went to school after high school, but were able to do something with your life to be successful for the Lord. Our education or lack of it doesn't make us any better or worse in God's sight"² than anyone else. So we are not to favor those with great education and ridicule those without. We're all important to God, no matter how many letters we have after our name.

Another way we judge someone else is by their body condition. It is easy for us to judge another if they are disfigured, or overweight, or disabled somehow, or blind, or needing additional apparatus to help them along their way. They are easily judged as "less than" in many people's minds. Yet these can be some of the greatest minds and capable individuals there are, who may hold tremendous insights and wisdom. They may have sacrificed their own bodies for the sake of our own personal freedom here in this country. But our society somehow deems anyone outside of a particular sculpted mold as being less acceptable than those with "perfect" figures.

Folks, no matter what body shape or condition you have, God values you as a special one in His sight. We're all different, and no matter what our society says is "good" or "acceptable" or "perfect" does not make us less in God's eyes. What matters to Him is what's in our heart. *It's what's on the inside that matters, not the wrappings on the outside.*

Another way we judge others is based upon our religious traditions. We succumb to Satan's leading by treating those of other religions as being "less than" valuable because they don't believe like we do. We demand that they conform to our way of believing before we treat them as anyone worthy of respect and importance.

But that's where the first believers in Christ struggled. In Acts 15:5-21 we heard how some of the early believers of Jesus, with Jewish nationality, demanded that the Gentile believers had to conform to the standards of Moses before they were counted as "true Christians." They had come from different

² (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 81, #218

backgrounds, different religious cultures, and some thought that the only way they could be counted as real followers of Jesus was for them to take on all of the Jewish traditions first.

Yet it was Peter who stood up and defended the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of anyone who would put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and follow His ways. The men and women may have been Gentiles, but they were none-the-less believers and followers of Jesus, having been converted from their former life to a new life with Christ Jesus. Just because they didn't have the Jewish upbringing like some others did, that did not make them any less followers of Jesus. Because of their belief in Jesus, they were now Children of God, just like those who came from the Jewish background. **There was to be no more discrepancy among the followers of Jesus based upon their being Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free, Greek or Scythian. Their background didn't matter.** What mattered was their faith in Jesus Christ, and that they diligently sought to follow His teachings and His commands.

Peter says it well, *“God, Who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are”* (Acts 15:8-11). He addressed the issue of faith over religious history, giving all people the chance to believe and follow Jesus specifically, and yet individually conforming to their own cultures. Yes, there were still standards that needed to be followed to be counted as a believer in Jesus, but the Gentile Christians did not have to subject themselves to the Law of Moses in order for them to be counted as true followers of Jesus.

Now, I'm not saying that people who profess to be followers of Jesus can do anything they want to and still be counted as Christians. No, the teachings of the Bible are clear that we need to obey the guidelines of Bible and stay true to their standards. We must be obedient to the teachings of Jesus and the other lessons of the Bible if we claim to be a follower of Jesus.

But there is another way that we judge people, and our lesson from the Book of James lifts up

this distinction. Listen carefully to James 2:1-13. (READ James 2:1-13)

James lifts up our judgement of people based upon the amount of wealth we have. And that judgement of a person bases our actions toward that person. He makes for the case of how two individuals were treated - one with a gold ring and fine clothes, the other with filthy, old clothing. Preferential treatment was given to the one who has wealth, while disdain was given to the one who was poor. The best seat in the house was given to the wealthy, while the floor was the place for the poor. James accurately states, “*have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts*” (Jam. 2:4)? Favoritism was shown to the one with wealth, while disgrace was given to the one with little. Oh, how easy it is for us to fall into the same situation, where we demonstrate favoritism. So James tells us, “*believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ MUST NOT show favoritism*” (Ja. 2:1).

I know it’s hard not to show favoritism, judging a person based upon the wealth they may or may not have. But we must remember that we’re all alike in God’s eyes. God has blessed some with the ability to make and have money, and God has blessed some with richness of faith. **We’re not to favor the one with money over the one with faith!** Rather, we are to look at each person as brother or sister in Christ, and treat them with the same amount of respect and dignity as we would anyone else.

Let me give you an idea of what I mean. This last week I had the chance to participate in a meeting with another church. When I arrived, I was the first person to attend the meeting, so I had to wait for the church to be opened up. I greeted those who arrived, and after getting into the church, began to notice those who were coming to that meeting. Right before the meeting was to start, a gentleman came in wearing work clothes, boots and having a distinct odor of manure. I could easily have thought this man to be a member of the congregation who was a farmer, not having good clothing to attend a church meeting.

However, this man turned out to be the pastor of the church! As a Licensed Local Pastor, he had to hurry to the meeting from his other job (that day cleaning out the manure pit) and he didn’t have time

to shower or change into other clothes. I could have easily judged him poorly, yet he was the leader of that congregation. What a fool I would have been had I criticized this man for his filthy old clothing. It took for me to get to know the man before I could say anything about him. He is a very faithful follower of Jesus Christ, diligently seeking to lead his congregation into a closer walk with the Lord Jesus. AND he also works on the farm to supply the every-day essentials for his family.

But on the other hand, I've had opportunity to work at soup kitchens around the US and on one particular event, I was serving food to folks at a New York City soup kitchen. You often think that soup kitchens are for those who are poor, or homeless, or street people, but during that serving time a man in a three-piece-suit walks in and takes his place in line. It would have been very easy for me to deny this man food that was intended for the poor, when he was there dressed like a CEO of a major corporation. I would have made myself look like a real fool had I said anything, because as it turned out, this man was among the working poor - dressed really nicely, but making barely enough to keep he and his family housed and fed. That soup kitchen was there for the poor, and even though he wore very nice clothing, he was just as much in need of the food as all of the other folks there that day.

Until we get to know the folks around us, we must be careful not to show favoritism, lest we not only bring disgrace to ourselves, but we also bring disgrace to our Lord Jesus. James makes that real clear, *“has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of Him to whom you belong”* (Ja. 2:5-7)?

Who wants to belong to a church that discriminates against anyone? Who wants to bring dishonor to the Lord Jesus because we judge and criticize another based upon our differences? **Favoritism within the life of the Christian church must not take place. We must look into the eyes of one another and see a brother or sister in Christ. THAT'S IT!** No judgement, no ridicule, no harassment, no criticism! We are all sinners in need of the grace of Jesus Christ, and it is ours to grant

mercy and grace so that those who do not know Jesus as their Savior and Lord are free to be here in this place to hear about Him and come to accept Him as their Savior. And we can't do that if we pre-judge them and practice favoritism.

We are to love everyone who comes into our door. That being said, that doesn't mean that we to let folks take advantage of us, or manipulate us, or to abuse our generosity and mercy. We are to treat them with respect, yet stay true to the Scriptures, and work with one another to build each other up in our faith in the Lord Jesus.

James tells us clearly, "*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment*" (Ja. 2:12-13). **We are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Leviticus 19:18) and show respect to each other, no matter what they may look like, what they may sound like, where they may be from, and how much wealth they may have.** We are to love one another even if they disagree with us about politics, even if they hold different views about social issues, even if they try to exploit us or punish us for our own particular beliefs. How else will they see the true character of Jesus Christ unless we demonstrate Him to them in the way we live and conduct ourselves?

So let us be genuine with our love for all people, to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Father, thank You for loving each one of us, even as we are. You could easily cast us all away from Your presence because of our failures to keep Your commands. Yet out of Your great mercy, You love us and continue to call us to repentance for our failing to obey You.

Lord Jesus, teach us to see each other as You saw those around You, calling all people to trust in You as our Savior and Lord. Give us the eyes to see others as brothers and sisters in You, so that we might treat them with the same respect and dignity as You treated us. Help us to show love to our neighbors so that they might see You through us because of the way that we treat them. Help us to love You with all our heart, and love our neighbor as ourselves. This we pray in Your Name. AMEN.