

“Everyone’s a Critic!”—James 2:1-4

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Everyone’s a Critic!”, is James 2:1-4 → *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Some forty years ago my wife and my niece were at a mall together doing some window shopping. My niece was wearing a coat made of some kind of fur. As she took off her coat and laid it on the bench next to my wife she said, “Watch this.” She proceeded into the store in eyeshot of the bench. My wife watched as she spent some time browsing around the store. She noticed that none of the clerks

ever acknowledged her presence. Returning to the bench, my niece put her coat back on and returned into the store. Immediately the store clerks were asking if she needed any help. She demonstrated how people can be treated as “less than” based upon their appearances.

“You can’t judge a book by its cover . . . beauty is only skin deep . . . first impressions are the most lasting . . .” and many other such similar clichés are intended to remind us to look past outward appearances and see the “real” person we are encountering. Yet, in our effort to be impartial toward others two realities become very evident in all of our efforts to do so: ① We can’t totally ignore how a person presents him or herself in words, actions and appearances; and, ② we process everything through our “value system” accompanied by some kind of judgment. In other words, everyone’s a critic. The question is: What is going to guide your value system as a “critical thinker.”

Our text places before us a sinful practice which apparently was happening in some Christian worship assemblies in the first century. Apparently they were showing *partiality* while holding to *the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ* (verse 1), thus, acting hypocritically. James is admonishing them for such a sinful practice. According to our text, it appears they were giving special distinction and attention to those

who were dressed in *fine clothing* and *wearing a gold ring* (i.e. jewelry which, in that day, was usually evidence of affluence). The *poor* in the worship assembly who were dressed in *shabby clothing* were expected to succumb to those more elegantly dressed when called upon to do so.

Interestingly, the text speaks to the whole assembly, not to particular groups or individuals within the worship assembly. We're not told if those who were rich insisted on such treatment or if those who were poor felt "less than" the rich and "knew their place." This is very important because it is easy for us to get caught up in a Genesis 3 attitude and try to point the finger and place the blame in an effort to make sure it's clear that no one can blame you. It's just another way of being a critic or, as verse 4 of our text describes it, making *distinctions among yourselves and becoming judges with evil or sinful thoughts*.

Being impartial and faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ at the same time is challenging for Christians indeed! Thus, in a sanctified effort to follow God's Words of our text, you must function with discernment given by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10-16). Discernment is different than being a critic, although judgments are made in both actions. Discernment is passing everything through your "value system" **which is sanctified by the Holy Spirit and informed by the**

absolute truth of God's written Word—the Bible. In John 17:17

Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father for you and me saying, *Sanctify them in the truth*. However, He didn't just stop there to leave you trying to figure out what that *truth* is. He continued His prayer saying: ***Your Word is truth.***

So, what truth does God's written Word teach us about our perspective of each other in our worship assembly? The most obvious answer from verse 1 of our text is to *show no partiality as we hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory*. When we gather for worship the focus is on Christ, both in the dispensing and receiving of His forgiveness of sins and in our worship, praise and adoration of Him. But what does this look like amongst so many sinful critics? We must encounter one another **on the basis of God's impartiality**.

His impartiality is bound up in the Person & Work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit had to take the apostles through many experiences to teach them that the forgiveness of sins, new life and eternal salvation accomplished by Jesus is for everyone—not just for a select group of people. Eventually they had to confess that anyone who trusts in Jesus and is baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (cf. Acts 2:38) receives the blessings of God's grace (cf. Acts 10:34-35). Galatians 3:28 says: *There is neither Jew nor Greek (i.e. nationality), there is neither slave nor free (i.e. vocations in life), there is no male and female, for*

you are all one in Christ Jesus. Everyone in this worship service are recipients of God's grace in the Person & Work of Jesus.

In order to be a recipient of God's gracious benefits though, there is another aspect to God's impartiality described in Romans 3:23 → **All** *have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* While the accomplished work of Jesus' one sacrifice is for all the sins of all people for all time (cf. Hebrews 9:27-28; 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18), its benefits are yours only by faith in that atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of **your** sins. God's impartiality confesses that everyone, no matter your economic status, vocations, talents, and so forth stands before God and each other as poor miserable sinners who deserve both temporal and eternal punishment for your sins.

Thus, faith in the atoning work of Jesus is essential because God also shows no partiality in judgment upon our sins. Romans 2:9-11 says: *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.* We all stand the same before God and one another in worship as sinners under the LORD's judgment upon our sin. We also all stand the same before God and one another in worship as **forgiven** sinners as we receive His Word and sacraments **by faith in Jesus.**

James stressed such an attitude of worship throughout his epistle:

- James 1:9-10 → He began his letter exhorting us: *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.* “At the end of the day”—or shall we say on the Last Day—they both stand before the throne of God on the same basis.
- James 4:6-7 → *God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* Notice the temptation to make *distinctions among ourselves and become judges with evil thoughts* comes from *the devil*.
- James 4:10 → *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.* (cf. Isaiah 57:15; Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:7-11; 18:9-14)

Discernment requires you to make judgments in order to determine what is proper or improper behavior according God’s Will as revealed in His written Word. Otherwise, how will you be able to strive to be faithful to *our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory* by abhorring *what is evil* and holding *fast to what is good* (cf. Romans 12:9)? It is also challenging to be discerning to make a proper judgment because we do depend upon the outward appearances in other’s behaviors, words and concepts conveyed in conversations.

Thus, the “critic” in you must be guided with sanctified discernment

to see yourself and others under God's impartiality—as both sinners and saints by faith in Christ Jesus. When Jesus dealt with the self-righteous “critical thinking” of the religious leaders of His day he constantly pointed them to discernment, not being critics. He says in John 7:24 to all of us: *Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.* He is not, contrary to many people's imaginations, telling us to be tolerant of all sinful behaviors, words and thoughts. Rather, as we all assemble in worship humbly, as sinners in the eyes of God and each other, we trust in God's judgment upon our sins in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ, praising and thanking Him that His forgiveness is for us all! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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