



Pastor's Update September 15, 2024

Rev. Francis Williams

"Show No Favoritism"

A number of years ago I attended a Sunday morning service at what is known as a storefront church in Brooklyn, New York. These religious spaces are called storefront churches because they operate in buildings that originally housed businesses. They are located at street level near sidewalks of busy streets in the inner city. The doors of these storefront churches are constructed similar to garage doors which open and close by lifting and pulling. These churches are strategically located where anyone can stagger in on any given Sunday morning.

On this particular Sunday morning in 1990, I was sitting in Church when something happened that juggled my memory to a passage in the Epistle of James. While listening intently to the sermon, a man in his fifties drifted into the sanctuary. His shabby clothing and disheveled demeanor gave the impression that he lived on the streets. He entered the building sat next to a lady who was well dressed in her Sunday best. When the unwelcomed visitor sat next to her, she shuffled uncomfortably in her seat to create some space between him and herself. The pew in which she sat was now filled with worshippers, so she could not avoid rubbing shoulders with the unexpected visitor. She turned around perhaps to see if there is an empty sit in the pews behind. Her face was the picture of disgust and anger. I am sure she was tempted to vacate her seat, or maybe wished that the earth would open under her.

As I witnessed this awkward situation, a passage in the epistle of James came to my mind. It reads as follows, "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, with favoritism. 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, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved, have not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him. But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?" (James 2:1-7).

The passage above addresses the sin of partiality. This sin is contrary to God's character and contradicts biblical Christianity. We can only imagine how the woman would react if the visitor was dressed in fine clothes. Be that as it may, among many Christians partiality is one of the sins that often go unnoticed. A few years ago, a Christian youth worker shared with me an ongoing situation that was very disheartening. He said that some of the parents of the children at his Church would not allow their children to mingle with the kids from the low-income community. These "Christian parents" did not wish for their kids to mingle with the other smelly kids from the neighborhood. Unfortunately, the youth ministry in that particular Church never flourished. The Truth is that the Church must be a community that welcomes people of every status.

When Christians look down upon people who are different from them, and when Christian parents discourage their children from mixing with children who are less fortunate, they demonstrate a deficit in an understanding of the gospel. The gospel message is that Jesus laid aside His glory and identified with sinners through His incarnation, life and death (Philipp. 2:3-8). Christians are now given the task of bearing this good news to everyone. And we ought to do it without partiality.

By God's Grace and for His glory,

Pr. Francis