



Partial to Impartiality

A church in our town recently lost its pastor for reasons of immorality. The other day I was talking with a member of its search committee who told me they had received over 50 resumes from potential pastoral candidates. They particularly liked one who was an excellent expositor, but felt this prospect's race might be unacceptable to some members who have contributed over half of the church's annual budget. As a result, the search committee preferred instead another pastor who had his doctorate and a number of successful programs at his current church. My initial reaction was that this local church may get what it wants but, perhaps, not what it needs.

Why do I say this? The church's leadership appears to be making an important decision that could possibly affect the future spiritual condition of the church based on reasons of race, economics, education, and worldly measurements of success—NOT on the basis of sound scriptural principles.

Is it biblical to defer (or not to defer) to someone based on these types of distinctions? Would Jesus make such distinctions? Listen to how Christ's opponents characterized Him in this regard:

Matthew 22:15-16, Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any."

Even Christ's adversaries recognized that He always spoke and acted in an impartial manner. In other words, He applied the truth (the divine standard of righteousness) equally to everyone.

(cf., Mark 12:13-14; Luke 20:20-21) -Verses referenced but not printed in the body of this study are printed at its conclusion.

Of course, God the Father shows no partiality, as the Jewish apostle Peter realized after responding to an invitation to speak at the home of a Gentile, the Roman centurion Cornelius.

Acts 10:34-35, Opening his mouth Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him."

The apostle Paul also said in Galatians 2:6, "God shows no partiality" . . . and in Ephesians 6:9, "there is no partiality with Him."

Since believers are to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29), they disobey God and His Word when they display sinful partiality. Christ's half-brother James emphasized this sin among believers in chapter two of his letter:

James 2:1, My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

James 2:4, have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

James 2:9, But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

(cf., 1 Timothy 5:21)

HOW DOES THE BIBLE DEFINE "PARTIALITY"?

There are at least a dozen different Hebrew and Greek words that deal with partiality. These words convey concepts of:

- honoring, respecting, or swelling (another's head) for unrighteous intent,
- presenting a "right" face to achieve a particular objective,
- passing judgment on someone based upon external distinctions or personal gain, or
- inclining one's self to someone with an eye toward receiving recognition or exaltation.

In all cases, such attitude or behavior has always been presented as evil. For example, when setting forth the particulars of God's righteous standard, Moses stated the following to the Israelites:

Exodus 23:2-3, You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

It doesn't matter whether one defers to the majority (like King Saul did when the Israelites took some of the Amalekites' spoil even though the LORD told him through Samuel to destroy all of it—1 Samuel 15:3-23), or to the minority (like "a poor man in his dispute"), God commands us not to practice partiality. By making distinctions that are based on partiality, we dishonor the Creator who has made people the way they are. As Job reminds us, it is God "who shows no partiality to princes nor regards the rich above the poor, for they all the work of His hands" (Job 34:19).

PARTIALITY OFTEN INVOLVES "MAKING JUDGMENTS"

In many scriptural illustrations, the issue of partiality is often focused on making judgments. Practicing partiality in such cases is tantamount to effecting injustice, thus perverting the accomplishment of true justice. God's commands on the subject of justice are direct and clear:

Leviticus 19:15, You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. (*cf.*, *Deuteronomy 1:17; Psalm 82:2; Proverbs 18:5; 24:23; 28:21*)

Deuteronomy 16:19, You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous.

When Elihu (who was younger than Job or Job's three other counselors) finally decided to speak his thoughts and opinions, he started by pointing out that practicing partiality involves flattering words as well as bribery, because the one who flatters or bribes is seeking an advantage. Such people desire to distort justice for their own benefit. Yet, Elihu recognized that God will ultimately punish the one who practices partiality or seeks partial treatment. Thus, Elihu stated in Job 32:21-22, "Let me now be partial to no one, nor flatter any man. For I do not know how to flatter, else my Maker would soon take me away."

Like other right-thinking men in the Old Testament, Elihu recognized that God is the ultimate Judge of everyone. God also told Moses, "For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe" (Deuteronomy 10:17). God reminded Ezra, "let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe" (2 Chronicles 19:7).

GOD IMPARTIALLY JUDGES BOTH BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS

Even though believers have been given the responsibility of judging other believers' words and deeds for the purpose of correcting and disciplining sinning believers, restoring them to fellowship, and keeping the church pure, James stressed the fact that "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy" (James 4:12a). That is because only God can accurately judge the intentions of one's heart, our inner self which motivates our words and actions. Paul reminded believers of this fact when he reproved them for inaccurate judgment.

1 Corinthians 4:5, Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

God is the ultimate Judge of our words and deeds, all of which reflect the inner condition of our life. Jesus said, "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34b). All our words and actions, even those done in carelessness, are subject to divine judgment. Jesus also said, "And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36). The Apostle Paul similarly stated, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Romans 2:5-6). (*cf.*, *Psalms 31:23b; 62:12b; Proverbs 24:12b; Isaiah 59:18; Jeremiah 21:14; Matthew 16:27; 2 Timothy 4:14; Revelation 18:6*).

God judges each believer and unbeliever "according to all his [man's] ways" (2 Chronicles 6:30). God's judgment is totally impartial. Only those "in the last Adam" (1 Corinthians 14:45)—believers "in Christ"—will escape His eternal judgment solely because Christ has paid the just penalty for all our sins. He accomplished this by His death on the cross. Thus, all the words and deeds of a believer (even those done in carelessness) have already been judged, and the payment has been fully paid in the Person and Work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

However, those still "in the first Adam" (unbelievers whose names are not written in the book of life) will face eternal judgment and suffer the second death, everlasting damnation in hell.

Revelation 20:12-15, And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the

books, according to their deeds . . . if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire . . . This is the second death, the lake of fire.

Romans 2:9, There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek . . . **Romans 3:22b-23**, for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

There is no distinction among us, since each of us has sinned. All of us have willfully transgressed God's perfect standard of righteousness. Consequently, we are ALL deserving of His wrath. We can only be saved by grace, through faith, and not because of any works on which we might boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9, For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Only a remnant of God's human creation has been spared from His wrath that was placed instead on His Son. This great salvation that God has mercifully provided us through Jesus Christ was also made without partiality.

Romans 10:12, For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him.

Acts 15:8-9, And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Revelation 5:9b, for You [Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God] were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

ARE BELIEVERS NOW EXEMPT FROM ANY FURTHER DIVINE JUDGMENT?

The answer to the above question is, "No." Even though believers are "in Christ," they are not exempt from further divinely impartial judgment. As Paul tells the Colossian believers:

Colossians 3:25, For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

What are some of "the consequences" Paul is talking about? They involve the loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Christ for those works done in the flesh, and the gain of rewards for those works done in the spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:12-14, Now if any man builds on the foundation [of Christ] with gold, silver, precious stones [things said and done in the spirit], wood, hay, straw [things said and done in the flesh], each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains [works done in the spirit], he will receive a reward. *[inserts added]*

2 Corinthians 5:10, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. *(cf., Romans 14:10)*

This should stimulate all of us "in Christ" to love and good deeds. Just as Peter exhorted us:

1 Peter 1:14-17, As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth.

CONCLUSION

As His Word reveals, God is the ultimate Judge who rules with complete impartiality. Since God is "on record" as condemning partiality, then you should respond in the record of your daily life by making decisions and judgments in an impartial manner. This can only be accomplished as you rely on God's sustaining power and abundant grace that is provided through Jesus Christ. As you continually follow Christ and lovingly obey God's Word, you can be "partial to impartiality."

PASSAGES REFERENCED BUT NOT FULLY QUOTED ABOVE

Mark 12:13-14, Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. They came and said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?"

Luke 20:20-21, So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor. They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth."

Galatians 2:6, But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.

Ephesians 6:9, And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

Romans 8:29, For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren

1 Timothy 5:21, I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.

Deuteronomy 1:17, “You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.”

Psalms 82:2, How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?

Proverbs 18:5, To show partiality to the wicked is not good, Nor to thrust aside the righteous in judgment.

Proverbs 24:23, These also are sayings of the wise. To show partiality in judgment is not good.

Proverbs 28:21, To show partiality is not good, because for a piece of bread a man will transgress.

Psalms 31:23b, The LORD preserves the faithful and fully recompenses the proud doer.

Psalms 62:12b, O Lord, for You recompense a man according to his work.

Proverbs 24:12b, will He not render to man according to his work?

Isaiah 59:18, According to their deeds, so He will repay, wrath to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the coastlands He will make recompense.

Jeremiah 21:14, “But I will punish you according to the results of your deeds,” declares the LORD, “And I will kindle a fire in its forest that it may devour all its environs.”

Matthew 16:27, “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.”

2 Timothy 4:14, Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

Revelation 18:6, "Pay her [Babylon] back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.

1 Corinthians 15:45, So also it is written, “The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.” The last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving spirit.

2 Chronicles 6:30, then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men

Romans 14:10, But you, why do you judge your brother *[regarding his words/actions based on faith; i.e., intent]*? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.