

July 1999 The Sin of Partiality

by Aaron Greenway

There is a plague that has ravished Christians in America. This particular blight has struck our churches, our college campuses, our seminaries, our youth groups. It has left many spiritually destitute and has robbed the unity of the body of Christ.

What am I talking about? I am speaking of a divisive tactic of the Enemy called “partiality,” an epidemic of the wildest proportions that affect show brothers and sisters relate to one another, crossing racial, gender, cultural, economic, and social boundaries. Sometimes, it has to do with how someone looks. Mostly, it plays out in how one has status over another. In all cases, it is rooted in stubborn pride. Many churches and Christian groups here in America have been deceived by the Enemy as they have consciously or unconsciously adopted this as part of their political structure and agenda.

To better illustrate my point, let me word paint a couple of scenarios where partiality might rear its ugly head:

1. You are brand new in town! Moving your residence 2000 miles across the country was not an easy task, but by God's grace, you made it. After a stressful week of learning the ropes at your new job, you rest in your easy chair in your living room. Suddenly, something goes THUD on your front doorstep. You open the door to find the evening paper rolled up in a rubber band. With the paper, you sit back down in your chair and begin to read. When you turn the page to the religion section, it has just occurred to you that you need to find some place to go to church, a place where you can worship the Lord, be fed sound doctrine, and where you can encourage and be encouraged by people in the Body. And so, you write down three churches and their addresses from the paper. The next day, before you make your way to the first church on the list, you put on your best clothes, wear some of your strongest deodorant, slick back your hair, shave that two day beard, and 'pop' that mint. But, when you show up, no one greets you at the door. You

find your way to the visitor table, but the greeter is too busy having a conversation with the youth pastor. And so, you grab a "Hello, my name is [insert the name 'Bob']" sticker and put it on yourself. Looking around, you begin to notice people giving you quick glances. Some even seem uncomfortable. On top of this, everyone looks better, smells better, and 'acts' better. Their clothes are lined with the Neimen Marcus logo; yours was bought at Super K. Every member is white; you're not. Their cars consist of Cadillacs, Lexuses, and Lincoln Towncars; your car is a 1981 Chevette. However, the worship was good and the preaching seemed to be Christ-centered with a great Romans 4 exposition of 'Justification by faith' But, when you got up to leave, everyone went back to their huddles, so you couldn't say goodbye to anyone. You walked out, pulled out your list and hoped church #2 would be a better experience.

2. The last several weeks have seemed like a blur. On April 17th, you were in a car accident on your way to a missions board meeting in which you would be considered as a missionary in the South America. However, your dreams seem to be shattered. A month and a half ago, the police and ambulance had to use the 'jaws of life' to pry you out of your mangled car. Well, after weeks of physical therapy and plastic surgery due to the impact of your face hitting the windshield, you are now free to leave the hospital. However, your job at Southwestern Bell was terminated. But this doesn't discourage you as you know the Lord is calling you to the Hispanic culture. You begin, again, approaching the Brothers and Sisters with the need of support. But when they saw your marred face, when they saw you limping through the hallway, and when they heard your slurred speech, the doors, somehow, slammed shut. Your abilities have now seemed limited, and so now the mission board raises questions as to whether or not you are qualified to serve. With this, the finances stopped coming in. In addition, your relationships begins to dissipate. You go home with nothing else to do except cry.

Now, let me ask all of us a question: How does God feel about this?? How does God feel when a group of believers look down on someone because of the clothes they wear, because of how they talk, or because of the color of their skin. Maybe they are a little awkward. Maybe, they do not have very much money. But, we turn away...

These two scenarios are NOT exaggerations. This goes on in the church in America ALL THE TIME. I have seen people associate with others simply because of how fat their wallet is, what gender they are, or how slick they appear to be. Many women will snub a guy (who intends only to be kind) and turn around and 'hob-knob' with a guy who has more physical affluence (i.e. game playing between brothers and sisters).. Many will talk to people with their own race and culture and ignore those outside, of whom they don't understand...perhaps with some racial slur under their breath.

Now, for the HARD facts. What I have described to you is the maimed church of Jesus Christ. How can we say we love Jesus and despise our brothers? How can we say we live for God and take advantage of our sisters? How can we call ourselves 'Christians' and treat others in the body of Christ with contempt. This is not love. It is horrible. And everyone of us, including myself, has been guilty of this somewhere along the line.

So what is the reason for all of this? The problem goes back to our marred view of who we think we are, preferring to hang around those who can stroke our egos and boost our personal self-image. Our problem is that we view ourselves as superior to others, that somehow, we are more worthy or more righteous than Brother Joe or Sister Jane based on how they look or seem to act. We see ourselves as more deserving of God's attention and love.

Also, many times, we see outsiders as a threat to the security of our church, social group. Well, I hate to say it, but the church of Jesus Christ is not a social club. It is not a clique. As a friend of mine put it, "The church is not a homogenous group of people."

Taking a trip back to the New Testament, we find that Jesus generally didn't hang around the physically, economically and socially affluent. He hung out with the 'drag' of society. He spent time with the lowlifes. His attention was toward those who were helpless, weak, and sinful (and real about it).

Our problem is that we are too (self) righteous for our own good. Our righteousness is only

based on how we appear to be rather than the condition of our hearts. Let's review a little of what John had to say about this:

I John 2:9 "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now."

I John 3:10 "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother."

I John 3:14 "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

I John 4:20-21 "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."

James 2:1-4 "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'Sit here at my footstool,' have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges of evil thoughts." (For more, read verses 5-13)

Romans 12:9-16 "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving

the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Be of the SAME mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion."

Partiality is a sin. Let us examine our own hearts. The next time a new believer comes into our midst, let us welcome him. The next time someone who is different but lives for Jesus walks by our 'group', let us embrace her. Because it is still true that we need each other! If we wound the people who we perceive as weak, it only proves to weaken 'us'.