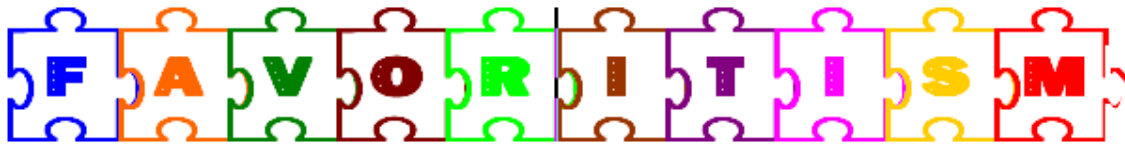




DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

---

**MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES...**

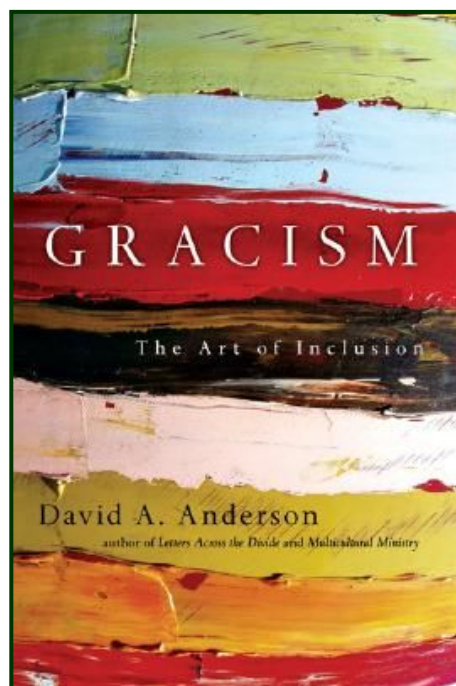


---

# WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

**AUGUST 2, 2009**

**LESSON #3** FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



## MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES...

WEEK #3 — I WILL SHARE WITH YOU (“FAVORITISM”)

Charlie Boswell was blinded during World War II while rescuing his friend from a tank that was under attack from enemy fire. Charlie was a great athlete before his accident and in a testimony to his talent and determination, he decided to try a brand new sport, a sport he never imagined with his eyesight – golf. Through determination and a deep love for the game, he became the National Blind Golf Champion. He received that honor 13 times. One of his heroes was the great golfer Ben Hogan, so it was truly an honor for Charlie to win the Ben Hogan Award in 1958.

Upon meeting Ben Hogan, Charlie was awestruck and stated that he had one wish and it was to have one round of golf with the great Ben Hogan. Mr. Hogan agreed that playing a round of golf together would be an honor for him as well, as he had heard about all of Charlie’s accomplishments and truly admired his skills. “Would you like to play for money, Mr. Hogan?” blurted out Charlie. “I can’t play you for money, it wouldn’t be fair,” said Mr. Hogan. “Aw come on, Mr. Hogan...\$1,000 per hole!” “I can’t. What would people think of me, taking advantage of you and your circumstance,” replied Hogan. “Chicken, Mr. Hogan?” “Okay,” blurted a frustrated Hogan, “but I am going to play my best.” “I wouldn’t expect anything else,” said the confident Boswell. “You’re on Mr. Boswell,” said Ben Hogan, “you name the time and place.” A very self-assured Boswell responded, “10 o’clock...tonight!”

Charlie Boswell knew just how to level the playing field with his idol, Ben Hogan, didn’t he? And, in a way, we’re talking about the same principle this morning—not taking advantage of the situation because of who we are or what we have. As we continue our series from David Anderson’s book, *Gracism*, we’re wrapping up our study on not showing favoritism, or partiality, but sharing what we have with those less fortunate. We are not

to show partiality because of race, class or culture. That really is what *gracism* is all about.

As we begin, let's read our foundational scripture verses for this week from **1 CORINTHIANS 12:23-24 (NIV)**: <sup>23</sup>*and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty,* <sup>24</sup>*while our presentable parts need no SPECIAL TREATMENT. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it...* As noted last week, although we, as Christians, should clearly extend God's grace to others—no matter what their race, class and culture—I don't think 1 Corinthians 12 says that. 1 Corinthians 12 is about spiritual gifts. These verses emphasize one major idea, according to Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary: *"The body is a magnificent picture of both unity and diversity at one and the same time... No one should exalt themselves because of the gift given to them, nor should any think themselves less because they receive a gift some view as less significant."*

**So, what does it mean in verse 24 when it talks about "our presentable parts need no special treatment?"** Remember, however, in these verses Paul is talking about spiritual gifts within the body—so let's think in that perspective. Recall also that the spiritual gifts are specified in **1 Corinthians 12:7-10 (MSG)**, so let me refresh your memory by reading the list from Peterson's paraphrase in *The Message*: *All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful: wise counsel, clear understanding, simple trust, healing the sick, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.*

Now, although God may rank spiritual gifts, there should be no special treatment of one over the other. There's no partiality or difference with God. Listen to this verse from **ROMANS 2:11 (NIV)** that supports that scripturally: <sup>11</sup>*For God does not show favoritism.*

Now, let's talk about Paul's statement about no special treatment. True or false: We like to receive special, hands-on attention and service? Would you prefer to fly *first class* or *coach* on a flight across the country? How many of you have a VIP card or some other special privilege card in your wallet or purse? Maybe a club card for an airline or a frequent flyer card? Maybe a VIP card for a country club, an upscale restaurant, private club, or even a grocery store. I've got the latter. Here's my grocery store card, but I'm just not so sure that it portrays the idea that I'm a VIP—since it's called a "*Pig Card*" (FROM PIGGLY WIGGLY). **But, is there really anything wrong with getting special treatment or favoritism? Why?** Listen to this modern-day example:

*Calvary Church, a congregation in Fresno, California with 18,000 members, now offers "preferred seating" to members who tithe. Tithers flash green Costco-like cards at church greeters, "who let them in early and usher them to special seating areas. The special seats have more padding, and they recline," says Dan Phelps, who was interviewed while kicking back before the sermon. "I feel a little guilty, but you can't knock the comfort."*

Calvary is believed to be the first church in America to use membership cards to dole out privileges to certain members. First-time visitors are offered the best seats—plush recliners in the orchestra section—while non-tithing attendees carry orange cards and are forced to sit in hard, stadium-style seats on the mezzanine. The pastor, in explaining this new and novel approach, adds, "We give honor to whom honor is due. If you tithe or volunteer in some way, you deserve a special thank you."

Churches like Calvary in Fresno are drawing what they admittedly note are wealthier "church consumers" by promoting luxury and social stratification inside the sanctuary. As more and more rich people attend, so the theory goes, tithe revenues increase and the church better promotes the gospel say those who defend it. Hum, I do wonder. What about the words we just read from **Romans 2:11** about *favoritism*?

Another mega-church, the Life Family Center in Abilene, Texas, offers members "reward points" similar to frequent flyer miles. These points are received for tithing and attending. The points add up to free hotel stays, vacation packages, and even tickets to NASCAR events. Not bad. I suppose no member with a reward card would want to "leave home without it" in this case. Encircling the Family Life Center's cavernous sanctuary are private skyboxes where groups watch the service while enjoying hors d'oeuvres and deep leather chairs. Not surprising to me, some of these special people pay only occasional attention to what takes place on the platform. Surprise, surprise! Its pastor defends this by adding that, "We compete with professional sporting events, not other churches. I would rather people come here than a football stadium, so I offer bigger perks. The same report noted that this year, at least a dozen more mega-churches will introduce some form of "club card." The pastor says, "The credit card commercial says it best: 'Membership has its privileges.'"

**What do you think? What does God's Word say?** Sounds a lot like what James writes about in **JAMES 2:1-13 (NIV)**. Let's look at those verses and see what they say about *favoritism* since that is the topic of discussion this week. As I read, I'd like for you to imagine how James might rephrase this if he were writing it today? <sup>1</sup>*My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.* <sup>2</sup>*Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.* <sup>3</sup>*If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"* <sup>4</sup>*have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?* <sup>5</sup>*Listen, my dear brothers: 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?* <sup>6</sup>*But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?* <sup>7</sup>*Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?*

*<sup>8</sup>If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. <sup>9</sup>But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup>For he who said, "Do not commit adultery,"<sup>1b</sup> also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. <sup>12</sup>Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, <sup>13</sup>because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*

**Any idea of an example that James might have used if he wrote those words today?**

Let me give you a contemporary example of one I think James may have written in modern times: *When Charles Evans Hughes was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, he moved to Washington and transferred his membership to a Baptist church there. His father had been a Baptist minister, and Hughes had been a lifelong witness to his own faith in Christ. It was the custom in that Baptist church to have all new members come forward during the morning service and be introduced to the congregation. On this particular day, the first to be called was a Chinese laundryman, Ah Sing, who had moved to Washington from San Francisco and kept a laundry near the church. He stood at the far side of the pulpit. As others were called, they took positions at the extreme opposite side. When a dozen people had gathered, Ah Sing still stood alone. Then Chief Justice Hughes was called, and he significantly stood next to the laundryman. A Christian who only associates with people of the same intellectual, academic, or professional interests is not living up to what Scripture mandates.*

Verse 1 of James 2 is clear on the subject— *"don't show favoritism."* That's pretty much what the verse in Romans 2:11 says as well, except the Romans' verse is a reference to God

Himself. Now, if you're asking why we are not to show favoritism, let's look at verses 2-4 again and think of an example. Here, James gives an illustration of the kind of favoritism that was practiced in his day, in the Church. He says: *"...suppose a rich man wearing a gold ring and fine clothes comes to your meeting, and a poor man in ragged clothes also comes."* Some call this *"the case of the near-sighted usher,"* because he could not see beyond the physical. Now, in our church we emphasize the fact that there is no dress code. We want you to be comfortable. But you may know churches where being dressed up is expected and apparently in the time and church James is addressing, the way a person was dressed really said something.

So, this rich man was really "decked out." He's immaculately groomed and looking good. He just reeks of money. The text literally describes him as "a gold-fingered man." So he'd have diamond rings on his fingers, a gold bracelet, a Rolex Presidential watch and a cross pen with, say, a Harvard emblem on the top of it. Something real classy. But, right behind this GQ guy comes a poor man. Notice James doesn't say he has no clothes or his clothes are filthy, but ragged. Maybe he's wearing pants that are too short, his shirt is dirty, and he's got a Timex watch with a worn leather band. Well, these two people present the usher with a real dilemma. One's in rags and the other's in rags. They both arrive at the same time, the church service is about to begin and the place is packed.

According to **MATTHEW 23:6**, there were "chief seats" in the synagogue—places of honor that the religious leaders loved to sit in. I suspect these seats were toward the front, right on the aisle so they could make a grand entrance. But, in verse 3 James says. *"Look, if you put the rich man in a place of honor but tell the poor man to sit on the floor in the back, your thoughts are evil and your motives are less than pure."* **Now, what could make a person act in such a way? Why would someone in the church show such obvious discriminatory treatment?** Maybe he was thinking, "Boy, if I can cater to this wealthy man maybe he'll befriend me and invite me out on his boat or to his

restaurant or something similar." Or maybe he wasn't having selfish thoughts but he reasoned, "You know our Church could use some money. We've ordered a new air conditioning system for the sanctuary and really need help. Maybe, if we treat him right, we could convince him to donate something or at least give a big down payment. I know I shouldn't show favoritism but you've got to be practical and this guy could help in a big way." Maybe he also rationalizes that the poor man would be embarrassed if he were seated up front, he'd be more comfortable in the back.

But can't you see this usher just doting all over this rich man? "Sir, I've got a seat for you where you'll have a clear view. The preacher's one of the best, the message is always great, (he's a very honest usher...), so sit up front and just know how glad we are that you're here. And comfort is our middle name, so are you right handed or left handed? Right handed? Good we'll put you on the left aisle so that you'll be unencumbered.".... And he's thinking, "Yea, so your right hand will be free and moving, especially when the offering basket is passed." And the usher treats this guest like a king and that's not bad, in fact something you want, as long as everyone is treated like royalty. But he was not equal in his treatment and that's what was wrong. And apparently that was a problem in the churches he was writing to and that's why James condemns them in verse 4, *"...you are guilty of creating distinctions among yourselves and making judgments based on evil motives."*

Showing partiality or favoritism sets one up as the judge of men. It makes one as though he or she is God. We tell who can and cannot worship God; we decide who is and who is not acceptable to God. This is something only God can do because it could make a difference in a person's eternal security. *In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk*

*to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu." That usher's prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior.*

Since we're talking about extending God's grace to others, in spite of their race, culture or class, one attribute of God that we don't hear much about is that He is **IMPARTIAL**. God is absolutely and totally impartial in dealing with people, but I'm afraid it isn't so with us. We are very partial. We have a virtual caste system that is based on popularity, looks, race, social status, and wealth. A person's education, economic status, looks, clothes, social status, job, fame, prestige, and earthly honor all mean nothing to God. Turn to **DEUTERONOMY 10:17-20 (NKJV)**, <sup>17</sup>*"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.* <sup>18</sup>*"He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.* <sup>19</sup>*"Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.* <sup>20</sup>*"You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name."*

God tells us that His is impartial and says that we are to also be impartial. Listen to these words from **2 CHRONICLES 19:7 (CEV)**, <sup>7</sup>*"So do your work in honor of him and know that he won't allow you to be unfair to anyone or to take bribes."* Because God is impartial, he calls His people to be impartial, and disciplines them when they are not. Now listen to these words from **MALACHI 2: 9 (CEV)**: <sup>9</sup>*"So I caused everyone to hate and despise you, because you disobeyed me and failed to treat all people alike."*

Just the opposite of that is favoritism. As we just read in James, showing favoritism or partiality reveals evil thoughts. Look back at the words of **JAMES 2:4** again, <sup>4</sup>*have you not discriminated*

*among yourselves and become judges with **EVIL THOUGHTS?*** Listen to this story I read recently in the newsletter *Our America*:

*"Dodie Gadiant, a schoolteacher for thirteen years, decided to travel across America and see the sights she had taught about. Traveling alone in a truck with camper in tow, she launched out. One afternoon rounding a curve on I-5 near Sacramento in rush-hour traffic, a water pump blew on her truck. She was tired, exasperated, scared, and alone. In spite of the traffic jam she caused, no one seemed interested in helping. "Leaning up against the trailer, she prayed, 'Please God, send me an angel . . . preferably one with mechanical experience.'*

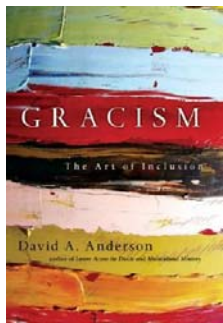
*Within four minutes, a huge Harley drove up, ridden by an enormous man sporting long, black hair, a beard and tattooed arms. With an incredible air of confidence, he jumped off and, without even glancing at Dodie, went to work on the truck. Within another few minutes, he flagged down a larger truck, attached a tow chain to the frame of the disabled Chevy, and whisked the whole 56-foot rig off the freeway onto a side street, where he calmly continued to work on the water pump. "The intimidated schoolteacher was too dumbfounded to talk, especially when she read the paralyzing words on the back of his leather jacket: 'Hell's Angels—California'. As he finished the task, she finally got up the courage to say, 'Thanks so much,' and carry on a brief conversation. Noticing her surprise at the whole ordeal, he looked her straight in the eye and mumbled, 'Don't judge a book by its cover. You may not know who you're talking to.' With that, he smiled, closed the hood of the truck, and straddled his Harley. With a wave, he was gone as fast as he had appeared."*

Showing favoritism or partiality discriminates against the poor and lowly. The verses we've read today in James and other books tell us that God loves the rich as well as the poor. Listen to these words from **PSALM 14:6 (NIV)**: ***You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge.*** The church should communicate the same message. The church needs to be a place where all can come regardless of social status. *General*

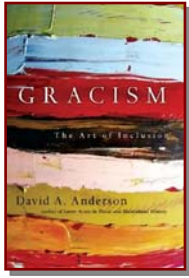
*Robert E. Lee was a devout follower of Jesus Christ. It is said that soon after the end of the American Civil War, he visited a church in Washington, D.C. During the communion service, he knelt beside a black man. An onlooker said to him later, "How could you do that?" Lee replied, "My friend, all ground is level beneath the cross."*

Is our church a place that expresses God's grace to everyone regardless of race, class or culture? Let's get rid of our classism, our prejudice, our pride and open our doors—and our hearts—to all who seek salvation regardless of race, social status, wealth, or clothing. Let us become a body that cares about the person.

**Let's Pray!** Thank you, Father, that all people are equal in your eyes. Forgive us for judging people by appearances and accomplishments. Forgive us for favoring the rich and powerful over the poor and weak. Oh God, change our hearts. Teach us what it means to love our neighbors as ourselves.



© 2009 R. DEAN WELCH  
AUGUST 2, 2009



## SESSION THREE — AUGUST 2, 2009

### MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES...



1. 1 Corinthians 12: 23-24 (NIV): *"And the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty while our presentable parts need no \_\_\_\_\_ . But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it..."*
2. James 2: 11 (NIV) says, *"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show \_\_\_\_\_ ."*
3. Showing partiality or favoritism sets one up as the \_\_\_\_\_ of men. It makes one as though he or she is \_\_\_\_\_ .
4. One attribute of God that we don't hear much about is that He is \_\_\_\_\_. God is absolutely and totally \_\_\_\_\_ in dealing with people.  
  
\* 2 Chronicles 19:7 (CEV), *"So do your work in honor of him and know that \_\_\_\_\_ won't allow you to be \_\_\_\_\_ to anyone or to take bribes."*
5. Because God is impartial, he calls His people to be impartial, and \_\_\_\_\_ them when they are not.  
  
\* Malachi 2: 9 (CEV): *"So I caused everyone to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ you, because you disobeyed me and failed to treat all people \_\_\_\_\_ ."*
6. The church needs to be a place where \_\_\_\_\_ can come regardless of \_\_\_\_\_ status.