

God is No Respector of Persons

by Caleb Colley, Ph.D.

When the first Gentile was converted to Christianity, the apostle Peter perceived that “God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35). Before the church was established and Gentiles began to be converted to Christ, many Jews supposed that God favored them over all other ethnic groups; some had the false notion that merely being Jewish was a sure sign that one was saved (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; 7:30).

When the religious barrier between Jews and Gentiles was broken down, Peter more fully understood one important aspect of God’s character: He does not favor—and never has favored—one person or group of people over others. Whether or not the Israelites always understood it, **anyone** who obeys God’s commands can be justified in His sight. Consider a sampling of the passages that emphasize God’s fairness toward all humans:

2 Chronicles 19:7: “Now therefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes.”

Job 34:19: “Yet He is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of His hands.”

Romans 2:10-11: “[B]ut glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.”

Galatians 5:6: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision or uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”

1 Peter 1:17: “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.”

Exactly what does it mean that God is impartial? God offers salvation to every man, no matter what external circumstances, such as socioeconomic status or nationality, might apply to him. God does not offer salvation only to the Jew, just because he is a Jew, or only to the Gentile because he is a Gentile. The Greek word translated “respector of persons” in the King James Version of Acts 10:34 (“God is no respector of persons”) is *prosopolemptes*, a word that refers to a judge who looks at a man’s face instead of at the facts of the case, and makes a decision based on whether or not he likes the man (Lenski, 1961, p. 418). Under Roman law, for example, a defendant’s societal status was weighed heavily along with evidence. Any human judge might show undue favor to a plaintiff or a defendant because of private friendship, bribery, rank, power, or political affiliation, but God, the perfect Judge, cannot be tempted by any of the things that might tempt a human judge to show unfair partiality.

God’s impartiality does not keep Him from choosing people and nations of people to accomplish His specific purposes. He was free to use the Israelites as the seed line to bring about the Son of God in human form (the Israelites have never been the only group of people who had access to salvation—see Romans 1:18ff; Jackson, 2004); He was free to use the Babylonians to defeat the disobedient Israelites in battle and to take the spoils from them (2 Kings 25:1-21); He was free to use Peter and Paul to spread the Gospel to lost sinners. God can accomplish everything He needs to do without violating His commitment to allow all the opportunity to be saved.

Furthermore, God blesses people in different ways. God’s impartiality does not mean that everyone will have exactly the same amount of money, exactly the same amount of influence, exactly the same number of children, or exactly the same number of years upon the Earth. (At the very moment that Peter noted God’s impartiality, he was in the presence of a man who possessed more material wealth than Peter did.) Some **do** have more money than others, some have families who love them more, and some even have more opportunities to hear the Gospel preached. However, **everyone** can be saved, if he is willing to search for the truth. While some accountable adults may live their entire lives without hearing a single Gospel sermon, they all experience the marvelous works of the hand of God, showing every person that He exists. Paul wrote:

[W]hat may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened (Romans 1:19-21).

God always has expected impartiality from His followers. We should not treat people differently because of their financial status or outward appearance. The Lord said: "You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty" (Leviticus 19:15). Deuteronomy 1:17 reads: "You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great." After describing a scenario in which a rich man was given a favored seat in the assembly, and a poor man was pushed to the side, James wrote: "But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:9). In stating that Christians should not show partiality because they believe in Christ, James, by inspiration, suggested that favoritism—treating certain people as if they are of more inherent worth—is inconsistent with faith in Christ, and causes one to violate God's law of liberty (2:8,12).

We are grateful that God has not arbitrarily chosen some people to be saved and some to be lost. Imagine a basis upon which He might select which people should be saved. Would He choose the wealthy? The well known? The most intelligent? Members of a particular ethnic group or culture? Fortunately, each person can choose for himself whether or not to accept God's saving grace (Joshua 24:15; Isaiah 7:16; Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 23:37; Revelation 22:17). Each person is responsible for his or her own actions (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Because of God's marvelous love for all humans, He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9; cf. 1 Timothy 2:4).

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