

## When Church Hurts

**James 2:1 – 10** *“ My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors”.*

James comes down hard over those who are biased in favor of, or partial to – rich over poor, for instance. James is reminding those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ to live our lives having no partiality among people. We are to emulate Jesus and “love our neighbor as ourselves” and “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

We tend to look at and react to people based on their outward appearance or circumstances in their lives. Our flesh nature looks through narrowly manmade glasses causing us to gravitate towards people who look or think like we do, perhaps avoiding those in a different tax bracket, a different neighborhood, those who have some spiritual or denominational differences or those who praise, worship or pray differently than we do.

By abiding in the Holy Spirit we can see that people are made in the image of God and realize that we are all redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ or in need of redemption. God looks at the heart. God has no partiality with regard to persons.

But our world is filled with hurting people both Christian and the lost that feel hopeless, desperately searching for love and acceptance and something or someone that they can trust. In a sin cursed world where drugs, pornography, sex, alcohol, divorce, abuse and violence seems to be the norm, even though there is no hope in any of these worldly things, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life prevents them from seeing the truth. When they reach a crisis in their lives they may realize that they need help, but may search in all the wrong places, leading them down a destructive path which can lead to more pain and chaos in their lives.

We as Christians can share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the hope that we have and allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to be examples of Christ’s love. But what if they do not find what they are looking for in the body of Christ and in our church buildings on Sunday morning? What if church hurts?

Like the poor man who is mentioned in James 2, there are many people who have felt the pain of going to a church and are treated differently only adding to the pain they already feel. Perhaps you’ve gone to a church that you haven’t been to before and weren’t even noticed or nobody talked to you. You may have been ignored or condemned by your peers at church

instead of encouraged, supported and comforted. You may have felt the stab of people's glances of disapproval or the condemning attitudes of your fellow Christians. Some churches seem to be more concerned about the clothes, makeup, jewelry or length of your hair or how church members should act than they are about having a heart to see the lost come to know Christ. Some Christian brothers, sisters or pastors seem to have it all together, hiding behind a mask, leaving no room for those of us to go forward during the invitation to seek prayer for our addictions, our marriages or families that are falling apart, our strongholds of pornography or adultery, our mental or spiritual illness, our hopelessness, our abusive relationships, or our divorce or abuse that we have suffered in the past that is still affecting us. All of these things affect us spiritually, but no matter how badly you are hurting you may feel that you dare not mention these things to what feels like the holier than thou crowd. Many of us have been victims of the sinful, selfish or hurtful acts of those in a church. Many people have been abused by a priest or minister, or gone to a church where the pastor has fallen into the trap of pornography or adultery. These things happen all the time. Many people are leaving church because of these hurts and disappointments.

Whatever the wound, you may feel like you never want to have anything to do with a church again. If you have become disillusioned by the ignorance or neglect on the part of someone who should have been there for you, or by the example of your pastor who is living in sin, or your inability to feel comfortable talking about your problems, you are not alone. There is a soul-ution.

But, first we need to realize that God alone is perfect and as humans we have a tendency to think that our church experience is going to be or should be perfect. But, God uses imperfect people to further His Kingdom and serve Him. No church is perfect nor immune from having dysfunction. In our Christian walk, hurts are inevitable, regardless if it is within the church or not. If you are going to a church where the pastor is living in sin and you are not getting fed the Word, I say, "Run, don't walk to another church." But if you are waiting for the church to meet all of your needs you will continue to feel hurt and frustrated.

We need to remember that one of the things we tend to do after being hurt is to avoid whomever or whatever has hurt us. Going to church is no exception. Unlike physical hurts, spiritual hurts seem to stimulate a response unlike any other wound. We tend to focus on the hurter instead of the Healer.

I believe this is one of Satan's tactics ~ to distract us with the pain so that the wound will fester and keep us from our spiritual potential and God's purpose for our lives. If we listen to the deceiver we will isolate from the people or things that have hurt us and become sour with cynicism and we will give in to the thoughts that say, "Just forget about going to church," or "I don't want to have anything to do with those people ever again."

The voice of truth says to use whatever we go through for God's glory.

The apostle Paul begged God to remove his affliction. Paul came to an important realization that we must also learn to be an effective Christian. "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **II Corinthians 12:9** Satan would love us to believe that getting hurt and feeling broken is when we resign and give up and give in. Our brokenness is part of God's plan; for it is when we are broken that we can receive God's healing and spiritual growth. If we stop just short of the healing and growth we

allow Satan to win.

It is important for us to live a self less life serving the Lord. God tells us not to put our trust in man. We need to look to Jesus for what we need instead of looking to the church to fill us. God will never leave us nor forsake us. As far as the rest of us in the church; I know I'm one of those flawed people and those around me will have to rely on the grace of God at times when I make mistakes. I have hurt people even though that was not my intent.

Feeling like a victim and deciding to stay there is optional. If we choose to nurse our victimhood rather than treat our wounds, they can become spiritually life threatening and can cause us to lose faith in people, in church and in God.

We can choose bitterness or choose emotional and spiritual healing. The end results are diametrically different. One choice leaves us paralyzed in the past. The other choice gives hope for the future as we look to Christ.

If you have stopped going to church or have been hurt by people at church; there are emotionally healthy churches that you can go to where you can learn to trust again and could be just what you need to heal. Being hurt by and leaving a church is similar to a divorce. We can become bitter and vow to never let anyone hurt us again or we can hold on to what we know is true; reading God's Word and keeping our intimate relationship with Christ strong. By arming ourselves with God's truth, submitting to God and resisting the devil, taking our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ and allowing God to use us for His glory we will be strengthened and be an effective Christian. What may have been meant to take you out of the battle can make you a stronger warrior for the Lord, and because of what you have been through, God can use you to have compassion for any wounded comrades.