THE CHURCH IN THE MIRROR:
Are You Reflecting Your Diverse Community?

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Introduction:

Self inspection is beneficial. It's good to look in the mirror to see what we look like and to see what needs correction. In our churches it is infinitely more vital that we look in the mirror to see how we line up with what God expects of our ministries.

As pastors, we should evaluate the state of the flock that the Lord has entrusted to us to tend for Him. As we look into our church's mirror and evaluate our ministry, many needs will become evident.

One need that often gets overlooked is this one. It involves the need to reach out to all people with the Gospel of Christ. Now all of us would make the claim: "We do reach out to all people!" The validity of that claim might be checked by our answer to this question: Does our ministry reflect the community in which we minister? In other words, are we reaching out to all in our community regardless of ethnicity & economics?. Does the makeup of our church reflect the varied peoples of our community?

If there is diversity in your neighborhood, there should be diversity in your church.

This National Leadership Conference is dealing with the topic of ministering in a changing world.

The World is changing in many ways every day. Immigration statistics prove that the world is rapidly becoming more integrated as people groups co-mingle, particularly in major cities world-wide.

Our world (and particularly our country) is seeing a co-mingling of peoples. A multi-culturalism has been born. Multi-ethnicity, like it or not, is abounding close to where you live and minister.

The world is coming together (just as God foretold through the prophet Daniel – Dan. 2:42-43 – *"And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay"*.)

A multitude of racial groups has landed on our shores, and this provides us with a great opportunity to impact the world right on our door step. This door will close in our face if we allow prejudice to control our perspective and attitudes toward these of a diverse background or color.

This thought should go without saying: There is no place for racism, prejudice, or any failure on our part to reach out to everyone in our community with equality of effort and interest.

If we are honest, we would generally have to admit that:

1. We like to minister to people who are "like us"
2. We are prone (due to our selfish sin natures) to prioritize people who we think will benefit us in some way and avoid those who have seemingly nothing to offer. (note the warning of James 2:1-9)
3. We have tendencies to avoid people who are ethnically different than we are.
4. We have tendencies to avoid people who are economically disadvantaged
5. We have tendencies to avoid people who we view as religiously "unreachable" (for example: the Hasidic Jew or the practicing Muslim)

We are fully aware that:

- **The Gospel is for every living human being**
  Mark 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature
  (Creature (κτισις ktisis) = any human living created being)

- **The work of the Great Commission involves discipling "all nations"**
  Matthew 28:19-20
  "Go ye therefore, and teach (lit. make disciples of) all nations. . ."
  ("nations" (εθνος ethnos) = All gentile/heathen people groups)

  Mark 13:10 And the gospel must first be published among all nations.
  Luke 24:47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.
  Romans 16:26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:
  Galatians 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

- **Heaven will be populated with people from every part of the earth**

  Rev. 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;
  Rev. 15:4 Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for *thou* only *art* holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

- **We, like the Apostle Paul, are debtors to every class & category of people:**
  Rom. 1:14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.
  Romans 1:14 is tied to the end of verse 13 because Paul is saying, "I wanted to come to you at Rome, but God had others besides you that He wanted me to share the gospel with (v. 13), because I am a debtor to all" (v. 14).

"I am debtor" = I am under a binding obligation.
For Paul, spreading the Gospel to all people was an obligation, not an option.
Paul saw himself as a debtor to all cultures and all classes.
To: Greeks - wise (educated)
Barbarians - unwise (uneducated)

The Barbarians were called this because of how their language sounded when it was spoken. To a Greek, this speaking sounded like they were saying: "Brrr-Brrr" (idle chatter).

- The Church of Antioch serves as a model for the diversity of people God uses in the local church:
  Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

  The Antiochian church had a spattering of Jews and Gentiles; Black & White; "Upper Class" & Lower Class"; Aristocratic & Formerly Religious.

* How can we build a ministry that reflects the diversity of our community?

We can build a ministry that reflects the diversity of our community by having

I. A <u>Biblical Anthropology</u> (Let God's perspective of people be your own)

(God's people must esteem the <u>soul</u> over the <u>skin</u>)
(Key Texts: Gen. 1:27, 9:6; James 3:9; Mark 8:37-37)
Realize that the essence of each human being does not consist in their skin color, size, shape, sex, or social status -- but in their <u>soul/spirit</u>.

*Realize the incredible value of a human soul!

1. Every person has been made in the <u>image</u> and <u>likeness</u> of God (Gen. 1:27; 9:6).

a. "Image" ("tselem") - points to man's personality features that are <u>reproductions</u> of God's spiritual, intellectual, and moral qualities.

b. "Likeness" ("demuth") - points to man as <u>not</u> being the same as God, but as being <u>similar</u> in pattern or model.

c. Why does God use both words, "image" and "likeness?"

To avoid the implication that man is a precise copy of God, albeit in miniature, the less specific and more abstract word "demuth" ("likeness") was added by God. "Demuth" then defines and limits the meaning of "tselem" (Humbert, Barr, T.W.O.T. Vol. 1, p. 192).

d. Man bears the image of God in three senses:

1) Man is like God in that he is a <u>person</u> (with personality). A "person" is a being who possesses self-consciousness, self-determination, intellect, emotion, will, world-consciousness, etc.
2) Man is like God in that he has a <u>spirit</u> (Jn. 4:24; I Cor. 6:20; cp. Eph. 4:23-24).
3) Man is like God in that he has a <u>moral nature</u> (a basic, innate comprehension of right and wrong - Rom. 2:14; Eccl. 7:29).

When Adam sinned, the image of God in man was marred and defiled but was not obliterated.

*Since mankind still retains this sense of the image of God, his life has a <u>dignity</u> and is to be <u>respected</u>, <u>honored</u>, and <u>protected</u>. Doing so honors the Creator (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9).

2. Every person has a soul-spirit which is of more value than all the <u>wealth</u> of the <u>world</u> (Mt. 16:26; Mk. 8:36, 37).

<u>Improper</u> definition of man:
"Man is a <u>body</u> who has a <u>soul/spirit</u>"

<u>Accurate</u> definition of man:
"Man is a <u>soul/spirit</u> who has a <u>body</u>"

The <u>SOUL</u>
Hebrew - נפש ("nephesh")
Greek - ψυχη ("psuche")
The "soul" is the immaterial aspect of man that gives him <u>life</u>
(Gen. 2:7 - "...Man became a living <u>soul</u>" ["nephesh"]).

The <u>SPIRIT</u>
Hebrew - רוח ("ruach")
Greek - πνευμα ("pneuma")

NOTE: The words "ruach" and "pneuma" in certain contexts are translated wind or breath (cp. Jn. 3:8; Rev. 11:11) because there is a parallel between the spirit and the wind or breath. "The spirit, like the wind, is invisible, immaterial, and powerful" (Vine, Expository Dictionary).

a. The "spirit" is the immaterial aspect of man that gives him a capacity to know and enjoy God.

1) We know God via the spirit (I Cor. 2:10-14).
2) We serve God with our spirit (Rom. 1:9 12:11)
3) Our spirit belongs to God (I Cor. 6:20)
4) The Holy Spirit bears witness to our human spirit (Rom. 8:16)
5) We pray and sing to God via the spirit (I Cor. 14:15)
6) God's grace is with our spirit (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23)
7) God's son Jesus Christ is with our spirit (II Tim. 4:22)
8) We are saved by God in our spirit (I Cor. 5:5)
9) Upon death, our spirit goes to Heaven
(Acts 7:59 - Note: the "soul" does also - Rev. 6:9)

b. Man's "spirit" is not to be equated with the "Holy Spirit."

Our spirit is distinct from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit ministers to the Christian by means of his human spirit, and the Holy Spirit lives in believers; but yet He is a distinct person.
God's Spirit does not need to be sanctified (He already is!), but our spirit must be (I Thes. 5:23).

c. Unsaved man does have a spirit, but it is "dead" in its relationship to God and its receptivity to God.

All unsaved do have a spirit, the problem is that it is not working in relationship to God.
It is "dead" (Eph.2:1-5) and needs to be renewed to life (Eph. 4:23)

Is there a difference (distinction) between man's soul and spirit?
Answer: Yes. Key Text: **I Thessalonians 5:23**

God divides "soul and spirit" in Heb. 4:12; I Cor. 2:14-15 and 15:44; and Luke 1:46-47.

What is the difference (distinction) between man's soul and spirit?
The "Spirit" is the immaterial (invisible) part of man that can relate to God (the spiritual realm).
The "Soul" is the immaterial part of man that relates to this life (the natural realm).

3. Every person's soul will live on for <u>eternity</u>

a. The souls of the saved are <u>with the Lord</u> (Gen.35:18; II Cor.5:8; Acts 7:59)

b. The souls of the lost are experiencing <u>eternal anguish & suffering</u> (Mt. 10:28; Rev. 14:11; 20:14,15)

Racism over skin color is foolish because a "soul" has no color and the soul/spirit is the essence of a man!

We can build a ministry that reflects the diversity of our community by having

II. An <u>Unprejudiced View</u> of all People

To be prejudiced is to pre-judge a person without knowing any facts about his/her own personal character.

Prejudice is judging a book by its cover without seeing the contents of its pages.

What is <u>prejudice</u>?

Prejudice is the sin of <u>pre-judging</u> a person based on a superficial, non-moral, exterior, surface evaluation. Prejudice evaluates <u>externals</u> over <u>internals</u> and often esteems the <u>temporal</u> over the <u>eternal</u>.

Biblical examples of people who made erroneous pre-judgments:

--Abraham toward Abimelech (Gen. 20:11)
--Joshua toward the Gibeonites (Josh. 9)
--Satan toward Job (Job 1:11, 2:5)
--Israel toward Saul (I Sam. 10:23-24)
--Goliath toward David (I Sam. 17:42-44)
--Pharisees toward John (for not eating & drinking) and Jesus (for eating & drinking)

How quick people are to judge (become critical of) a person based on:

--the clothing he/she wears (which is not necessarily an indication of the heart)
--the car he/she drives
--the Bible version he/she carries to church
(those who prefer the KJV are often judged as antiquated and uneducated, while those who read the NASV are judged to be liberal or at best New Evangelical)
--the denominational label attached to his/her church
--facial hair (beard - a symbol of rebellion; Beware: Mormons are as clean-cut as you can get!)

*Outward appearance vs. the heart
(I Sam. 16:7)

*Labels vs. inner reality
(cp. Mark 9:38-40)
--Denominational labels are sometimes misleading
For example: My first church Emmanuel Gospel Church in Newington, CT (though not having the name "Baptist") was a great church;
I have found that many "Baptists" in NYC are heretical

--A man's degrees (Ph.D., Th.M., etc.) are not necessarily indicative of his qualifications
(Labels are important [EX: at grocery store], but are not necessarily accurate descriptions of the true content of the man or ministry.)

Prior to having a clear understanding about a person, what attitude should we have toward him? Suspicion? Skepticism? Or love? (I Cor. 13:7)

Prejudice is "thinking negatively of others without sufficient justification. Prejudice is the process of stereotyping, by which certain characteristics, either positive or negative, are ascribed to all members of a group." (Gordon Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (1954), cited by Breckenridge, What Color is Your God? p. 61)

Jesus described the heart of prejudice very succinctly when He said: *"Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment"* (John 7:24). The word *"appearance"* is derived from the word *opsis* (akin to "optic," the eye), which refers to that which you see, outward appearance, the outward aspect of a person, his face (Jn. 11:44) or countenance.

To the legalistic Pharisees, who were making a judgment of Him for healing a man on the Sabbath, Christ said, in effect, "Stop judging based on outward, face value, external criteria, and make decisions about Me based on the truth and righteousness of my actions."

The Bible does not teach that we should not judge; indeed, we must have discernment and make discriminatory judgments (I Thes. 5:21; Rev. 2:2; I Cor. 5:5-11; Rom. 16:17; John 7:24).

However, we are never to judge with a nasty, unmerciful, harsh, censorious, critical, and condemning attitude (Mt. 7:1), nor are we to discriminate prematurely against a particular person or situation without having all the facts about that person or situation.

No discerning man of God should make inalterable pre-evaluations about anything without seeking the truth and concrete evidence about a man or matter.

". . . the honor of kings is to search out a matter" (Prov. 25:2).

The noble Bereans did not just take Paul's word for it; they *"searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

God's Word is clear about the folly of making judgments about any matter before obtaining the specific facts (cp. Prov. 18:13).

The basic, underlying, core cause of prejudice is sinful pride. How we view "self" will influence how we view others. People naturally love themselves; it is part of man's selfish nature to elevate self and anything related to ourselves. Our egotistical pride will therefore favor others who look like us, act like us, have some resource or material that will benefit us. At the heart of prejudice is a vain idolatry, an attitude of supremacy.

It is a sinful tendency (of fallen, depraved humanity) to think of ourselves--and hence our nationality, race, or color--as being superior to others.

Examples:

--The Greeks during the time of Alexander the Great
--The Romans during the time of the Caesars
--The Germans during the time of Adolph Hitler
--The Klu Klux Klan of today
--The Nation of Islam (Louis Farrakan) and the Black Israelite movement of today

Why is prejudice so wicked?

>It often extols race over righteousness
>It often esteems color over character
>It often respects popularity over principle
>It often glorifies culture over conduct
>It often values wealth over worth
>It often evaluates externals not internals
>It often smacks of evolution over creationism
>It often promotes division over unity
>It often instigates strife rather than peace/harmony
>It often elevates nationalistic pride over Christ-like humility

People behave in response to what they believe (how people act toward others is a manifestation of the belief system they hold to). A flawed or skewed theology will result in an erroneous view of God, self, and others.

We can build a ministry that reflects the diversity of our community by having

III. A <u>Humble Attitude</u> about yourself in comparison with people who differ from you

A. Beware of the Pride of <u>RACIAL</u> SUPREMACY

(God's people must extol <u>righteousness</u> over <u>race</u>)

(Key Text: Acts 10:9-48)

***Don't glory in your <u>people</u> (Look in the mirror for a wrong feeling of <u>national</u> pride)**

Jew and Gentile are equal in the body of Christ. (Rom. 2:11 - *"For there is no respect of persons with God."*) God does not show racial favoritism (nor should we!) (v. 34)

Why not? 4 Evidences:

1. GOD'S <u>APPROVAL</u> IS TOWARD ALL (V. 9-16)
   (All men, whether Jew or Gentile, are <u>kosher</u> with God)

   Peter had a nationalistic pride that God would have to erode. God would have to prepare Peter to let him know that He accepted all - Jew and Gentile on an <u>equal basis</u>.

2. GOD'S <u>MESSAGE</u> IS FOR ALL (V. 17-33)
   (All men have the right to <u>hear</u> the <u>Word</u> of God)

3. GOD'S <u>GRACE</u> IS FOR ALL (V. 34-43)
   (All men can be <u>forgiven</u> by the <u>Son</u> of God)

   a. GOD GRACIOUSLY <u>INVITES</u> ALL (V. 34-35)
   b. GOD GRACIOUSLY <u>GAVE HIS SON</u> FOR ALL (V. 36-42)
   c. GOD GRACIOUSLY <u>FORGIVES</u> ALL WHO BELIEVE (V. 43)

4. GOD'S <u>SPIRIT</u> IS FOR ALL (V. 44-48)
   (All believers are <u>baptized</u> by the <u>Spirit</u> of God)

The Christian's identity should not be "in his people," but "in Christ."

No servant of God can tolerate the sin of racial discrimination in his life.

All of us discriminate on a daily basis (i.e. we make judgments or decisions to choose on thing over another based on reasonable criteria; example: the supermarket, the car to buy, the school to attend, the boy to marry, the truth to believe, etc.).
Discrimination is not wrong (on moral matters, on stewardship matters).

However, racial discrimination is wrong (note: racial discrimination and homosexual discrimination are not the same issue. Why? You did not have a choice as to your skin color, but you do have a choice as to the lifestyle you choose to live.).

1. No racism (because all men are created equal) (Gen. 1:27)
2. No nationalistic pride (because our citizenship is in Heaven) (Phil. 3:20)

*Don't nurture an attitude of ethnic supremacy.

Beware of the influences of the "White Supremists" -
--Klu Klux Clan
--Hitler mentality
--Gloria Sanger
--Deep South USA prejudice

Beware of the influences of the "Black Supremists" -
--Black Israelites
--Black Muslims (Louis Farrakan's Nation of Islam)
--Black Pride movements
(Black heritage Bibles, etc.)

B. Beware of the Pride of SOCIAL SUPREMACY

(God's people must respect a man's principle over his popularity)
(Key Text: I Cor. 1:24-31)
***Don't glory in your fame and notoriety (Look in the mirror for social pride)**

The Corinthians' main problem was "I" trouble. "I am this; I can do that; I am better than you are," etc.
They were *"puffed up"* with pride (I Cor. 4:6, 18-19; 5:2).
In these first three chapters, Paul deflates their pride and elevates, magnifies, and exalts God.

Note the previous context:
In verses 17-25, the Apostle Paul portrayed the message of God (*"the preaching of the cross"* - v. 18)
as being weak in men's eyes, but mighty in God's eyes.

Now in verses 26-31, he portrays the people of God as being weak in the world's eyes, but blessed in God's eyes.
Continuing with the intention to deflate the Corinthians' vain pride and to humble those who glory in men, Paul shows the type of people God saves and uses for His glory.

God not only has a message the unsaved, perishing world regards as *"foolish"* (v. 18, 21, 23, 25), but He also has messengers they mighty view as foolish.

God not only has a gospel the godless, unconverted, lost, pagan world would disregard, but He has a people that often don't add up to much in the world's estimation.

God is not desperately "looking for millionaires or famous athletes or entertainers or statesmen" as if He needed their money, fame, fortune, or talent to get His work done!

The Lord specializes in converting simple folk, common people, the under-privileged, the down-and-outers, the project kids, and other looked-down-upon groups.

Some might say: "That's because they are the only ones dumb enough to believe the Bible."

No, actually, they are the only ones humble enough to believe!
Jesus said, *"I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes."* (Mt. 11:25).

God delights in taking a Sarah who could not bear children and making her the mother of one of the largest races on earth (Gen. 18:14, 32:12)

God delights in taking a humble slave like Joseph and elevating him second to Pharaoh over Egypt (Gen. 41:38-44).

God delights in enlisting 300 soldiers of Gideon to fight and conquer 120,000 Mideanites (Jud. 7:2, 7, 12; 8:10) (NOTE: 400 to 1 odds).

God delights in utilizing a Samson to destroy 1,000 wicked Philistines with a jawbone of a donkey (Jud. 15:16).

God delights in using a red-headed, freckle-faced, baby-faced (I Sam. 17:42) shepherd boy named David to wipe out a 9'9" fully armored Philistine named Goliath (I Sam. 17).

God delights in providing adequate food for a poor widow of Zarephath who only had a few drops of oil and a handful of grain (I Ki. 17:9ff).

God delights in using three Hebrew youths to show up King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Dan. 3).

God delights in using as His mouthpiece a John the Baptist, "who had no formal education, no training in a trade or profession, no money, no military rank, no political position, no social pedigree, no impressive appearance (or diet!)" (MacArthur, p. 51). Yet Jesus said, *"Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist"* (Mt. 11:11).

God delights in taking a boy's lunch consisting of two sardines and five bite-size biscuits to feed 5,000 men besides women and children (Mt. 14:17-19).

"Little is much when God is in it." -- Conversely, much is little, if God is not in it!

God delights in taking unlearned, ignorant, dumb fishermen from Galilee and turning them into the most bold and influential mortals ever to spread the Gospel message (Acts 4:13).

**God can take someone the world views as a "nobody" and make a somebody out of him! ... He can take something the world views as "nothing" and make something out of it!*

Why?

God mightily transforms "nobodies" and "nothings"...

1. To display His wisdom & power (v.24-26)
2. To shame the wisdom of this world (v.27-28)
3. To strip man of his proud boasting (v.29)
4. To glorify His Son -- Jesus Christ (v.30)
5. To fulfill His Word (v.31)

"Thus saith the Lord,
Let not the wise man
glory in his wisdom,
neither let the mighty man
glory in his might,
let not the rich man
glory in his riches:
But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me,
that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment,
and righteousness in the earth:
for in these things I delight,
saith the Lord."
(Jeremiah 9:23-24)

C. Beware of the Pride of CULTURAL SUPREMACY

(God's people must honor character and conduct over culture and custom)
(Key Text: I Cor. 9:19-23)
***Don't glory in your ways of doing things (Look in the mirror for cultural pride)**

Paul, rather than forcing the Gentiles to embrace His Jewish culture and customs, made personal sacrifices and adjustments to spread the Gospel inside of the culture he ministered to, without doctrinal or moral compromise.

Paul chose to adjust his methodologies so that he would reach more people, without compromising his message or Biblical convictions (v.19-23)

V. 19
In verses 19-22, the phrase *"that I might gain"* occurs five times.

Paul's heart was fixed on gaining souls for Christ.

"Free from all men" - Although Paul did not have to live to suit anyone's customs, cultural practices, or mannerisms, he freely chose to serve them by adapting to their non-moral distinctions so as to win them for Christ.

V. 20
--Paul adapted his lifestyle to the Jew to win them (he would perhaps eat kosher foods, wear a beanie on his head, speak the Hebrew which he knew, observe the Sabbath, etc., observe certain Old Testament Jewish Laws [not with the intent of gaining salvation]).

V. 21
--Paul adapted his lifestyle to the Gentile to win them (when in a Gentile's home, Paul did not rise up at the hour of prayer, face Jerusalem and begin praying; he didn't fulfill Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws, which were done away with and fulfilled at the cross. He lived by the Law of Love when in a Gentile's house).

V. 22
--Paul adapted his lifestyle to the weak to win them (the "weak" in context would include the one with a weak conscience toward idols [i.e.:9-12]; Paul would not engage in any practice which would violate the conscience of anyone).

"I am made all things to all men" - This does not involve Biblical compromise on doctrine, dogma, or clearly-defined moral issues.

This does not involve adaptations for fleshly purposes (i.e. "When in Rome do as the Romans do.").

It does involve adjustments in technique, methodology, and custom for the Gospel's sake.

What does it mean to *"be all things to all men"*? It means:

1. A willingness to allow for differences (not everyone has to "do Christianity" just like an American; how willing are you to accommodate the differences of others without ignoring or violating God's moral law?)

2. A willingness to bend on non-moral issues (compromise on preferences, never on principles)

3. A willingness to adjust your ways of doing things so that you can conform to the culture you are ministering in, without Biblical compromise (be flexible).

4. A willingness to be open to new methodologies

Our authority is "sola scriptura," not any man's culture.

We should consider these principles of cross-cultural ministry as given by Reuben H. Brooks:

1) The Bible shows no ethnically pure, "correct" culture.
2) As in the Bible, so today we should accept people from every culture and ethnic group as our neighbors and treat them with mutual respect and dignity.
3) The Old Testament Scripture is replete with examples of a transcultural Gospel.
4) The New Testament does not show one culture to be the correct one and all others wrong.
5) The true message of Christianity is a person, Jesus Christ.
6) To cross into other cultures is the expected norm for God's people, not the exception.

(Breckenridge, p. 77)

D. Beware of the Pride of <u>ECONOMIC</u> SUPREMACY

(God's people must value a person's <u>worth</u> over his <u>wealth</u>)

(Key Text: James 2:1-13)

***Don't glory in your <u>status</u> (Look in the mirror for <u>material</u> pride)**

First impressions of people are <u>not</u> always accurate impressions.

ILLUS: The man who looked like a vagabond and was seeking a bank that would help him begin a savings account. At the first bank he tried, no one took him seriously. Then he tried another bank. "Can we help you?" "Yes, I would like to deposit my fortune in your bank." He was a multi-millionaire! (from "Dear Abby")

"So, what do you do for a living?" The question is often asked. And then a judgment is made about the individual based on his answer.

First time impressions are rarely correct.

60% of those in the Roman Empire were of the poor/slave class.

"Respect of persons" = lit. to "receive the face"; to show partiality, personal favoritism.

"Respect of persons" = a biased judgment, based on external appearances or circumstances such as race, wealth, social rank, or popularity while not looking at the person's internal true worth (value).

"Respect of persons" - to judge people superficially rather than on the basis of their true worth in God's sight.

Deut. 1:16, 17 - God commanded the judges to *"judge righteously between every man and his brother . . . Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man . . ."*

YOU MUST NOT HAVE PARTIALITY! (v. 1)
Why not? 4 Reasons:

1. BECAUSE WHEN YOU ARE PARTIAL, **YOU HAVE A WRONG VALUE SYSTEM** (v. 2-4)
   V. 4 - "Judges" - you need to judge a person's worth as God judges it (He is an immortal soul, created in the image of God).
   "Evil thoughts" Sinful motives. Can this happen in a Church today? Yes!
   When special attention is given to the rich in hopes that they will give money liberally.
   Social and economic distinctions should be wiped out by the Gospel.
   In the early church, there must have been a sense of awkwardness when the master would sit next to his slave; or if the slave led the service in which his master was but a member of the congregation. We have a tendency to cater to the rich because we hope to get something out of them, and to avoid the poor because they embarrass us.

2. BECAUSE WHEN YOU ARE PARTIAL, **YOU ARE INCONSISTENT** (v. 5 - 7)

   a. THEOLOGICALLY - INCONSISTENT WITH THE METHOD OF GOD (v.5- 6a)
      1) Those you reject, God selects (v. 5).
      2) Those you reject, you dishonor (v. 6a).
   b. LOGICALLY - inconsistent with practice of the rich.
      1) Those you favor, oppress you (v. 6b).
      2) Those you favor, dishonor God (v. 7)

3. BECAUSE WHEN YOU ARE PARTIAL, **YOU BREAK THE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE** (V. 8-11).

4. BECAUSE WHEN YOU ARE PARTIAL, **YOU ARE GUILTY OF HYPOCRISY** (v. 12-13).
   Your practice (treatment of others) must be consistent with how Christ treated you. Did he show special favor to you because of any wealth, gifts, abilities, etc. that you had? -- NO!

Application to Soul-winning -

Ask yourself:

1) Am I as interested in the salvation of a poor man as one who is rich? (i.e. - "weird vs. normal")
2) Am I willing to put as much effort into the winning of one who is uncultured as one who is educated?
3) Am I more excited when a person gets saved who is talented, gifted (a potential leader) as when one with limited gifts gets saved? (Look at their potential! - What God can make them)

Conclusion:

Basically, what is needed for your church to overthrow its prejudice is:

1. A right view of self and others
   (A Biblical anthropology)

2. A right view of God
   (A Biblical theology)

3. A right view of salvation
   (A Biblical soteriology)

****Needed: A Right Theology**

In God's eyes, all lines of distinction, all supposed marks of superiority are non-existent.

"For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11).

Jesus did not show partiality. Even His enemies admitted: *"Master, we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men."* (Matt. 22:16b)

a. God shows no partiality in judging men
   (Rom. 2:9-11 - *"Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God."*)

b. God shows no partiality in describing men (Rom. 3:9-23)
   (Rom. 3:9-10 - *"What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.")*

****Needed: A <u>Right Soteriology</u>**

God shows no partiality in <u>saving</u> men (Rom. 3:24-31).

Gal. 3:26-28 - *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."*

All races are <u>accepted</u> by God and <u>saved</u> on an equal level (Gal. 3:26-28).

Do you view yourself as a debtor to all people (indebted to reach all with the Gospel)?

Rom. 1:14 - *"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."*

All races are <u>equal</u> in the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13).

Prejudice has adversely affected evangelism, because it has produced:

1) **Fear:** Many are afraid to witness to some people because they are rich, famous, Jewish, too educated, too potentially dangerous, etc. Such are pre-judged as unreachable.

2) **Neglect:** Many look down their proud noses at others who are poor, of a certain race, color, or culture. Such are prejudged as being unworthy of time, effort, and ministry.

Questions to consider:

--Should a black preacher start a "black church"? (No, unless he is in a part of the world where there are only black people)

--What should naturally divide people?

1) Unknown <u>language</u> barriers (Gen. 11:1-9)

2) Unrepentant <u>sinful</u> barriers
   a) Unbelief (II Cor. 6:14-17)
   b) Sinful practices (II Thes. 3:6; I Cor. 5:9-13)
   c) Doctrinal heresy affecting cardinal doctrine (Rom. 16:17; II John 10)

Practical Advise on Building a Ministry that matches the Diversity of your Community:

1. Pastor, set the example of an unprejudiced view of others (I Tim. 4:12)

2. Select workers in your church based on Biblical spirituality (not race, color, wealth, or popularity) (Acts 6:1-7)

3. Teach your congregation a Biblical anthropology

4. Fulfill the Great Commission by witnessing to *"every creature"* (Mk. 16:15) and by making disciples of "*all nations"* (Mt. 28:19) (look at people from God's perspective).

5. Beware of telling foolish racial jokes and using demeaning, derogatory speech about others of diverse ethnic origin (Eph. 5:4) (Be careful about making broad, sweeping statements, such as "All _____ are _____")

   The cultural tendencies of a particular nation or ethnic group, are not necessarily hard and fast absolutes about everyone in that group. Beware of making categorical statements.

   We don't need to worry about becoming "politically correct" (although we should be Biblical considerate). Let's concern ourselves with being "spiritually correct."

6. Allow for cultural differences in non-doctrinal, non-moral areas of life.

7. Encourage the parents of your church to teach their children by example and precept to have an unprejudiced view of others (prejudice is primarily learned behavior, and it is most often learned from one's parents).

8. Mingle and visit with every one in your church (beware of cliques of any type) (Rom. 15:7).

9. Let's be committed to true justice (II Sam. 23:3; Prov. 17:15) (Show no favoritism or discrimination based on non-moral criteria. Don't write anyone off, but give everyone a fair hearing).

10. Appreciate and utilize the wholesome diversity that exists in the church (I Cor. 12).

11. As you have opportunity, try to visit foreign countries with the intent of ministering to those people. Becoming familiar with people, places, and diverse ways of doing things will help you to build bridges and establish rapport with people of that ethnicity here in the States. I have had the opportunity to minister in India on four separate occasions. Such experience and appreciation for much of the good qualities of Indian culture has opened the door wide for me to minister to those people in NY.

12. Don't be afraid of the "fall out" of having a church filled with people of diverse color and culture. All people matter to God!
    I am aware that some pastors might be afraid that, if they reach out to "undesirables" then the "normal" more well-to-do people will stop attending. If they do, let them leave. They are not the type you want in your church anyway.

13. Have an extra dose of flexibility, patience, and genuine love for all people.
    When ministering to people of diversity we must generally:
    a. Keep messages simple, yet still unfold the deep riches of God's Word.
    b. Worship with less formality in the services while upholding Christ-honoring standards
    c. Be patient in all aspects of ministry
       The pastor must preach God's Word with "all long-suffering (patience) and doctrine (teaching)" (II Tim. 4:2).
       Missionary William Carey said three ingredients are essential for effective ministry: "Patience, patience, patience."
    d. Be prepared to deal with issues such as interracial dating & marriage.