

## God Shows No Partiality – Why Do We?

**Intro.** Living with other people can be difficult. It doesn't matter if they are family, friends or strangers. Rules help. A band, the Eagles, have a song called "Frail Grasp on the Big Picture" which laments all the focus on small stuff like "Who left the top off the...toothpaste?" "Whose turn to take the garbage out?" [Long Road Out of Eden, 2007] rather than on the important issues in life like ending poverty, injustice and war. Today's readings are clear that *love of God* is essential, the most important thing, for being a follower of the Lord. Everything else is small stuff.

**I.** The early followers of Christ never believed they were starting a new religion. They saw themselves as always belonging to the great traditions of Israel.

They continued to attend synagogue and keep the rules. When their evangelization was wildly successful – not because of their own power but due to the power of the Holy Spirit – people outside their tradition accepted Jesus. Halleluiah! Break out the champagne. Wait. What about the rules that forbid eating certain foods or requiring the sign of the covenant, circumcision? Or hanging out with Gentiles? Put the cork back in. Too late. Peter had another life-changing experience. Having already met the Messiah, he now met the Holy Spirit in *other* people. He uttered the words that would forever change the way of following the Lord: "In truth, I see God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him." Later he, Paul and Barnabas had to give powerful witness that blew the lid off the rigid

understanding of rules for following the Lord. Man-made rules, but not among the commandments *made by God*. The disciples didn't let the small stuff get in the way of spreading God's Word to the Gentiles and the church grew. **Concl.** To be clear, rules and guidelines are important. They help describe a way of living in a community. However, periodically rules take on an importance that overpowers what is essential to the purpose of the group, whether religious or secular. Some years ago I joined a well-known service club. It is a wonderful, international group. When I was invited to join, I found I was the only minister. I think it was a mistake. The membership chairman was a new to our parish and from out of town. I think he needed a new member. More strangely, there were no women members. It wasn't the international club's fault. It had finally

changed. My club hadn't. A few years after I moved to a different town and joined the same group which club allowed women, one of the members of the previous group said he was leaving unless they changed. They gave in finally. This is no different from many other groups who hold onto small stuff and limit membership because of religion, gender or race. They become irrelevant or don't survive. **In following the Lord, the small stuff must never be confused with what is essential. The readings say that love of God is essential. The Holy Spirit was too strong for the Pharisees of that day and hopefully of any day. Since God shows no partiality, how can we?**

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