

Sermon: What? Me? Discriminate?

IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group

1. Tell of a time when you witnessed favouritism / discrimination. How did you react?
2. Tell of a time when you witnessed mercy. How did you react?

UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God

1. Review the qualities and actions of the 'pure and faultless' religion for which God is looking. (James 1:1-27)
2. What exactly happened in the scenario that James describes? (James 2:2-4) Why do you think James included this text after what he has written in James 1?
3. Consider the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of God. (Refer to 1 Sam 16:7; Matt 5:3; 1 Cor 4:7; Gal 3:26-29) How does each Kingdom describe 'poor,' 'rich' and significant?
4. Using the story of the Fall (Genesis 2, 3), explain why we are prone to show favouritism and discrimination?
5. Within this passage, Pastor Henry detailed three reasons why the reader should not discriminate. List the three reasons. How do the following phrases inform these reasons: (James 2:1)...in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ; (2:7)...the noble name of Him to whom you belong; (2:8)...the royal law.
6. What 'freedoms' can the reader of James gain by keeping the 'royal law'? (2:12)

OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community

1. What are practical suggestions for loving our neighbour? (see Sermon summary, or add your own) Which suggestion is God challenging you to demonstrate?
2. Toward whom do you need to show mercy this week rather than prejudice, indifference or resentment? How can you treat that person with mercy?

Main thing for me is:

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

THE WORD (NIV)

1 Samuel 16:7

⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Matthew 5:3

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

1 Corinthians 4:7

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Galatians 3:26-29

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

James 2:1-13

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ²Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³If 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," ⁴have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

⁸If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹²Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Sermon Study Summary

James 1 instructs us on how to respond to trials, temptations and the truth of God's Word — the Bible — with humility and obedience. A 'genuine faith' or 'true religion' in action is summed up in the last verses of the chapter. Such mature persons have a controlled tongue, a genuine compassion for the most vulnerable and needy; they seek to reflect the character, mission and values of Christ. James 2 is a continuation of what James introduced in these last verses of chapter 1. Maturity, James says, is additionally not being guilty of the sin of favoritism or partiality (James 2:1-13).

Favoritism is judging someone based on their outward appearance. Most of us have 'secret' lists of certain kinds of people — those whom we endure at best, and whom we like. We evaluate them based on external criteria such as their appearance, ethnicity, or social status rather than their character and values. Based on our assessment we will either withhold or give our love, friendship, mercy and service. James says 'don't do it'. James 2:2-4 provides an example that James may have witnessed. Both a poor man and a rich man came to a worship service; the wealthy man was given preferential treatment. James goes on to say why this kind of discrimination should not occur.

1. Because it dishonors our Lord Jesus Christ. Favoritism is inconsistent with the character and conviction of Jesus (v 2:1). He came to break down social barriers, class, race, and gender, and to introduce a new Kingdom. This new Kingdom would be defined by love where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female but where all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28). There all are unique but seen as equals through faith in Jesus Christ. In this Kingdom the 'poor' of the world may be the richest in God's eyes in having the strongest faith (James 2:5; Matt 5:3). This is because the way into His Kingdom is not through any earthly thing such as status or education, but through spiritual poverty (humility) and a deep awareness of one's need for God. It is the 'poor' of the world who may see this need more so than the wealthy. In the church the wealthy were equals to the poor, women or slaves. It was the one place on the planet where their voice was heard, they had value, dignity, equality and were accepted (1 Samuel 16:7).

2. Because we are dishonoring who we are in Christ. (vs 2:6-7) In giving preferential treatment to the wealthy person the usher was communicating that to be rich in cash was more important than being rich in faith. In other words, the value system of the world was more appealing than the value system of God's Kingdom. By implying this, he was not only dishonoring Christ but who he was in Christ.

3. Because we are breaking God's law. (vs 2:9-11) In Jesus' day the law was a kind of plus/minus system. If the law was obeyed one got points, and vice versa. Many laws carried different weights in how important they were, such as the Sabbath. If one carried a positive 'balance' they were okay. This too can creep into the church. Favoritism was not that important compared to committing murder. James says that if one shows favoritism they are sinning and to break one law was to break them all. It only takes one speeding ticket to break a perfect record.

How do we overcome the temptation to discriminate? Love your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8). The core temptation is to be our own god believing that life will turn out best if we are in charge. We are created in the image of God (Genesis 2). God intended from the beginning for our significance and value to come from (being in relationship with) Him. In Genesis 3 that relationship was cut off and we needed to find a new source for our significance and value. If we are our own god then we must make ourselves significant or valuable. This is done based on our performance, and to be significant is to measure our performance against one another. Life is then defined by competition and comparison and a drive to outperform one another — keeping score. This is behind the temptation to discriminate and our tendency to set ourselves up as judges of other people's value based on external criteria. This only leads to despair, loneliness and a world without genuine love. There are no winners. When James says to keep one's self from being polluted by the world he is speaking in chapter 2 about this value system that divides and destroys, (1 Cor 4:7) and to take up the alternative: Jesus and His Kingdom. Here our significance is rooted in our relationship with God rather than our performance. Nobody can touch or change that. It sets us free to live and fulfill the calling that God has given each one of us. There is no need to compete; there is no need to prove our worth.

How can we practically love our neighbor? In the context of James 2, our neighbor is anyone we encounter, and especially those we would be least likely to love but perhaps to discriminate against (ie. the good Samaritan Luke 10:25-36). Who may this be in your life? Perhaps it is a neighbor whose religion is different, or another who lives an immoral lifestyle. How would Jesus have you love them practically?

- a) Love them by accepting them (James 2:13). Too many Christians think that judgment triumphs over mercy. James instructs us to not have a judgmental spirit but to be gracious and accepting of those we disagree with. Note that this acceptance does not mean one approves of their beliefs or lifestyle. We can still interact with them in a spirit of grace and acceptance. Focus on how God sees your neighbor rather than everything you disagree with. God created them in His image and they matter to Him. It is not our job to fix them or change their minds; it is Jesus' job.
- b) Love them by listening to them. We don't love them because we don't know them because we don't know their story (Luke 6:28). Ask lots of good questions and the more we listen the more understanding we will be and the more open they will be to us.
- c) Love them by praying for them. Jesus said to pray for those who mistreat you. Pray that they come to know and see the love of Jesus.
- d) Love them by serving them. God is at work in their lives in ways we cannot see or know. Be faithful and extend love and grace to them in His name. Ask yourself, 'What is the most loving thing I can do for this person?' Treat them as you would like to be treated?