

A Pastor without discrimination

• To neglect the poor goes against the mind of God

• Despite all the attention and flattery that James' friends were giving to rich people, they were not having any influence upon them at all

• When you discriminate against one group of people and in favour of another group, you lose both groups

How the true pastor or Christian leader should apply his teaching

1. James has a word that truly comes from God

• Designed to produce a change

2. James is not intimidated by the wealthy

James is in the process of pointing out the folly of ill-treating the poor. God has chosen the poor, he says. The rich Christians to whom James was writing were foolish to ill-treat the poor. Jesus did not do such things. To want to be friendly only to the rich is to become judgemental, and only God is entitled to act as a judge. God delights to have the poor in His kingdom. To neglect the poor goes against the mind of God.

James continues. *'But you, for your part, have dishonoured the poor person. Do the rich people not oppress you and do they not drag you to the law-courts?'*¹ *Are they not the ones who slander the good name by which you have been called?'*² It is a strange thing for Christians to have a special interest in the rich, for the rich oppress the Christians and show very little interest in the Christian church. Despite all the attention and flattery that James' friends were giving to rich people, they were not having any influence upon them at all. This is an important point in connection with discrimination. When you discriminate against one group of people and in favour of another group, you lose both groups. You lose the poor against whom you discriminate, but you lose the rich as well. Your favouritism and flattery does not persuade the rich to become Christians. Not at all. The rich tend to be enemies of the gospel, and they remain the enemies of the gospel even when the church flatters them. They know they are being flattered because of their wealth, but they are not impressed when they see churches indulging in flattery. They know they are wanted for their money and not for themselves. They can tell when other people simply want to have wealthy people among their number. In James' circle the rich were oppressing the Christians – as they often do. They despised the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they would drag to court any Christian who was in debt to them. Why should the Christians act as if they admire such people? How can they be brought to repentance and faith if we admire them before they show any repentance and before they show any faith in our Saviour?

We see here the way a true pastor or Christian leader should apply his teaching to his people.

1. **James has a word for his people that truly comes from God.** It addresses them in the actual situation that they are in. It is not merely general teaching about Christian doctrine. It confronts them with what they have been doing and the mistakes they have been making. It rebukes them and addresses their consciences. It is designed to pierce their consciences and pull them away from their ill-treatment of the poor.

2. **James is not intimidated by the wealthy.** Many Christian leaders would be delighted to have numerous rich Christians in and around the ministry in which they serve God. Some would be quite pleased when their people specially want the rich to come and be part of them. But what is the motive behind such snobbishness? It is pride. It is a worldly desire to be thought important. But James shows Christian courage in dealing with the situation. Many Christian preachers would have been very unwilling to do or say anything that would upset the rich! If you only want to flatter someone it is difficult to

1 2:6

2 2:7

bring to them a true word from God. If you are afraid of what people might think of you, you will be held back from speaking the word of God into the situation in which God has put you.

3. James acts with spirituality not sentimentality

• He tells them what they need to know

3. James acts with spirituality not sentimentality. There are many who act as if the function of a pastor is simply to keep his people as one big happy family. It is true that the Christian church is a family, but families can have badly behaved children! It is certainly the task of a pastor to keep his people rejoicing. A miserable Christian is of no use to anyone. But none of this means that the pastor must become a sentimental flatterer simply giving his people what he knows will please them and make them feel nice. James is our model here. 'You have dishonoured the poor!' he says to them. He is not afraid to use the word 'you'. He addresses them boldly and directly. He is not bothered about being so nice to them that he cannot tell them what they need to know.

4. James is a true leader

• Ahead of others in hearing God

4. James is a true leader. A leader is a person who leads! He has to be **ahead** of others in seeing the will of God. I do not mean that he is isolated and unwilling to listen to others. But he is not simply a follower in disguise. Some 'leaders' are really followers. They find out what people want and give it to them just as they want it. But that is not leading; it is following. If James had just been giving the people what they liked to hear he would not have been rebuking them for their ill-treatment of the poor.

• Like Jesus he brought a true word from God that would rescue them if obeyed

Of course in all of this James is simply being like Jesus. Jesus never bothered too much about what people thought of Him. He was not worried about who was paying His salary. He never flattered the rich. He had a tender heart towards every person who was in any kind of need, physical or spiritual. He brought to them a true word from God which would rescue them if they heeded it.

• True pastors keep us in the will of God - we should value them highly

Such men are true pastors. We should value them highly. There are not many of them. And when they address our consciences and rescue us from our mistakes they are truly being shepherds for God's sheep. Such men, beginning with the biblical writers, rescue us from foolishly wandering away from the will of God. They have a ministry of restoration and will bring us back into the pathways of righteousness – if we allow them to impart God's word into our lives.



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