

We must get rid of any kind of discrimination

• God's agenda is to reach the poor and needy

James now begins to take up the three matters that he specially mentioned in James 1:26–27. The first thing on his agenda is our need to reach the poor and needy and bring them into our congregations at an equal level with anyone else. His first point is going to be: we must get rid of any kind of discrimination. He puts it like this: *'My brothers and sisters, do not hold to the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with favouritism towards important people¹. For if there comes into your meeting-place a man with gold rings on his fingers, and in showy clothing, but there also comes in a poor person with shabby clothes², and you look attentively at the person who is wearing the fine clothes, and you say, "Sit here in this nice place" but you say to the poor person "Stand over there!"³, or "Sit on the floor by my feet!", are you not making discriminations among yourselves, and you have become judges of other people with critical thoughts⁴.*

1 2:1

2 2:2

3 2:3

4 2:4

• An example

Don't show any kind of favouritism towards any class of people, says James¹. Don't favour the rich, the clever, the good-looking. Don't favour this tribe or that nationality. Then he gives an example of how it was happening. A person would come into this meeting-place of these Jewish Christians. If the person was obviously wealthy, he would be treated nicely. If he was obviously not so wealthy he would be discouraged from coming again! These people wanted to be choosy about who came to their meetings!

1 2:1

The Marks of discrimination

What are the marks of discrimination? James tells us. You can see whether you discriminate when you think of (i) what you notice ('you look attentively ...'), (ii) what you say ('... and you say, "Sit here ..."'), and (iii) how you make the other person feel.

Reasons for not discriminating

(i) Because Jesus did not do it

Why should we not do it? (i) **Because Jesus did not do it** towards us! Jesus was and is 'the Lord of glory'! He surely did not find us very attractive when He looked at us. We were shabby people if ever there were such people – dressed in our sins. But the 'Lord of glory' came down to help us and bring us into His kingdom and get us to reign with Him. We are surely to be like Him. He is faithful towards us. And He did everything in perfect faith. He still intercedes for us in heaven with perfect faith. Our salvation is a matter of holding on to Him – and He does not practise any kind of discrimination.

(ii) Because it is judgemental

(ii) **Because it is judgemental.** In discrimination, we are looking at the externalities of a person's life and choosing him or rejecting him on the basis of something external. This kind of thinking is evil, says James,

(iii) Because it is against the plan of God for His people.

(iii) **Because it is against the plan of God for His people.** James goes on. *'Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters, has not God chosen those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him?'¹.* There is such a thing as predestination and most of God's elect are poor! God is choosy in an altogether different way. He chooses the worst people He can find! He likes to have among His people those

1 2:5

whom no one else wants. Actually poor people can be rich in a different way than in money-matters. They can be rich in faith. (We notice James is not a prosperity-teacher. He does not guarantee the poor Christian will become rich in a worldly way!) Christians who are weak financially can be very powerful in their knowledge of God and in their experience of His help. They can be rich in faith when it comes to living by prayerfulness and by trust in a great Saviour.

• *Poor-but-believing Christians are heirs of a great inheritance*

Poor-but-believing Christians are heirs of a great inheritance. In the Bible 'inheritance' is the word that is used for what God wants to give us. It takes faith and persistent faith to get it. God has many promises that He wants to fulfill in our lives. He has a calling for us. He will provide for us enough to fulfill our calling. He will bring us to high level of reward and honour. He may not make us rich but He certainly will provide enough for us to fulfill His will. And He is not mean but generous! The poor find out these things more than the rich! The rich can scarcely enter into all of the blessings of the kingdom of God. Any Christian who discriminates against the poor is opposing the greatest friends he or she can ever have!

• *Justification – our acceptance by God is different from inheritance*

We notice that there is a difference between justification-by-faith-only (as Paul would put it) and inheritance. Our initial acceptance by God is without works. We come to our first salvation by the grace of God – plus nothing! Faith is no more than a beggar stretching out his hand to receive a free gift. But our **inheritance** is conditional upon works of faith (as every New Testament writer knows). The poor Christian does not get to his or her inheritance just by being poor. We are not saved by poverty! We have to be rich in faith. We have, as James says, to love God in a practical manner. It is hard for the rich to love God. They do not feel they need Him. Even rich Christians are very rarely spiritual people. If you reject poor people, you have been warned. You are rejecting the kind of people God likes! We had best change our ways and start reaching out to those who are needy and underprivileged. If we do so it will lead us into richer treasures that we never even knew existed. For underprivileged Christians often have treasures the world knows nothing of.

Rich in faith greater treasure than mere material wealth

Reaching the poor and needy



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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