

EXTREME FAITH

WISDOM IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Discussion Three:

From Prejudice to Friendship (James 2:1-13)

The glory and the Body of Christ is that all are welcome, regardless of culture, religious background, social class, gender or education. This was not normal in the first century (and, regrettably, we still have divisions like these today). One of the criticisms of Christianity is that anyone could eat and drink at the Table of the Lord and participate in the services. Many in the upper classes were shocked that women and slaves were deacons and elders, bishops and prophets. The Apostle Paul and his peers spent their lifetimes helping Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor regard each other with equality and mutual affection and respect. All of these same divisions exist in our world today – they are just carefully hidden sometimes. James is concerned that when we say, “All are welcome” that we really will live up to this declaration.

Reading #1: James 2:1-7

Key idea:

We must welcome everyone, regardless of class, color, or culture. And there is much to learn from the materially poor who are believer in the Lord.

- Parallel scriptures: I Corinthians 11:17-34; Galatians 3:28-4:7; and the Epistle to Philemon
- Insight: The long passage in I Corinthians 11 reveals that God’s people were dragging their old class prejudices into church and disregarding the poor. Christian worship was marked by shared meals and communion was part of this. When Paul says they are failing to discern the Lord’s body, he is talking about their relationships with one another and the need to get rid of class divisions!
- Question: What are some of the divisions and prejudices God’s people struggle with today?
- Question: How do we get past our prejudices and really appreciate people different from us?

Insight:

A Civil Rights leader from the 1960s, who marched with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, was asked recently how people could get past class and race differences. His answer was two-fold. First, God’s grace in Christ must capture our hearts so we can start loving others as Christ has loved us. Second, we must intentionally develop relationships with people different from us.

Reading #2: James 2:8-13

Key idea:

James declared that the “royal law” of scripture – given by our Lord and King – is summarized in the command to “love our neighbor as yourself.” In Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said all the law and the prophets (the entire Old Testament) were contained in the Great Command to love God and

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neighbor. When we break God's commands, we are no longer loving our neighbor. God wants to show us mercy, as we do the same to others.

- Parallel scriptures: Exodus 19:6; 20:1-17; Matthew 22:37-40; Micah 6:6-8
- Discussion: share an experience of learning of another culture or making a friend who is very different from yourself.

Insight:

Notice that God's grace is always primary, and obedience is our response to his goodness in our lives. No one – from Genesis to Revelation, from Adam to the final believer of earth – is ever saved by their good works! God chose Israel (Exodus 3-4), delivered them from the Egyptians (Exodus 14-15), declared they were his royal nation (Exodus 19:6), THEN he gave the commands. The same pattern is in the New Testament: we are saved by grace, then called upon to offer our life as a thank you to God (romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:8-10; 4:1-6).

Let's ask the Lord to reveal any hidden prejudices and cleanse our hearts so we can welcome new friends and experience a deeper unity in Christ.