

Do Not Show Partiality

James 2:1-9

12/26/1999

Let's turn in our Bibles, please, to James, chapter 2. The book of James, chapter 2. We want to read together James, chapter 2, verses 1 through 9. James, chapter 2, beginning with verse 1:

“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.”

Discrimination is a word that has obtained a connotation of great evil in our day and age. To be one who discriminates is tantamount to being as evil as Hitler, or as socially outcast as the Ku Klux Klan. However, we must recognize that like all value judgments of our popular culture, this value judgment is one that is badly skewed and one that is entirely contrary to biblical truth.

In a previous era, if one was said to be a discriminating man, that was a high compliment. A man of discrimination was one who was skilled in discernment. He could discriminate between good and evil, between right and wrong, between the valuable and the worthless, between good companions and bad, between that which was wise and that which was foolish, between that which was moral and that which was immoral.

And it is a sad commentary on our day that to make such discriminating judgments as I have just described is to be considered the personification of evil, and worthy of the most venomous rejection. Of course, that's an act of discrimination on *their* part, but they would never admit that. But nevertheless, to be a person who discriminates is considered to be the worst of human pariahs. We ought to be people who discriminate. We ought to be people who can make discerning judgments between good and evil, between the moral and the immoral, between good people and bad people, between wise and unwise courses of action.

Indeed, society cannot function without discrimination. We discriminate, do we not, between criminals and lawabiding citizens, and treat them quite differently. We discriminate between one political party and another, between one political candidate and another. We embrace one and we

reject another. We discriminate between what we will spend our money on and what we won't. We discriminate between who we will marry and who we will not. We discriminate between where we will work and where we won't.

The point is, *everyone* without exception discriminates. Believers discriminate and unbelievers discriminate. Good people discriminate and bad people discriminate. And so everyone without exception discriminates; the only question, is the basis of my discrimination *valid*, and are the objects of my discrimination *legitimate*? That's the only question.

Now God's word alone can supply the true and proper answers to those questions. God's word tells us *how* we should discriminate, *who* we should discriminate—either for or against, and *why* we should discriminate. In some cases, discrimination is required of us. In other cases, discrimination is *forbidden* to us. One basis of discrimination may be valid, another may be invalid. One object of discrimination may be suitable, while another object of discrimination is not. And so the lesson we must understand is this, is that God *alone* defines the *basis*, the *objects*, and the *limits* of discrimination. And we must carefully follow His guidelines in the matter, not that of current social consensus.

In the current social consensus, people tend to discriminate where they should *not*. For example, our government has discriminated against the inclusion of Christianity in its public forums and life. Prayer, the Bible, the Ten Commandments, have all been thrown out of government institutions. They have discriminated against them and rejected them. And they should *not* do that.

People tend to discriminate where they should not, and they *fail* to discriminate where they *should*. For example, they identify homosexuality as just another alternative lifestyle that should not be seen as any different than a heterosexual lifestyle. And so where they *should* be making discriminations, they don't, and where they *shouldn't* be making discriminations, they *are*. And so society and the common cultural consensus is *no* safe guide. We must look to God's word alone as to when we should and when we should not discriminate—what is *appropriate* and what is *inappropriate* discrimination.

Now in the passage that is before us today, we have an example of *inappropriate* discrimination—discrimination that is *forbidden*, discrimination that is entirely *wrong*. Now it's important for us to understand that this passage is *not* a condemnation of all discrimination of every *type*, but it is only a condemnation of a *particular* discrimination of a *certain* type, and that is the treating of people differently in the church on the basis of their perceived wealth.

In the first place then this evening, let us consider together the prohibition stated—the *prohibition* stated. This is contained in verses 1 through 4: “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”

Now James makes it clear that the faith that we believe and practice is the faith *of our Lord*, Jesus Christ. Those who would confine religion to merely controlling the tongue, visiting the widow and the fatherless, and keeping oneself unspotted from the world—in other words, mere external *moral* reformation—need to read the next verse. Our religion *also pivots* around faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And so this faith that we have is a faith that *proceeds* from Christ as its source, it is a faith that is *placed* in Him as its object, and it is a faith that *submits* to Him as its *Lord*. All of that is wrapped up in this phrase, “the of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

Now this faith of Christ, which we possess and practice, is not to be carried out in an atmosphere of respect of *persons*. This phrase “respect of persons” refers to the manifestation of partiality or favoritism in dealings with people *based* on externally visible factors. The word literally means to receive someone’s face. In other words, you look upon someone’s external appearance, and on that basis you make a judgment as to whether to embrace them or to reject them. This is expressly forbidden by the Lord, not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old.

In First Samuel 16, and verse 7, when Samuel was sent to anoint the King of Israel, the Lord said to Samuel, with reference to one *he* thought *surely* was going to be the King of Israel, the Lord said to Samuel, “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” Now the Lord *did* make a discriminating judgment between David and his brothers, and he embraced David as His next king and rejected his brothers as the next king, not on the basis of external appearance, but on another basis—on the basis of character.

And what is prohibited in the passage before us today in the book of James is not discrimination on the basis of *character*. For we are *required* to make discrimination on that basis. For example, when you make a choice as to who your pastors and who your deacons are going to be, you *discriminate* between the men of the congregation *based* on, among other things, their character, and also their gifts, their proven maturity. And discriminations made on that basis are entirely appropriate. But you *don’t* discriminate among the men in the congregation for church office, for example, on the basis of how wealthy they are, or how handsome they are, or how tall they are, or any other external factor.

And so when James says, in verse 1, “have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons,” this is not a universal prohibition showing respect to persons under *any* circumstances whatsoever, but rather it is a *particular* prohibition to showing respect of persons with reference to particular *circumstances*.

And those particular circumstances are three. First of all, the *context* in which the prohibition is given is in the context of the public assembly of the local church. In the context of the public assembly of the local church this prohibition is given. Secondly, the *basis* of the discrimination is the presence or absence of an outward display of wealth. Here’s a person who comes in with expensive clothing and expensive jewelry. And here’s another person who comes in with very pitiful, tattered, worn, and even soiled clothing. And so the discrimination was made on the basis

of the presence or absence of an outward display of wealth. Thirdly, the nature of this discrimination involved the granting of differing levels of honor and extending different levels of comfort to the people *involved*.

So what you have here is a rather narrowly defined prohibition of discrimination. It is discrimination that takes place in the context of the public assembly of the church. It is a discrimination based on the presence or absence of the outward display of wealth. And it is a discrimination that involves the granting of differing levels of honor and comfort to the various people that are involved. Now in such a circumstance, under such conditions, on such a basis, discrimination in the extension of honor and comfort is absolutely forbidden.

Now suppose someone came into our assembly who was a little deaf. They couldn't hear. And suppose they also had arthritis, so they couldn't sit in a hard pew. And so we take the person, we bring him right up front here and put him in a nice platform rocker, right there. Is that a legitimate discrimination? Absolutely it is. And so we must understand the basis and the limits of this prohibition on discrimination.

The reason why the partiality that is spoken of in *this* passage is declared to be wrong is because they were judging, or discriminating, not on the basis of legitimate and *valid* difference, but on the basis of their own evil thoughts. Notice if you will, verse 4. He says, "Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" The reason why this discrimination was taking place is because certain evil thoughts were running through these people's minds—thoughts like, Hey, we should treat the rich better than the poor, because the rich can give large sums of money to the church. They'll fill the treasury and help us meet the budget. Or, they may be thinking, We need to show preference to the rich—make sure they hang around, because *their* presence in our assembly will lend great credibility to us in the eyes of the world. I mean, if the world see the *rich* attending *our* church, then they'll say, Wow, that must be a church that has their act together. Maybe there's something *worthwhile* there. And so they may be thinking that he will draw *others* of his class to the church *with* him. And what an advantage that will be to us.

So the kind evil thinking that went into the *discrimination* process was thinking that was selfcentered and it was *ungodly* in its basis and perspective. These are all evil thoughts—thoughts that the rich can give large sums to the church, thoughts that his presence will lend credibility to us before the world, thoughts that he will draw others of his class along with him. These are all evil thoughts—thoughts that are sinful and that are unworthy of the servant of God and the church of God, because they are *looking to man* for the obtaining of these aforementioned benefits, and not to God, and placing their *confidence* in men in order to meet the needs in the assembly.

Discrimination among people on the basis of what they can do for you in the realm of wealth is the mark of a *wicked* person. In the book of Jude, chapter 1, verses 11 and 16, we see this dynamic at work. Speaking of the wicked that Jude was addressing, he says, "Woe unto them!" Jude 1:11, "for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward." You see, what was Balaam's problem? He put *money* ahead of *principle*. And it was the consideration of the wealth he could obtain that motivated him in his discrimination against the nation of Israel and his

discrimination for* Balak, the son of Zippor. He discriminated based on where the money was, and so he gave himself over to the persecution of and destruction of the poor people of God because this wealthy man had more money, and he looked to the advantage of the wealth rather than to the advantage of the spiritual growth of the people.

In Jude 1, and verse 16, it says, regarding these people, “These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words,” now notice, “having men’s persons in admiration *because of advantage.*” In other words, they admired this person and that person, and discriminated in their favor for what that person can do for *them* because of the *advantage* that they themselves can obtain. In Proverbs 17, and verse 5, it says, “Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker.” And do you see, that’s exactly what was happening in these assemblies, is that these people were *mocking* the poor, they were pandering to the rich, for the sake of selfinterest arising out of evil thoughts. Now that kind of discrimination is *wrong*. It is dead wrong, because it is a discrimination that has wrong *objects*, it has wrong *motives*, and it has wrong *goals*. And therefore, the discrimination itself is wrong.

God has never told us to discriminate on the basis of wealth with reference to our treatment of other people. Indeed, it is expressly forbidden in the Old Testament when the judges were said, Do not show pity to the poor, and don’t show favoritism to the rich. But when you judge, judge *righteous* judgment, according to the truth, *irrespective* of these people’s social status. You see, there are bleedingheart judges who say, Oh, this person is poor, so we’ll give him a break. Wrong. You don’t do that. Or, This person is rich, so we’ll give *them* a break. You don’t do that either. If someone’s *wrong*, it doesn’t matter if they’re poor or rich, it is to be identified as such. And if they’re *right*, it doesn’t matter if they’re poor or rich, they’re to be identified as such. So this, then, is the prohibition stated.

In the second place, let us consider together the explanation given—the explanation given. Now what James does is he now gives an explanation for his prohibition. He gives several reasons, three in fact, as to why we should not discriminate on the basis of people’s external appearances of wealth. Now in this explanation that he gives, in verses 5 through 9, it is important for us to understand that he’s speaking here in general terms. He’s speaking of *classes* of people. He is not speaking of specific individuals *among* them. He makes categorical statements about the poor as a class, and categorical statements about the rich as a class. Now then, there are clearly exceptions to these general categorizations. But we’re not dealing with particular individuals, we’re just dealing with characteristics of classes of people, all right?

Now notice what he says in verse 5, “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” Now is that universally true? Are only poor people chosen? No, there’s some rich people chosen. But as a class, when you look at the totality of Christianity, who are they made up of? Answer: the lower class in society.

So under the explanation given, consider first of all, that the poor are often the true rich. The poor are often the true rich. He says, “Hath not God chosen,” or elected, “the poor of this world rich in

faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” Now you see, the problem with these folks that James is addressing is that they didn’t know how to measure true wealth. Who was really rich? Is it the person who’s got a million, billion dollars? Or, is it the person who has *great faith*? Well, what he’s talking about here is that those who are *rich* are those who are *rich in faith*. The poor man with an abundance of faith is actually superior in *true* wealth to the rich man who trusts in his wealth rather than in God for salvation and for *blessing*.

Paul speaks of this wealth in Second Corinthians 6, and in verse 10, when he says, speaking of himself, that we are “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” Now materially, Paul was poor. And materially, Paul possessed virtually nothing. And yet, he went around making people *rich* and he himself possessed *all things*. Now that’s a mark of a wealthy person—when you own everything and you go around making other people *rich*. But in what realm did that occur?—in the spiritual realm. He had the greatest of all wealth, which was the Gospel and all of its blessings. He was a *rich man*. He had been blessed with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places, in Christ. And that’s why he talks about the *riches* that are in Christ. And then he went around just distributing that to folks—spread the Gospel everywhere—made other folks *rich* in faith and in the things of God.

And so he says here, the poor man with an abundance of faith is actually superior in *true* wealth to the rich man who trusts in his wealth rather than in God for his salvation and *blessing*. And so therefore, if you’re going to discriminate on the basis of wealth, at least get your measure of wealth correct, and show preference to the *truly* rich man. Because the poor are far more often chosen of God to be the truly wealthy than the rich *ever* are.

In First Corinthians, chapter 1, and verse 26 through 29, he says, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble”—those are the rich people of society—“are called: But God hath chosen [elected] the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen [elected] the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen [elected], yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

And so when you look at those who God chooses as elect, by and large, the *vast* majority of them are those who are in the lower socioeconomic status of society. And if they are the ones that God has chosen, then who are we to go around *rejecting* them? You see, the very class of people that God draws the *vast* majority of his elected out of, were, in the church that James is writing to, being rejected by the very people who claimed to have at their hearts’ interests *God’s* heart’s interests. And so there was a gross * _____.

It’s important for us to understand how poor the rich *really* are. We should feel sorry for the rich. Listen to what Jesus says in Mark, chapter 10, verses 17 through 27. When the rich young ruler came to Him, it says:

“And when he [Jesus] was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

“Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that *trust* in *riches* to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”

But it would take an *act* of God to break him of his trust in his riches. And so his riches were really a great weight to him; a great *drag* upon him. And humanly speaking, they were the thing that were keeping him from coming to faith in *Christ*. He was in *bondage* to his riches. And they should've been seen as a great hindrance to him, and should have moved people to have an attitude of *pity* towards him, not an attitude of envy.

The point is this, wealth is typically a severe disadvantage, not an advantage. And that's why the Bible says, Labor not to be rich. They that go after riches pierce themselves through with many *sorrows*. And if God brings riches as a result of hard work and diligence, fine. But don't make it your goal and don't make it your god, because it is a terrible master.

And so the first reason why James gives for not engaging in this kind of discrimination in *favor* of the rich is because they're really not the *rich*. The really valuable people are not those with money. The really valuable people in the church are those with *faith*. And the *richer* they are in faith, the more value they have to the congregation.

Secondly, he says the rich are often destructive to the church. The rich are often destructive to the church. Notice what he says in verse 6. He says, “But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”

And so he's saying, Look, you're all hot and bothered to get the rich folks into your church. Listen. Rather than being a blessing and an *advantage* to the people of God, they're often your worst *hindrance*. They are often, he says first of all, the church's worst *oppressors*, not the church's greatest *supporters*. People think, Oooh, we'll get the rich people in, and then we'll have

money. You get the rich people in and you'll have oppression. We see, time and time again, it was the *wealthy* who oppressed the work of God and the people of God and the church of God.

In Acts 13, and verse 50, it says, “But the Jews stirred up”—not the rabble, but—“the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city,” in other words, those who are at the top of the socioeconomic ladder, “and raised *persecution* against Paul and Barnabas, and *expelled* them out of their coasts.” It was the rich, it was the mighty, it was the noble who conspired together to expel Paul and his company out of their borders.

In Acts 16, verses 19 through 23, here Paul was in Philippi. He cast a demon out of this slave girl who used to tell fortunes for a fee. And this slave girl's masters were obviously wealthy enough people to own slaves and made quite a revenue off of her fortunetelling. It says, after Paul had cast the demon out of her, it says, “And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.” And of course, they were then thrust into the inner part of the prison, and you know the rest of the story.

In Acts 19, it was the silversmiths. Acts 19:23 through 41, while I'll not read it all, just various parts of it, it says “And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen.” In other words, these were rich folks. They had a booming trade. And they were advanced in the acquisition of wealth. “Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation”—he got all his rich friends together—“and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.” They were wealthy people.

“Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.”

And so, you know that they then had a *huge* riot, and they drug these men before the people, and Paul was able to escape, and then finally the city magistrate said that there are deputies, let them implead one against another. And so, no doubt, Demetrius and his crowd drug the believers before the magistrates, attempting to get them arrested.

And so, these are but three of many examples we could multiply in the Scriptures of where the wealthy, the noble, the upper class, the rich, were those who *persecuted* and *oppressed* the believers and drew them, literally, before the judgment seats because the message they were preaching was either offensive to their persons, or contrary to their continued accumulation of wealth.

But not only are they often the church's worst *oppressors*, not the church's greatest *supporters*, but they are often God's worst *detractors*—not those who bring credit to His cause. In verse 7, it says, "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" And so this is another way in which the rich are often destructive to the church, not only by dragging the believers before the magistrates, but also by blaspheming the name of God.

We see, for example, in Proverbs 18:11, and in Proverbs 18:23, these statements regarding the nature of the rich. It says, "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit." In other words, his wealth makes him conceited. It says in verse 23, "The poor useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly." That is, they think that their wealth gives them the right to run over people verbally. Proverbs 28, and verse 6, it says, "Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich." And oftentimes, perversity of ways and wealth are very closely linked together. And then in verse 11 of Proverbs 28, it says, "The rich man is wise in his own conceit."

So what do we see are characteristics of rich men in general? They are conceited, they answer roughly, and they are perverse in their ways. And it is precisely this kind of disposition and character that causes them not only to blaspheme God themselves, but also their very *behavior* as *professed* Christians causes *others* to blaspheme God because of the way they act, while claiming to be Christians. You remember Paul said that about the Jews. He says, The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, your behavior—your hypocritical behavior. And so it is often with the wealthy.

You remember in First Corinthians 11, verses 20 through 22, when they came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. There were rich people in Corinth and there were poor people in the Corinthian church. And what happened? It says, in First Corinthians 11:20, "When ye come together therefore into one place," it is *impossible* to observe the Lord's supper. "For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" Now notice: "or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? what shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not."

In other words, there were some people who came to church and they had enough money and enough wealth to provide more than enough for *themselves*. It says they were drunken, they were satiated. They had more than they *needed*, and then here were the poor people in the church and didn't have *anything* to eat. And would they share? Not a chance! And so because of their selfish behavior and their indulgence and their superior financial condition and resources, the function of their activity was to bring despising upon the church of God, and shame upon the poor brethren. And so by their behavior, they were not only *not* bringing *commendation* to the Gospel, they were bringing *condemnation*. Can you imagine—unsaved visitor comes to church and he sees the rich treat the poor that way in church? What would he think—of church and of God?

There's a third reason why this explanation is—third part of this explanation that is given. Not only the poor are often the true rich, not only the rich are often destructive to the church, but

thirdly, he just comes out and flat out states that respect of persons is *sin* when it proceeds on a wrong basis. Respect of persons is sin when it proceeds on a wrong basis.

Now notice what he says in verses 8 through 9. He says, “If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons,” on the basis upon which he’s just been *talking*, he says, “ye *commit sin*.” In other words, respect of persons, discrimination between and among persons without a just *cause* is a violation of the duty to love our neighbor as ourself.

Now, if we have a just cause, not only *can* we discriminate, but we had *better* discriminate. But you see, the reason why this discrimination was wrong is because it didn’t have a *justifiable* cause for it. The cause rather was a selfish one of selfadvantage. God’s word tells us what justifiable causes *are*. He says, Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath light with darkness? So you *discriminate*. You say, Is this person an unbeliever? I can’t be yoked together with him. I’m going to discriminate and withdraw from entangling alliances with this person. Is that justified? Sure it is. In fact, it would be sin *not* to discriminate. But to say, I’m not going to be involved with this person because he’s Black, or because he’s poor—those are *not* justifiable causes for discrimination, and to engage in discrimination on *those* bases is *sin*.

And so we need to treat others as we ourselves would be treated, and if we do not believe it would be just for ourselves to be discriminated on a basis, then we ought not to extend that discrimination to others.

I have three closing exhortations. In light of the particular discrimination that was taking place in our passage in James 2, I have three words of counsel. First of all, beware of electing people to church office based on their economic status. Beware of electing people to church office based on their economic status.

Now I have seen this happen again and again and again in churches. In most churches, to be a deacon or to be a trustee or to be on the board, you only need to be a wealthy businessman. And if you’re a wealthy businessman, then certainly you have your act together, you understand money, and so therefore you’re fit to handle the money of the *church*. And *character* is entirely *overlooked*.

And so do not take into consideration whether someone is wealthy or poor in deciding whether they’re suitable for church office unless that wealth or that poverty tells you something about their character. Now if they’re poor because they’re lazy and slovenly, because they have no initiative, then that’s a reflection on a character issue, and that *is* a legitimate basis for discrimination. But if they’re poor just because they’re poor, even though they’re honest and hardworking and diligent, then it’s irrelevant. And so when we are considering together church officers in the future in our assembly, be they deacons or be they elders, let us not take into consideration people’s economic status as the basis of our decision.

Secondly, not only do we need to beware of electing people to office based on their economic status, we need to beware of pandering to the rich in the exercise of reproof for church discipline. We need to beware of pandering to the rich in the exercise of reproof for church discipline. You know, oftentimes the sins of the rich in the congregation are neither addressed nor are they confronted because there is a fear that if those folks leave, the offering's going to go down. That's never been the policy here. But in a small church, it's a great temptation. And so we have to beware of that, and to respect *no man's* face for what he may or may not supply of the finances of the church.

The Jews brought a flattery to Jesus Christ, which happened to be true, when they said of Him in Mark, chapter 12, and in verse 14, "And when they were come, they say unto him [Jesus], Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?"

Now they were trying to butter Him up and flatter Him, but in *flattering* Him they were really telling a very pointed truth about Christ, and that is, He was *not* a respecter of persons. He didn't care if somebody was the king of the land, or if they were a poor widow with two *mites*. He told them the truth and He dealt with them on the basis of justice and facts. He did not regard the persons of men, regardless of what it cost Him. And you know what it eventually cost Him? He got nailed to a cross, right? Because he wouldn't be partial on a wrong basis.

Now did He discriminate? Sure He did. He chose twelve. He didn't choose thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, or *all* of the people. He picked *twelve*. And then did He discriminate among the twelve? He picked *three*—Peter, James, and John—as His closest intimates. I've been criticized in the past because I spent more time with some people in the church than others. Didn't spend an equal amount of time with everybody. Well, neither did Jesus. And don't feel like you have to, either. You spend time with those that God gives you a ministry to and a heart for and a relationship with. You're under no obligation to spend equivalent amounts of time with everybody in this assembly.

And if someone is not spending as much time with one person as they are with another, just mark it up to the fact that God has directed their ministry in the lives of people a little differently than perhaps you might have thought. Why did Jesus choose Peter, James, and John to be His special intimates rather than including all twelve all of the time? I don't know, but He did. He had a reason. And the reason was just. But these people recognized that He was someone who was true, and cared for no man; that is, He did not pander to people on the basis of the advantages they could supply to Him. But He cared for *people*. But He didn't care for what they could do for Him, He cared for what He could do for them. And you see, that was the difference between His discrimination and that of these people in James, chapter 2.

The third counsel is, beware of viewing the poor as *always* being rich in faith. And beware of viewing the rich as *always* being oppressive *blasphemers*. Now as I said earlier, he was speaking here in generalities and in *classes*. Sometimes the poor are great blasphemers and oppressors of

the people of God. And sometimes the *rich* in this world's wealth are also those who are rich in faith and those who are a great blessing to the people of God.

Judas Iscariot was someone who was poor enough so that 30 pieces of silver meant enough to him to betray Christ. Thirty pieces of silver was *not* a lot of money. And so he clearly wasn't a wealthy man. And so here is a poor man engaging in the worst act of oppression and blasphemy that there ever was in betraying the Son of God.

On the other hand, you have Joseph of Arimathea of whom the Scripture says, in Matthew 27:57 through 59, "When the even was come, there came a *rich* man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate," a very risky thing, I might add, "and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb," which only the rich had—only they had their own rockhewn tombs, everybody else got buried in the dirt—"which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed." So here is an example of a rich man who was a true disciple and who was rich in faith.

The point that we need to conclude with is this. Second Corinthians 5:16 says, "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more" after the flesh. In other words, what he's saying is the basis of our relationship is not going to be on externals anymore, but rather it's going to be on the basis of spiritual realities and truth.

You see, the discrimination in James, chapter 2, is based on *externals*. This person was *rich*, that person was *poor*. These people were known after the flesh—after the external, the physical, the visible. And what he's saying is, that's not the basis upon which to know people, judge people, or discriminate among people. The basis for knowing, judging, and discriminating among people is on the basis of spiritual *principle*, on the basis of *character*, on the basis of those who *possess faith*.

And so this, then, is the principle that James sets before us, is the principle of avoiding *unjust* discrimination based on *improper* motives and inappropriate subjects. It is not a prohibition of all discrimination. And so we must be careful, especially in our day and age when the word "discrimination" has almost become a *swear* word, not to abandon the biblical perspective on the subject, but to recognize that there is a legitimate discrimination and an illegitimate discrimination, and we must go to the Scriptures to know the difference.

Well let us pray together. Father, thank you so much for the great act of discrimination that you engaged in in choosing a people for salvation. Father, when you elected a body for Christ, a bride for Christ, a church for Christ, Father, out of the mass of fallen humanity, you chose some. Father, help us, too, to make choices among the mass of both fallen and redeemed humanity. Help us to make choices that are based on your principles. Help us, Lord, to know what we should discriminate *for*, and what we should discriminate *against*. Help us to know when we shouldn't discriminate at *all*. And help us to know when we should.

Father, may the principles contained in this example be a guiding light to us, and help us to realize that discrimination based on the *external* is not the basis upon which we, as the people of God, should discriminate. But help us to discriminate on those bases that you have commanded us to—on the basis of truth, on the basis of character, on the basis of godliness. Lord, I pray that we might have wisdom and direction in these matters, and exercise kindness and yet fairness in all of our choices. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

Page 4, paragraph 4*: Deleted. *“Bosar? Is that his name? Who was it? Uh, his name escapes me. But anyway, it was somebody that—Balak, the son of Bosar, that’s it. Good. Thank you. Yeah, Balak, the son of Bosar. I knew there was a “Bosar” in there somewhere. But anyway, that was his problem, is that...”*

Added: Balak, the son of Zippor.

Page 6, paragraph 3*: Gap in recording.