

James 8 – Wisdom about Discrimination
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC – 7/9/2023

Last week the Supreme Court ruled that college admission policies that consider race as a factor are unconstitutional and not lawful under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Some people consider that decision a setback for minorities, but the interesting thing is that the Harvard case was on behalf of Asian students – a minority who believe that affirmative action policies were actually hindering their ability to enroll at Harvard.

What has come out since that decision is that many people believe that Harvard can still discriminate in their enrollment because of something called “Legacy Admissions.” Legacy admissions is a policy of giving preference to undergraduate applicants who have family members who either attended Harvard or work at Harvard. They also give preference to the children of wealthy donors. So, many consider this to be discrimination based on wealth. People with money can buy their way in, so to speak.

I’m sure you remember the cases of wealthy actors who went to prison for paying thousands of dollars to get their children admitted to elite schools. Their wealth enabled their children to get into schools they weren’t qualified to attend, and that kept other qualified applicants out.

You probably wonder why I’m bringing this up. Well, we are continuing our Bible study on the book of James. And today I’m preaching on Wisdom about Discrimination. And the discrimination James is specifically addressing is discrimination based on income. Our text is James 2:1-10.

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If 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," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

1- Do Not Show Favoritism

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. This glorious faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, should never be associated with partiality, discrimination, prejudice or racism.

The Lord of glory Himself shows no partiality. Deuteronomy 10:17 says:

LORD your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality...

Acts 10:34 says: *God is no respecter of persons.*
NIV - *God does not show favoritism.*

In other words, God does not discriminate. He made everyone and He loves them all the same. As the family of God, we must do the same.

Discrimination and racism are not modern inventions. Satan has been using them to sow seeds of hate throughout history. Discrimination and racism are not uniquely American. They've happened in all cultures throughout history.

In fact, James wrote in an age filled with prejudice, hatred and discrimination based on class, ethnicity, nationality, gender and religious background. In the ancient world people were routinely and permanently categorized because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, or whatever.

A significant aspect of the work Jesus came to do was to tear down all these walls that divided people. All the things that normally divide people are brought into unity in Christ. Ephesians 2 addresses the division that existed between Jews and Gentiles. Verse 14-17 say:

For Christ Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.

We may be separated and hostile to other people – but Jesus died to destroy the barrier between people groups. Christ died to put to death hostility toward people who are not like us. He made unity out of division. He made peace out of hostility. How did He do it? Through the cross. Through faith, we are all part of the one body of Christ.

But unity does not happen automatically. It had to be taught by leaders like James who said never hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with partiality. And I'm teaching you the same thing today!

James gives us an example of how the early church discriminated. The example was the way 2 different people were treated in the church. One was rich and had gold rings and fine clothes. In Roman society, gold rings were a sign of great wealth. Theologian David Hiebert said that there were even shops in Rome where people who could not afford to buy gold rings could rent a ring for special occasions.

That's how important economic status was in those days. And it affected the church. So, James contrasts how the church treated that rich man with how they treated a shabbily dressed poor man. The rich man was given special attention and the best seat in the house, but the poor man was told to stand in the back or sit on the floor.

James said that when they did that they discriminated among themselves and become judges with evil thoughts. Notice that discrimination is based on judgment and evil thinking. James is telling us:

2- Do Not Discriminate

The Greek word for favoritism literally means "to accept a face." It means you show partiality based on the way someone looks. When you do that, you are in fact, prejudging people. That's what prejudice means: to prejudge - to have a favorable or unfavorable opinion about a person or a people group just because of their outward characteristics – before you even know the person.

You can see that in statements like: Well, you know how black people are, or how white people are or how Latinos are or how Asians are. If you think you know a person just because of their color you are probably wrong! And if you treat them poorly because of their color you are sinning!

Thankfully, God does not discriminate! 1 Samuel 16:7 says:

People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

To be prejudiced and to show favoritism means that we don't understand what is truly important to God – the heart! When we miss the heart of people, we miss the heart of God! And when we show favoritism to rich people over poor people, we miss the heart of God.

Though it may be easy for people to be partial to the rich, God isn't partial to them. In fact, James 2:5-6 says:

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? But you have insulted the poor.

God measures riches on a very different standard than we do. He sees people who are rich in money but poor in faith and He says, "Oh, that poor rich person. They think they have everything and they have nothing!" And God sees people who are poor in money, yet who have faith in Him, and He says, "There is a truly rich person! He trusts me for everything."

Let me be clear: just because someone is poor does not mean they are automatically rich in faith.

And just because someone is rich does not mean God does not choose them. God does not only choose the poor. But the fact is that down through history, more people respond to the Gospel than rich people.

God never calls us to show partiality against the rich, but James lays out some facts about the rich people of his day in verses 6-7.

Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of Him to whom you belong?

James points out the absurdity of this behavior – they were showing favoritism to the rich people who oppressed them – and they were discriminating against the poor people who were rich in faith.

I think some churches still do this because they think the rich person has greater potential to give finances to the church. There are some churches today who give special seating to people based on how much they give. How sad! James says stop it! He then says in verses 8-9:

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

It seems that James was anticipating that some people might try to defend their partiality to the rich by saying they are simply loving the rich as their neighbor in obedience to the law.

James calls it the royal law. Royal means kingly - it’s a law of the kingdom. And Jesus said it’s the greatest law of the kingdom in Matthew 22:37-40

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Many people want to pick and choose who they consider to be their neighbor. In Luke 10, a man tried to justify himself by asking Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus then told the story of the Good Samaritan who helped a person in need. All the religious people passed the wounded man, and only the Samaritan helped him. The point was strongly made by Jesus because Jews hated Samaritans. They would not associate with them. Yet Jesus said, “Those are the neighbors you should love.”

Who are you not loving because of their ethnicity or background or beliefs? James says if you show partiality, you commit sin.

By the way, the problem is not being nice to the rich. The problem is being nice to the rich and not nice to the poor! Or showing favoritism to one ethnicity over another.

All discrimination is evil. People can discriminate because of:
Ethnicity – Age – Gender - Education level - Income level

We can see how discrimination is evil by understanding that the New Testament Greek word for discrimination literally means “to separate.” Remember – Satan wants to divide us but Jesus came to unite us!

According to Thayer’s Lexicon there are 3 levels of separation.

- 1- To separate by making a distinction or to discriminate in your mind
- 2- To separate by withdrawing from someone
- 3- To separate from someone in a hostile spirit that opposes them

We can probably see this most clearly in racism. Racism is the belief in the superiority of a particular race and the inferiority of other races. Racism involves prejudice and discrimination against other races. If it’s not dealt with - racism will result in hatred, animosity and antagonism toward certain races. If that is not dealt with, racism often results in unfair or abusive or hateful behavior towards other races. It only keeps getting worse if it is not repudiated and repented of!

Listen! Racism is one of the biggest sins on the planet. You will find it everywhere. And it’s one of the biggest sins on the planet because racism is driven by demonic forces. So, overcoming racism is not a battle against flesh and blood; it’s a spiritual battle! Ephesians 6:12 says

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

I believe racism is a world-ruling spirit because you can see its impact all over this planet. Racism has probably sown more death and destruction than any other demonic spirit. Racism has enslaved people – killed people – held people back in life.

The only thing that will shut the door to racism is the cross of Christ!
And the church is the institution God uses to bring change to a nation.
To do that requires action on our part.

3- The Principle of Intentionality

Jesus intentionally broke racial barriers. I told you earlier that Jews hated Samaritans. They intentionally travelled around Samaria so they didn’t have to bet near Samaritans.

But Jesus intentionally went to Samaria to minister to them.

If we are going to overcome discrimination and break racial barriers like Jesus did, we must get intentional about it. When's the last time you intentionally reached out to someone whose ethnicity is different than yours?

It's great that you're attending a multi-ethnic church, but I want to encourage you to build relationships with people of other ethnicities. To do this requires:

4- The Principle of Humility

We must realize that none of us are better than others because of our race, education or income. Galatians 3:26-29 says:

You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In Christ – your race or your occupation or your income or your gender do not matter. We are all one in Christ.

5- The Principle of Unity

We must realize that God made us all and He made us diverse. He has not called us to uniformity, or sameness. He has called us to unity. God wants unity between all ethnic groups.

The word ethnic comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, which means a race, a tribe, a people group.

Mark 11:17 - *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.* This means the church is for every *ethnos*, people group, race.

Unity is hard when we concentrate on our differences, but we are more alike than different. Acts 17:26 says:

He has made from one blood every nation (ethnos) of men to dwell on all the face of the earth.

We all come from one common ancestor – Adam.

We are all born with his blood.

When we are born again it is by one blood – the blood of Christ.

His blood is sufficient to save people from every ethnicity, income level, education level or any other level!

We need to know that and we need to tell others about that!

6- The Principle of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 says:

From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us.

These verses show us that to be ministers of reconciliation, we must:

- 1- Not look at others from a worldly point of view
- 2- We must view others as Christ view them
- 3- We must be ambassadors who appeal to others on God's behalf.

For us to do that, we must not regard others from a worldly point of view.

How do the races view each other in the world?

With suspicion. With prejudice. Sometimes even with hate.

But we need to see others and Christ sees them!

And we must love them enough to seek reconciliation with God and each other!

Reconciliation means to restore to relationship after division happens.

What discrimination divides – reconciliation unites.

What favoritism hurts – reconciliation heals.

What prejudice hates – reconciliation loves.

What racism destroys – reconciliation restores.

If racism is going to be healed, all of us must do our part.

The church can take the lead by being different from the world!

Unfortunately, churches are one of the most segregated places on earth.

But God has called GFC to be a reflection of heaven on earth by being a place where you find the presence and power of God and - since the kingdom of heaven is multi-ethnic – then the church should appear that way on earth.

And whenever different ethnic groups gather together and worship on earth – that in itself is an act of spiritual warfare!

Demons can't stand it when we worship – and they really can't stand it when blacks and whites and Hispanics and Asians worship together!

Why do you think it's so hard to build a multi-ethnic church?

Because we are in the forefront in the war against racism and Satan fights that with all he's got!

But we will overcome in Jesus name!

Let's stand and take authority over a spirit of racism and division and discrimination in Jesus' name!