



HG20: James 3/6 'Favouritism Forbidden'

James 2:1-13

Home Group Sermon Notes

11th October 2009 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: The CofE has, in recent years, come under a lot of criticism, much of it justified in my view, with regards to its inability to integrate people from ethnic and cultural minorities into the wider church. This could also be true of class. But it's not just class distinction that the CofE has struggled to come to terms with over the years. I think it was Archbishop John Sentamu who, after the inquiry into the Stephen Lawrence affair, said that the Metropolitan Police was institutionally racist and - many have applied those same words to the CofE. It goes without saying that God's family transcends cultures and ethnicity, however, it seems fair to say that the CofE has a long way to go before we can be the 'all encompassing church' I believe God desires us to be. I'm aware that we can all work towards bridging the gap that exists between our understanding, even acceptance, of each other's cultures and backgrounds. And, whilst you might suggest that is not an issue here in Billericay, it may well be an issue in the future and it is certainly a cause for concern within this Diocese. So-much-so, that it is something we're being asked to address as a deanery and, in due course, at PCC/DCC level. However, these are not new problems, they are as old as Christianity itself and James brought this problem to light and gives us some helpful thoughts as to the way we should address these issues. I believe the church should be representative of all sections of the community and James' letter supports that view.

1) There is a Principle to Remember, vs1. Jewish people in that day coveted recognition and honour, and vied with one another for praise. We have a similar problem with us today in our celebrity fuelled culture. People are clamouring for recognition are among us, not only in politics, industry, and society, but even in the church. Some church leaders, even members, use their positions to enhance their own importance. There are a number of ways in which this could be seen: we can show favouritism on the basis of personality, or looks or economic standing. We can favour people based on their gifts and abilities. Who is the most important, the preacher or the soundman? The welcome team member or the Sunday school teacher? The pastor or the person who makes the coffee? The truth is that one is not better than the other; they are just utilizing different gifts.

2) There is a Problem to Remedy, vs2-4. The first guest is identified as 'a man with gold rings' or, literally, 'having many gold rings'. The second man is identified as a 'poor man in shabby clothes.' 'Shabby', as it is used here, need not necessarily be understood in the sense of a homeless person, but as a man dressed in clothes soiled and stained from work. Here, James is highlighting the distinction in the way that the two visitors are received, the rich man is received cordially and the poor man is received carelessly if not crudely. The use of the plural (you) suggests that this was a general attitude of the whole church. It's sad to say, but we often make the same mistakes. We tend to judge people on what we see outwardly rather than what they are inwardly. Dress, colour of skin, fashion, and other superficial things carry more weight than the fruit of the Spirit that may be manifest in their lives. We cater to the rich because we hope to get something out of them, and we avoid the poor because they embarrass us. Isn't that true?

In vs4 James says: '*Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*' If a judge in a court of law were to allow himself to be affected by the clothing of the defendant, would he not be violating justice? Would it be an abuse of influence? Of course it would. Would we trust their judgment? Would we have respect for their authority? Of course we wouldn't. And for a Christian to show favouritism to someone on the basis of their outward appearance is no less wrong.

3) There is a Perspective to Adopt, vs5-11. Paul's illustration about the stranded female motorist and the 'Hells Angel' coming to her aid! People are not always what they seem. James invites his readers to adopt a new perspective and gives three reasons why favouritism is wrong.

Favouritism is wrong because it is inconsistent with God's methods, vs5: The emphasis here is on God's choosing. In his letter to the church at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 1:25-29, Paul wrote God's method of choosing has always been grace, and not on anything we are, have or ever will have. The poor of this world become rich in faith; as sons of God, they inherit the wealth of the kingdom. It is possible to be poor in this world and rich in the next, or rich in this world and poor in the next (1 Timothy 6:17-18). Or, you could be poor both in this world and the next, or rich in this world and the next. It all depends on what you do with Jesus and the material wealth He has given you. God promises the kingdom to 'those who love Him' vs5, not to those who love this world and its riches.

In that day, it was easy for rich people to exploit the poor, to influence decisions at court and to make themselves richer. Unfortunately, we see the same things being committed today. James, it seems to me, is suggesting that these are sins which are a blasphemy to the name of Jesus. The doctrine of God's Grace, if we really believe it, forces us to relate to people on the basis of God's plan and not on the basis of human merit or social status. Jesus' death broke down the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-22). But His birth and life, broke down the walls between rich and poor, young and old, educated and uneducated.

Favouritism is wrong because it is indifferent to the truth revealed in Scripture, vs8-11: *Love your neighbour as yourself*, is called the royal law because it is the supreme law of human relationships and because it was given by the King of Kings. In Matthew 22:37-40, when a young lawyer asked, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first commandment. And the second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." Note the use of the phrase *you shall love*. It points to the personal responsibility of every believer to do this.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to highlight the difference between heart religion and works religion (we looked at this a few months ago). Jesus used a masterstroke when he selected a Samaritan as the hero of the story. It left the Jewish legal expert almost speechless. This was a classic case in which Jesus reverses the expectations of his hearers. Priests and Levites were respected and honoured, while Samaritans were despised and held in utter contempt. They were looked down by the Jews as members of a corrupt race, as a nation of half-breeds. They were publicly cursed in the synagogues as heretics and prayers were offered begging God to deny them eternal life. There was no love lost between the races.

In modern day terms we can think of the hostility: between Palestinians and Jews; Serbs and Croats; Sunni and Shiite; IRA and UVF; Black and White; Christians and Muslims; Upper Class and Working Class; Travellers and the settled community etc. It's easy to raise barriers isn't it? We too, can easily become selective as to who benefits from expressions of our Christian love. Jesus warned his disciples against restricting their hospitality to only those who could return it. Someone once wrote: *To love the whole world for me is no chore; My only real problem is the neighbour next door.*

4) There is a Practice to Implement, vs12-13. If one of the tests of the reality of our faith is how we treat other people: Could you pass the test? James reminds us that:

We will be judged by our Words: What we say to people, and how we say it, even our careless words, will be judged (Matthew 12:36). Of course, the words we speak come from the heart; so when God judges the words, He is examining/judging our heart (Matthew 12:34-37). [Jesus emphasized caution in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-26, 33-37; 7:1-5, 21-23).] We have the potential to have a profound effect on those around us by what we say. Even the simplest statements can convey powerful messages. 'Children learn what they live.' But it's not just children, is it?

We will be judged by our Deeds: (Read Colossians 3:22-25). It is true that God remembers our sins against us no more (Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 10:17); *but our sins affect our character and works*. We cannot sin lightly and serve faithfully. God forgives our sins when we confess them to Him, but He cannot change their consequences. (In vs14-26, James expands on faith and deeds, but I'm not going to these verses this morning, one because of time and because we looked at this in some depth a couple of weeks ago).

We will be judged by our Attitudes: James contrasts two attitudes here: showing mercy to others, and refusing to show mercy. If we have been merciful toward others, God will be merciful toward us. However, we must not twist this truth into a lie. It does not mean that we *earn* mercy by showing mercy, because it is impossible to earn mercy. If it is earned, as with grace, it is not mercy! Nor does it mean that we should be 'soft on sin' and never judge it in the lives of others. Someone said to me the other day, 'I don't condemn anybody, and so God won't condemn me.' But we forget that mercy and justice both come from God, they are not competitors. Where God finds repentance and faith, He is able to show mercy; where He finds rebellion and unbelief, He must administer justice. It is the heart of the sinner that determines the treatment he or she receives from God.

Conclusion. We live in a suffering world. There are people everywhere who are wounded and hurting. Some have been robbed by parental or marital failure; others have been left half-dead as a result of their own choices. Some are being destroyed by living in the world we do. Some have been let down by so-called Christians. They cross our path on a daily basis. But we never know when our opportunity will come to be their 'neighbour.' Wouldn't you like to be someone who makes a difference in someone else's life? The choice is really yours. You don't have to be a product of your environment or experiences. You have the power to make a choice to reject the negative and harmful practice of showing favouritism. You can choose to be an encourager. You can be someone who puts an arm round someone else's shoulder and makes a lasting difference in their lives. Now, I realise it's not always popular or convenient or cheap not to show favouritism, and to follow the example of Jesus, but it is, without any shadow of a doubt, the right thing to do. The challenge, for every generation, is to create a genuine, relational community with the love of Jesus at the centre of all we do.



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Home Group Discussion Notes

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

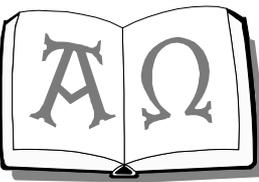
Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)



Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

1) Have you ever been in a situation where others have been favoured before you? How did it make you feel? Share your experiences with your Home Group.

2) James speaks of '*discriminating amongst yourselves*' vs4. How might this show itself: 1) in our society; 2) in the Christian community?

3) Are you ever guilty of showing favouritism? In what ways might you have done this (either intentionally or subconsciously)?

4) (Remembering Paul's illustration about the stranded female motorist and the 'Hells Angel' coming to her aid) have you ever experienced a most unlikely 'angel' coming to your rescue?

5) Read Luke 10:25-37 and the section: 'There is a Perspective to Adopt.' The Samaritans, to the Jews, were outcasts and not to be befriended at any cost. Who is the Samaritan/outcast in your life? What steps can you take to restore and heal that relationship?

6) Read the section: 'There is a Practice to Implement'. Paul asked the question: 'If one of the tests of the reality of your faith is how we treat other people: would you/we pass the test?'



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

