

Place: Lurgan Baptist 14:12:2003

Reading: James 2:1-13

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

12. THE DANGERS OF DISCRIMINATION

In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered becoming a Christian. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus Christ he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. However, when he entered the church building, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go and worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. He wrote,

“ If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu.” The 10,000th member to be welcomed into a prominent Baptist Church in Dallas Texas, was announced as taking place the following week. Who was it ? Not the old lady who was the 10,001st, but the kicker of the Dallas Cowboys.

A former Miss America travels the circuit of certain Charismatic Churches in that country, and her glamorous portrait is featured that Sunday in the newspaper ads inviting people to attend. In other words to hobnob with the great and glorious and bask in their reflected glory. To first century Christians who had allowed favouritism and discrimination to enter the church, James says, *“ Stop it, do not show favouritism.”*

Now there is no doubt that there must have been social problems in the early church. You see, the church was the only place in the ancient world where social distinctions did not exist. There must have been a certain initial awkwardness when a master found himself sitting next his slave, or perhaps when his slave was actually leading a service or distributing the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. Keep in mind also, that in its early days, the church was predominantly poor and humble, and therefore if a rich man was saved and came to the fellowship there must have been the temptation to make a fuss of him. You see, people do discriminate on the basis of resources and money.

I heard about a man who phoned the church office and asked if he could speak to the head hog at the trough. The secretary said *“ Who ?”* The man replied, *“ I want to speak to the head hog at the trough.”* Sure that she heard correctly the secretary said, *“ Sir if you mean our pastor you will have to treat him with more respect and ask for the “ Rev,” or the “ pastor,”* but certainly you cannot refer to him as the head hog at the trough.” The man responded, *“ I see. Well, I have 10,000 dollars I was thinking about donating to the building fund.”* The secretary exclaimed, *“ Oh, my hold the line, I think the big pig just walked through the door.”* Yes, there are those who discriminate on the basis of *resources* and will have nothing to do with anyone who is not on their economic level. Some have no respect for others unless they are of the same social class, the same race, the same sex, the same colour. Christians with money can discriminate against those

without it. Christians without money can discriminate against those who have money and respond with jealousy, envy and suspicion. But my the church of Jesus Christ ought to be one place where discrimination is a dirty word. Now here is James practical as ever dealing with The Dangers of Discrimination. Notice here:

(1) THE EVIL THAT WAS TOLERATED

Look at (2:1) We could paraphrase it, “ *My brothers as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism.* ” What was happening was this. People were saying one thing and doing another. On the one hand there was *a profession of faith*, but on the other there was *a practice of flattery*. Now that was something that James could not tolerate. In fact his whole argument is that belief and behaviour must go together, creed and conduct should speak with the same voice. But that was not happening in these churches that James was addressing. There was (1) What was it ? Well, notice:

(a) THE IDENTIFICATION OF IT:

What is this evil that James is condemning ? “ *Respect of persons.* ” (3:1) Now used in a certain sense

“ *respect,* ” is something the Bible command and commends. The Lord Jesus made it clear that we are

“ *to render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesars.* ” (Matt 22:21 Rom 13:1) In Civil life we are to have respect. The Bible also urges respect in Church Life. Do you recall Paul's words to Timothy, “ *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.* ” (1 Tim 5:17) The Bible also stress's respect in Family Life. (Col 3:17) But what about this word that James uses here ? Literally it means, “ *to lay hold of a person's face.* ” What does that mean ? It means to treat a person in a special way not because they deserve it, but because of something outside of their character.

To show favour to people on account of their external advantages such as their position, power, wealth, or influence.

You see, the evil that James was attacking was discrimination, partiality and favouritism within the church. These people were flattering the rich in hope of getting something from them. One wise old man explained the difference between gossip and flattery. He said, “ *Gossip is what we say behind someone's back that we could never say to his face and flattery is what we say to someone's face that we would never say behind his back.* ” Do you know ladies how a flatterer comes up to you and he has not seen in you a while and he says to you, “ *Why you look so young.* ” And after you're gone he says turns to a friend and says, “ *Hasn't she got old looking ?* ” Well, here were Christians who were flattering the rich. (a) But notice:

(b) THE INCONSISTENCY OF IT:

You see, this evil, partiality, favouritism was inconsistent with their profession of faith in Christ. The phrase, “ *the faith of our Lord Jesus,* ” would be better translated “ *faith in our Lord Jesus*

Christ.” Here were a people who made a profession of faith in Christ yet the way they lived seemed to be a living denial of their profession because they were partial. And this partiality which they showed was not in keeping with:

1. THE INCARNATE WORD:

The Lord Jesus. Now its possible that the words, “*the Lord,*” were not in the original which leaves us with this interesting title, “*our Lord Jesus Christ of glory.*” Now Christ possessed glory in eternity. Do you recall His great high priestly prayer ? “*And now O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.*” (Jn 17:5) In His coming to earth that glory was evident. John says, “*we beheld His glory.*” (Jn 1:14) And when He comes to earth again it will be in “*power and great glory.*” (Matt 24:30) Yet the eternal, glorious Deity of Jesus Christ did not put Him at a distance from men. He was

“*separate from sinners,*” (Heb 7:26) but He was also very near to them and He was near to them regardless of their *rank, resources or reputation.* At no time did the Lord Jesus how Himself to be “*a respecter of persons.*” Now says James, “*Your profession is that you’re trusting the Lord Jesus Christ of Glory, but He treated all men alike regardless of their rank, resources or reputation. This is the person in whom you are trusting, but I am afraid when I look at your lives I see an inconsistency.*” My what about us ? Do you say that you are Christ’s and yet don’t follow His example ? Are we claiming to be Christians yet partiality, spiritual snobbery is written all over our lives ? Well, this partiality is inconsistent (1) and its out of keeping with:

2. THE INSPIRED WORD:

For the Bible everywhere condemns discrimination. Listen to the words of the Old Testament: “*Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.*” (Lev 19:15) “*To have respect of persons is not good.*” (Prov 28:21) Do you recall that recurring phrase in the N.T. ? “*There is no respect of persons with God.*” (Rom 2:11 Eph 6:9 Prov 24:23) You see, when we act in a partial, discriminate way, we’re behaving contrary to the spirit of the Word of God and contrary to the example of the Christ of God. (a) (b)

(c) THE INDICATION OF IT:

James says, “*Do not attempt to hold and practice the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory together with snobbery.*” (ANT) It was raising its head then, and it raises it head now. Someone has said there are at least five areas where we as believers can be tempted to discriminate. *We can discriminate on the basis of appearance, ancestry, age, achievement, and affluence.* Now is it not true that so often because of a man’s rank, his financial resources he’s placed on a mission board, named for a committee, nominated for some council. Sometimes its because of his family name that he becomes a candidate for some position within the church. Many of the Christians James wrote to were trying to seize spiritual offices and James had to warn them. (3:1) My this was (1) But notice,

(2) THE EXAMPLE THAT WAS RELATED

You see in (2:2-3) James illustrates the truth that he has been focusing on. Now lets try and get the picture. A worship service is about to begin. In walk two men. One is wearing a five hundred pound suit. He's been to some fancy shop in Lurgan. He has a gold watch and a gold ring, the other man comes in wearing clothes from War and Want. And a certain usher enamoured with outward appearance escorts the rich man to the best seat and says to the poor man, " *Go and stand over there out of the way.*" Now the real problem here is not finding a good seat for the rich man but in ignoring the poor man. Now do you see clearly what James is saying ? He is not saying that its wrong to wear a gold ring or a gold watch. He is dealing with a issue far deeper than that.

Look at the situation here and notice:

(a) *THE APPEARANCE:*

The phrase " *with a gold ring,*" would be better translated " *gold fingered.*" He had a gem at every joint, a nugget at every knuckle. You've seen folk like that haven't you ? He was clothed " *in goodly apparel,*" in fine clothing. There is an old saying that says, " *Clothes make the man,*" but I prefer the Winchester motto that says, " *Manners makes the man.*" Anyhow here was a wealthy man. As for the other guy we are told that he was " *a poor man in vile raiment.*" The word " *vile,*" means " *filthy, shabby.*" What a contrast between these two men as they come into church. One in rings the other in rags. That was (a) But did you notice:

(b) *THE APPROACH:*

To one of them there was an invitation, " *Sit here,*" to the other there was instruction, " *stand here.*" Do you see the difference in the approach ? One was ushered to a special seat with all due ceremony, while the other was to stand somewhere or sit on the floor. Here was the discrimination and notice carefully on what it was based, it was financial. *They indulged the rich because he was rich and they were indifferent to the poor because he was poor, and its so easy to be guilty of that kind of thing ?* When Ronald Reagan was Governor of California he attended the Bel Aire Presbyterian Church. When in attendance Ronald and Nancy Reagan usually sat in the same seats just off the centre aisle about two thirds of the way up the church. One Sunday morning the Governor and his wife were late and two college students were sitting in those seats. An usher came down the aisle and asked the students if they would move to different seats. They moved and the Reagan's were brought in and seated. The pastor of the church got up and left the pulpit, and walked down to the college students and said, " *As long as I am pastor of this church that will never happen to you again.*"

My are we guilty of this sort of thing ? Do you look down your nose at some other believers because you think you're better off ? Are you indifferent to some because of their poor position? Because of their unattractive outward appearance ? My is a jewel less precious because it comes in a plain box ? Is a soul less precious because it is bound up with what we judge to be an

unattractive outward appearance ? Oh, lets beware of prejudice and discrimination within the church of Jesus Christ for there is (1) (2)

(3) THE ERROR THAT WAS DENUNCIATED

You see, the way some of these believers were thinking and behaving was wrong. Indeed James tells them in

(2:4) that such behaviour meant that they were:

(a) *DISCRIMINATING:*

Look at (2:4) Or, “ Are ye not discriminating among your own ?” (ANT) It has been said that the church must be one place where all distinctions are wiped out. In the presence of God all men are one. My is that not something we need to remember ? You see, the ground at the foot of the Cross is level. Now there is seniority in the Christian church, but there is no superiority. We are “ *all one in Christ Jesus.* ” You see, in the early days of the church it was sometimes known for a slave to be served by his master at the Lord’s Table, as an illustration of the fact that in Christ they were one. The distinctions had disappeared. But what about us ? Do we realise that the church, the Christian family is a classless society ? Such behaviour, that is being partial, not only meant they were (a) but were:

(b) *JUDGING:*

“ *And judges,* ” or as a paraphrase puts it,

“ *setting yourselves up to assess a man’s quality.* ” You see, here were Christians who were assuming in a carnal way, the right to decide whether a man was to be received or rejected. I heard about a godly minister who took over a rather dead kind of church. Very soon, he went out doing a lot of personal work, distributing tracts, going into various homes and places to witness for the Saviour. When the church members got to hear about it they were cross and they issued him with an ultimatum. Either he stopped *this kind of thing or he left the church.* “ *Why,* ” they said, “ *we cannot have you going into public houses with the gospel. It is like holding revival meetings in Marks and Spencer. If you carry on talking to those people about the Lord and distributing tracts to them, do you know what they might do ? They might come to church. They might be sitting right alongside us in the pews. I am afraid we cannot have that. Either you stop going to them, or you leave the church.* ”

Almost unbelievable isn’t it ? Well, he did leave the church and God blessed and honoured his ministry elsewhere ! Its so easy is it not to set ourselves as judges of other men’s qualities and characters. So often we don’t see beyond the superficial, the temporal, the material. My when someone comes into our church fellowship from a different culture, a different country, a different background do we welcome them or judge them ? I tell you if they are unsaved we should be seeking to win them. For James says that when we behave in a partial way we are (a) (b) and we are:

(c) **SCHEMING:**

The last phrase can be translated like this, “*judges with wrong motives,*” (A.N.T.) The word “*thoughts,*” here is a Greek word (dialogismos) from which we get our word “*dialogue.*” In other words, they tossed the issue to and fro in their minds, they weighed it all up and then they acted in the way likely to do them the most good. They were like the false teachers in the Book of Jude who “*flattered people to gain advantage.*” (Jude 16)

You see, to put money before merit is wrong, and it is born of a wrong motive. My in our dealings with our fellow-men we should examine our motives remembering that “*the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*” (1 Sam 16:7) ***The Dangers of Discrimination !*** Are you guilty of it ? In your personal life ? In your church life ? In your social life ? Is it not time you stopped it ? ***Is it not time you realised as far as God is concerned anybody, and everybody should be treated as somebody !***