

## **JAMES 2:1-4**

### **DISCRIMINATION IN THE SANCTUARY OF THE LORD**

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit down at my feet,’ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”<sup>1</sup>

Christians are immersed in the culture in which they live, and to greater or lesser degree, fallen creatures that we are, though citizens of heaven, we import our culture into the church. Tragically, we tend to transform the church of the Living God into a reflection of the prevailing culture without even being aware of what we are doing. Without planning for the transition, the church is one day more Canadian than it is Christian. Nowhere is this transformation more evident than when we seek to become respectable within the communities wherein we worship. Soon, our desire to be liked overwhelms our desire to please God.

At one time I pastored a Chinese congregation. The Christians in that congregation were good people who longed to honour God. However, the congregation struggled to move beyond being Chinese. I was often frustrated by the tendency of church leaders to exalt Chinese culture over the instruction of the Word. For instance, it was more important that missionaries be Chinese than that they be in doctrinal agreement with the church. In a final message, I pleaded with the church to choose Christ over culture, a plea which in great measure fell on deaf ears.

On yet another occasion, I was approached by a black congregation seeking a pastor. During exploratory discussions, I was somewhat taken aback when one of my interlocutors raised a concern that white people might come to the church. Lynda and I asked whether they were Christians that happened to be black, or whether they were blacks that happened to be Christians. The pulpit committee was nonplused and asked for time to consider the question. After some weeks, a committee member phoned. Apologising profusely because he was the one appointed to deliver their answer, he informed me that the congregation had come to the conclusion that they were black, and Christianity would need to be subservient to race.

Sadly, I have witnessed too many Canadian churches that have more pride in being Canadian than in being Christian. Many churches in Canada have consciously, or unconsciously, decided that it is more important to align with the culture than it is to be Christian. I briefly pastored a congregation in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Though God was blessing with growth and the salvation of many souls, a conflict which required the attention of the church leadership arose within the church. I pointed to the Scriptures as the final arbiter for resolving the dispute, but the chairman of the deacons arose and said, “We are Canadian. If there is a conflict between the Bible and our constitution, we must obey the constitution.” I was astounded, concluding that his arrogance was exceeded only by his ignorance. Tragically, the deacons agreed with him in this matter, unconsciously declaring themselves to be infallible; they deemed the documents they had drafted superior to the Word of God, which was rendered in this instance inferior to their own imaginations.

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

In the ensuing years I have come to realise that the assertion of that arrogant man grew out of the common practise of “electing” church leaders. Evangelical churches have developed the cult of democracy, imagining that democracy is divine. Nothing could be further from the truth. Moses, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, warned, “You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing” [EXODUS 23:2 NRSV BIBLE]. God expects His people to seek the truth and then to do what is true. Fifty percent plus one does not make an action right or justify a decision. That self-important man, as is tragically true of too many who imagine themselves to be approved by God as church leaders, was chairman of the deacons simply because he had advanced himself as someone of importance and was willing to “let his name stand” for election.

The natural tendency for all mankind is to gravitate to the familiar; we are by nature uncomfortable when asked to accept the unfamiliar. There is a level of trust demanded that we do not naturally extend to those representing what is in our estimate strange and different. We prefer certain foods, and often refuse to try what we deem to be exotic primarily because it is different. It is one thing when discrimination is toward foods or other similar, though less vital, matters of life. However, there is grave danger to the church when people begin to discriminate toward other people, treating some with undue deference and treating others with disdain.

Likewise, we have a propensity to exert ourselves in an effort to elevate our own social standing through encouraging those we imagine to be of higher social standing to favour us with their presence. In a former church, I faced almost constant pressure from individuals convinced that we needed to improve the quality of the congregation by bringing in “the right kind of people.” This has been a familiar cry within several congregations I have known as people focus on the social status rather than the spiritual condition of those attending services.

I find such attitudes to be pitiful. I still recall a family who came to that same church because they had been informed by another pastor that we were an “entry level congregation.” Another man with severe needs approached me on one occasion because the pastor of one of the more prosperous churches within the community which he had first approached told him that he was unwelcome there. That pastor did helpfully add that he would fit better in our congregation. We, of course, did welcome him.

James confronted the natural tendency to “play it safe” within the congregation of the Lord, challenging each one who would read his letter to review his or her practise toward prominent individuals within society and toward those who are less prominent within society. We who today unite in the fellowship of this growing congregation will do well to hear James’ words, learn from what he has written, and then do as he has instructed.

**THE ADMONITION** — “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.” As we begin our exposition, I note that James is addressing people whom he assumes holds the Faith of Christ the Lord. He addresses those who read his missive as brothers, indicating that he assumes they are believers. Just so, I trust that you whom I address share this common Faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Since the issue of how we live out this most holy Faith is critical, pause for a moment and consider what is entailed in being identified as a Christian congregation. It means that those gathered in the assembly believe the message that Jesus died because of their sin and that He was raised for their justification. It means that each member has individually accepted this truth, and that each one has willingly surrendered rule over his or her life to the Living Son of God. Those gathered in assemblies such as this do not believe that they have organised a church, but rather they are convinced that God has birthed a church wherein He dwells by faith.

Thus, when James addresses readers as brothers, he is not merely addressing them as individuals, nor even as a social or political entity, but he is addressing them as the Body of Christ, united by love for the Saviour and held together in a common purpose by the knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit among them. Each member knows that he or she is gifted by God and responsible to administer the gifts God has entrusted to benefit every other member. Moreover, each member realises that each of the members sharing the life of Christ is not only gifted for the benefit of all, but that each member is to be received as a gift entrusted by God who delights to shower His goodness on His children.

In the church, we must not permit ourselves to show favouritism. The Greek underlying the text is difficult to translate with a single word. The word that is central to the admonition only occurs four times in the New Testament. It may be helpful for us to review the other three instances where this particular word is used. First, the Apostle in **ROMANS 2:11**, informs us that “God shows no partiality.” In **EPHESIANS 6:9**, Paul asserts that with God “there is no partiality.” Finally, in **COLOSSIANS 3:25**, Paul cautions that God shows no partiality with respect to judgement. So, the other three instances of the use of this word refer to God as impartial in His treatment of us, and in particular, that He shows no favouritism when it comes to judgement.

We are somewhat dependent upon the context to permit us to fully grasp James’ concern in the warning he gives. The context describes how we are to accept others within the Body of Christ. Peterson focuses his rendering of this verse on how we live out our faith as Christians. “My dear friends, don’t let public opinion influence how you live out our glorious, Christ-originated faith.”<sup>2</sup> The Good News Translation focuses on how we treat our fellowman. “My brothers and sisters, as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, you must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance.”<sup>3</sup>

Other translators understand the passage to warn against bias or partiality, particularly in the church. “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favouritism.”<sup>4</sup> “My brothers, do not practice your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ by showing partiality.”<sup>5</sup> “My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favour some people over others?”<sup>6</sup>

This teaching should not have been novel to James’ readers, for it is thoroughly grounded in the Law. Moses cautioned those who would be required to judge in Israel to avoid prejudice. “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour” [**LEVITICUS 19:15**]. This cautionary statement is emphasised elsewhere in the Pentateuch also. “You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God’s. And the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it” [**DEUTERONOMY 1:17**]. Compare that to yet one other instance of warning against favouritism. “You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous” [**DEUTERONOMY 16:19**]. Thus, under the Law, from the beginning of biblical teaching, partiality or favouritism is proscribed for all who would honour God. The teaching becomes foundational for understanding the way God relates to all mankind.

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002)

<sup>3</sup> **The Good News Translation** (American Bible Society, New York, NY 1992)

<sup>4</sup> **New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update** (Lockman Foundation, LaHabra, CA 1995)

<sup>5</sup> **International Standard Version New Testament: Version 1.1** (Learning Foundation, Yorba Linda, CA 2000)

<sup>6</sup> **New Living Translation** (Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL 2004)

The theme of avoiding bias is iterated by Solomon. “Partiality in judging is not good” [PROVERBS 24:23] is a statement echoed just a few verses later in the same book. “To show partiality in judgement is terrible” [PROVERBS 28:21].<sup>7</sup> The case Solomon presented in either of these instances uses tapeinosis—a deliberate understatement to present a worst-case scenario. Underscore in your mind, then, that showing partiality or exercising favouritism—especially when rendering judgement—is the absolute worst thing one can do.

Let me extrapolate that knowledge to the people of God found within the Body of Christ. Paul pleads with the Church of God at Corinth because they were appealing to the civic judiciary to settle their disputes, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:2, 3]! When the church is called to render judgement, the people of God must reflect the character of God and be impartial. They must hold the guilty responsible for their actions and commend those who seek to honour God through righteousness and holiness.

Jesus gained a reputation of being fair in His reception of all mankind. On one occasion, the Pharisees endeavoured to trap Him. It is not the trap that I take note of, but the preamble to the question they asked that draws my attention at this moment. Disciples of the Pharisees, together with Herodians, approached Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances” [MATTHEW 22:16]. They are complimenting Him for fairness! And, just as the Master was even-handed, so those who follow Him must be even-handed in applying the Faith He has given us.

Jude excoriated those whom he identified as wicked men in this brief missive. Of them, Jude wrote, “These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favouritism to gain advantage” [JUDE 16]. One of the marks of wicked people, in addition to being grumbling malcontents, is that they are biased; and they use these biases for their own advantage, implying that they deliberately injure others. These are religious people without compunction about advancing themselves through hurting others.

The admonition that we have received from the pen of James is that we must not show partiality in matters pertaining to the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory. Though it is true that this applies to issues of judgement that come before the church, James compels us to examine out attitudes toward individuals coming into the church or even exploring the Faith. Therefore, it will be instructive for us to review the example that James presents in order to grasp the scope of this instruction and to prove godly in the application.

**THE EXAMPLE** — “If a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit down at my feet,’ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

In the hypothetical case presented, James does not tell us whether the person coming into the assembly is being received into membership or whether the individual is exploring the Faith. I assume that he is deliberately vague in order to permit the example to cover all possible situations within the church. Whether receiving people into the assembly or whether welcoming those who are exploring the Faith, James’ example confronts any tendency toward prejudice.

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<sup>7</sup> **NET Bible** (Biblical Studies Press, Dallas, TX 2006)

The phenomenon of ranking individuals according to the size of their portfolio or according to their social standing is older than we might have imagined. We accuse people of worshipping the almighty dollar, but people have been influenced by wealth from time immemorial. What is important to understand is that this is an example, and not the only reason for concern among the churches of our Lord. To be certain, showing deference to wealth is a problem among the churches; but letting our prejudice dictate action in the church is wrong regardless of the source of our prejudice.

In a former congregation, a man had ruled over the church for some years. He was wealthy, and his money hushed dissent. On one occasion, when I was not being sufficiently accommodating to his wealth, he challenged me, saying, “Who do you think pays your salary?” My response was swift and biblical, “To hell with your money! And you along with it. Why, that’s unthinkable—trying to buy God’s gift! You’ll never be part of what God is doing by striking bargains and offering bribes. Change your ways—and now” [ACTS 9:20, THE MESSAGE]!<sup>8</sup>

I have witnessed in large churches, and in small churches, the deference paid to people of wealth. I am grateful to say that some of the people of wealth I have known were godly and gracious, avoiding taking advantage of their wealth. However, that did not stop many others from hanging onto their words and/or their acts as though they carried more weight than did other, less wealthy individuals. On the other hand, I have seen some of God’s choice saints dismissed because they were not people of influence in the world or because they had no great wealth with which to impress others. James says that we are to avoid permitting wealth or the absence of wealth to influence us in our conduct within the church.

We will do well to remember the words of the Apostle as he wrote to the young theologian, Timothy. “There is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” [1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10].

It is not only wealth that elicits our esteem. Within the congregations of Christ our Lord are found individuals who defer to race and culture. Loyalty is a wonderful trait, if it does not blind us to obedience to the command of our Master. Among the professed people of God are individuals who are willing to disobey, because obedience would bring them into conflict with other members of their own race. I have witnessed this among white congregations, to be certain. However, I have seen the same grievous error reside within Chinese congregations, within black congregations, and among Filipino Christians. It is a trait that contaminates each of us to greater or lesser degree. As individuals and as churches we must determine that we follow Christ Jesus; and if we will honour Christ the Lord avoid being brought into captivity to culture.

I know from experience the courage required in opposing the prevalent culture when it rejects people of another race; and I have been on the other side of that cultural divide as well. I know what it is to oppose the Canadian culture of “nice,” that refuses to condemn evil because we don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. However, such attitudes must be seen for the wickedness they present. Whether promoting southern segregation, or whether promoting oriental isolation, refusal to win the lost because of fear of offending culture is evil. Whether attempting to advance oneself as worthy of admiration by social elites or whether seeking to curry favour through censure of less socially desirable elements of society is equally evil.

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<sup>8</sup> Peterson, *op. cit.*

Other Christians justify rejecting obedience to Christ in order to avoid straining friendship with those who are doing evil. In a deacons' meeting, the head of a missionary organisation pled for me to understand why he could not obey the Bible. He admitted that the position I advocated was true to the Word and that he had acted as I advocated when he was on the mission field; but, he whined, "I've been friends with Frank for over twenty-five years."

Perhaps we have all witnessed professed saints of God who too often close their eyes to open defiance of the command of God because it is a friend or an acquaintance of many years that is perpetuating the wickedness. Such people justify their refusal to do what is right and honourable because they don't want to jeopardise the friendship; and so they jettison intimacy with God and obedience to the Risen Lord of Glory. "You should know that loving the world is the same as hating God. Anyone who wants to be a friend of the world becomes God's enemy" [JAMES 4:4].<sup>9</sup> Surely it is evident that this admonition includes choosing to avoid hurting your friends at the expense of obedience to God.

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, ascended to the throne upon the death of his father. Following his ascension, the people of Israel asked for relief a heavy tax burden imposed by Solomon. Rehoboam inquired of the older men who had advised his father, and they wisely counselled the young king to heed the request of the people. However, in 1 KINGS 12:8, we read, "But he abandoned the counsel the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him." He listened to his friends, because he was comfortable with them. The result was that the Kingdom was divided [see 1 KINGS 12:16 ff.] and God's cause was injured.

I have been a student of the culture of the church for almost forty years, and I cannot say that discrimination is exercised in one area more frequently than in another. I can say, however, that bias and partiality is a serious problem among the churches of our Lord. We are each prone to succumb to the siren allure of following our own prejudice in accepting others within the congregation of the Lord. Therefore, we desperately need to be confronted from time-to-time so that we will avoid surrendering allegiance to the Son of God who receives us without prejudice. Let me say quite clearly, no one is received by Christ on probation! When we are saved, we are fully redeemed and accepted without qualification. Because this is so, we must encourage one another to accept those whom God brings to us without prejudice of any kind.

**THE APPLICATION** — "Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" The NEW CENTURY VERSION captures the horror of James' question when it translates the FOURTH VERSE, "What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better."<sup>10</sup>

Discrimination, permitting our prejudice to overrule the Word of God, leads to sin of a most pernicious sort. Favouritism means that we have set ourselves up as judges. This becomes quite clear when we read Wuest' expanded version. "Are you not divided in your own mind [expressing a doubt as to the requirements of the faith you have in the Lord Jesus], and have become judges with pernicious thoughts?"<sup>11</sup> What is in view is more than merely questioning the value of a fellow believer; the condemnation is that when we discriminate against fellow believers, we are setting ourselves in the place of God. It is as though we have decided that we write the rules as to whether one is truly a Christian or not. This is more than questioning behaviour, it is letting bias dictate acceptance.

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<sup>9</sup> **The Everyday Bible: New Century Version** (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN 2005)

<sup>10</sup> NCV, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, **The New Testament: An Expanded Translation** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1961)

It is imperative that we make some specific application, though we cannot, of necessity, be exhaustive in our search for application of James' teaching. The first critical area I draw to your attention is that we must evangelise without bias. Let me restate that truth in a negative fashion in order to emphasise the truth. **Don't permit bias to deter you from evangelising.**

I was asked to assist a Chinese congregation on one occasion. The deacons were concerned because the church was not growing, and since I was pastoring a rapidly growing church in a neighbouring municipality, they sought my advice. They had an active visitation programme, but no one was being saved despite their efforts. Meeting with the deacons, I asked them to describe their evangelism programme for me. They told me that they followed up on visitors and also focused on nearby neighbourhoods to visit and to present their ministry.

"Tell me," I inquired, "what do you do when you encounter a Korean family?"

After an uncomfortable pause, one of the deacons at last said, "We excuse ourselves and go to the next home."

I followed up by asking, "And if a white couple occupies the home?"

Clearly ill at ease, one of the deacons said, "Well, they wouldn't be comfortable worshipping with us and we wouldn't be comfortable with them."

That honest answer certainly piqued my curiosity; and knowing that the congregation was Mandarin speaking, I sought further clarification of their approach to evangelism by asking, "What if you encounter a home in which the residents speak Cantonese?"

Again, there was that long, deliberate pause before one of the deacons answered the query, "We excuse ourselves, saying that we made a mistake, and go to the next house."

I was forthright in pointing out that their prejudice did not permit God to bless them. If they were to take the Gospel to every home, God would bless them with many people that spoke Mandarin. However, so long as they discriminated against all other people, God could not bless their efforts. The same thing is true for us. If we do not deliver the Gospel to all mankind—rich and poor, Native or Caucasian, proud or humble—God will not bless us. The Commission we received from the Risen Saviour was to "make disciples of all nations" [MATTHEW 28:19]. Those that are discipled are to be baptised and instructed in all that the Master has commanded. The command of the Master was that His people are to be witnesses in "Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" [ACTS 1:8].

Lest you think that I am slamming Chinese Christians, I want to remind you that the first ecclesiastical prejudice was Jewish bias against Gentiles. Despite receiving a command to carry the message of life to "the end of the earth," the Jewish saints, when scattered by the persecution generated by the stoning of Stephen, spoke the Word "to no one except Jews" [ACTS 11:19]. Prejudice that blinds us to obedience is a systemic condition contaminating all Christendom.

My first ministry was in a prison farm in Kaufman County, Texas. Soon after I began preaching there, inmates were being saved. When they were released from prison, they joined me in worship at my home church. Many of those men were black, and the congregation I attended was white. I was informed that these men were unwelcome to attend services with me. No one should be surprised that the congregation which at one time was thriving and vibrant is no longer in existence. We dare not discriminate in reaching out to the lost of our world.

Again, **favouritism cannot be permitted to contaminate your service within the church.** As a Christian, you have been gifted by God, and the gift(s) you now possess were entrusted to you for the benefit of the entire Body. However, if you withhold your gift from some members because you imagine that they are not your kind of people, you dishonour the Saviour and will find yourself opposed to God who gives us every good gift and every perfect gift.

Within the assembly into which the Spirit of God has settled you, each one is responsible to serve one another. Notice the reciprocal commands and you will discover that we are not given the luxury of choosing whom we will serve. We are to “love one another” [1 JOHN 4:7-12]; and if we do this, we will “welcome one another” [ROMANS 15:7], mutually encourage one another [ROMANS 1:12], “live in harmony with one another” [ROMANS 12:16], and we will “care for one another” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:25]. We will avoid passing judgement on one another [ROMANS 14:3], but rather we will “comfort one another” and “agree with one another” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:11]. In the assembly, we will “be kind to one another,” forgive one another [EPHESIANS 4:32], address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs [EPHESIANS 5:19], and submit to one another out of reverence for Christ [EPHESIANS 5:21]. Because we have accepted the burden of mutual love, we will “confess [our sins to one another and pray for one another” [JAMES 5:16] and we will “show hospitality to one another without grumbling” [1 PETER 4:9].

Above all else, we will recognise that each one has received a gift, and we will determine to “use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” [1 PETER 4:10]. The Master declared, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and *servant of all*” [MARK 9:35]. This was a common saying by the Master. In MARK 10:44, He is quoted, “Whoever would be first among you must be *slave of all*.” It is our strength and to God’s glory for us to adopt a servant’s attitude toward our fellow believers sharing the life of the Body.

**Prejudice must not interfere with your conduct as a member of the community of faith.**

Another way of saying the same thing is to remind you, that we must hold one another accountable for both our service before the Lord and for our conduct before the world. To restate the case, **favouritism must not move you from holding one another accountable before God.** This concept is related, of course, to the previous application. As a member of the Body, you are responsible to avoid bringing reproach on the cause of Christ. The former application focused on what you do within the congregation, and the present application focuses on what you do beyond the walls of the church.

Quite candidly, we tend to remain silent in the face of wickedness at the workplace and among friends because we fear giving offence. We justify our actions by saying that we are seeking opportunity to witness for Christ. When did God ever command us to do evil so that good may result? When did Christ ever commend us for being cowardly in order to become brave? By failing to live out the Faith openly, we are often offensive to the cause of Christ.

Society has attempted to copy biblical teaching, drafting laws against discrimination. However, as is true of all that man touches, mankind has utterly contaminated this beautiful teaching by creating discrimination against godliness and the Faith once delivered to the saints. Today, we discriminate in favour of wickedness and sanction prejudice against righteousness. Isaiah identified precisely the condition resulting from man’s attempt to implement God’s standard according to the mindset of the day.

“Woe to those who call evil good  
and good evil,  
who put darkness for light  
and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet  
and sweet for bitter!”

[ISAIAH 5:20]



In the church, we must be godly, avoiding favouritism and holding one another accountable to righteousness. We cannot approve of evil through our silence because we don't want to hurt someone's feelings. Neither can we approve of evil simply in order to enhance our stature in the eyes of another.

When friends tell salacious or lascivious stories and we fail to object, we are choosing their esteem over the purity that Christ requires of His people. When colleagues promote activities that are unethical or immoral and we fail to oppose such actions, we are furthering the cause of evil even as we deny the righteousness of Christ the Lord. When church members speak untruthfully and promote that which is unbiblical, should we remain silent we are giving assent to their wickedness and thus disgracing the Name by which we are called. In each of these instances, our favouritism and bias in an effort to influence others to accept us overwhelms our desire to honour the Lord Jesus. We are neither promoting righteousness nor encouraging one another to do what is honourable. We must hold one another accountable for righteousness.

It would be a good thing for the people of God to be godly, living not as nut cases, but living quiet lives in demonstration of the power of the Spirit. In the early church, one demonstration of the godliness of the Risen Lord resulted in holy awe among those watching. We read the "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard" of God's work [**ACTS 5:11**]. We will not hear of such holy fear until the people of God again live bold lives of godly purity, standing against evil and walking in the fear of the Lord.

I am unapologetic in calling for those who are members of this congregation to determine to reject prejudice, both in the church and in daily life. I am unapologetic in calling the people of God to be holy and pure in their actions. I urge any who stand on the periphery of the congregation to consider whether this is the Body to which God is appointing you. Come, join us and take a stand with us for righteousness and for godliness and for the advance of His Kingdom. Those who share our service who have somehow yet to receive the life offered in Christ the Lord are the focus of my final plea.

The Word of God declares, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." That passage concludes with the promise that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. Believe this message and enter into the freedom that is found only in Christ Jesus the Lord. Receive Him and be saved, even today. Amen.