

5. In what ways have you been wounded by favoritism or prejudice? In what ways have you shown partiality (favoritism or prejudice) toward others?
6. As Christ-followers, we are directed by God's Word to become involved directly and personally with the poor. It is difficult to read the Bible and escape this basic responsibility, and no amount of indirect contributions to church or charity can substitute for personal contact and concern for the poor. So where are the poor in your daily lifestyle? Who is right in front of you, and how can you respond? In what ways can you help the poor while you maintain their dignity?
7. In what ways might we treat rich people as more important than poor people?
8. As a suburban church, in what ways can we show genuine love to people of different races, cultures and economic standing?
9. Why is partiality (favoritism, prejudice) often overlooked as a sin?
10. How might many churches, which have no poor to slight, fall into the trap of partiality by slanting criteria toward the prominent and influential?
11. What is the difference between evaluating a position and judging someone?
12. What is behind our sins of favoritism and prejudice? What inner thoughts motivate us to sinful behavior? In what ways can we appropriately resist these temptations and love as Christ loves?
13. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Do you find it difficult to be merciful to those who don't "deserve" it? How can God's mercy, granted to us when we don't deserve it, help us to be merciful toward one another?

# James 2:1-13

## Discussion Group Questions

April 27, 2008

LESSON 4

Dr. Jerry Nelson

*For discussion following the sermon on April 27, 2008*

## The Condemnation of Partiality

### Key Points

Think about our Welcome Center on Sunday morning. You observe a number of people who apparently "don't belong". Maybe they have piercing, tattoos and purple hair. Maybe they have unkempt clothes and are in need of a bath. Maybe they have on very expensive clothing and exude an attitude of arrogance. What are your thoughts as you "evaluate" them? Today's passage challenges us to examine our responses. James uncovers:

- Favoritism
- Discrimination
- Our attitudes toward the rich and the poor
- Non-preferential love
- Judgment and mercy

God does not show favoritism, and as Christ-followers bearing his image, neither should we. Yet we are prone to comparison, to exploiting others for personal gain (whether they are rich or poor), and discounting the needs of those less fortunate than ourselves. These sins of pride result in all kinds of relational sin against one another.

The plight of the poor elicits a number of responses ranging from pity, to denial, to judgment, to helplessness, to activism. Conversely, we can be tempted to treat the rich with disdain (due to jealousy), or false interest to gain something for ourselves.

If we are being conformed to the image of Christ, if we are to respond to the rich and poor as Jesus responds, if we are to accept and live the challenges of this passage, what then, is a biblical response? Non-preferential love. We must see people as God sees them, and respond to them with dignity, authenticity, and Christ-enabled love. We also must recognize that our tainted thoughts and attitudes are sin and be willing to allow God to transform our hearts.

### **Leader's Guide**

#### Personal Preparation

- While our text deals specifically with prejudices regarding the rich and the poor, there are many ways we compare ourselves with others, resulting in sin. Competition, one-upmanship, and self aggrandizement are cultural norms that often go unchecked. Awareness, followed by a willingness to change, is the first step to transformational change.
- We all face temptations to disassociate with others based on economic status, appearance, political views, race, intellect, and theology. As you prepare your heart this week, ask God to reveal hidden sin of favoritism or discrimination. If someone comes to mind that you have sinned against, ask God to enable you to respond in love.

#### Group Preparation

- The topic of favoritism could spark lively discussion as it relates to social justice. This can quickly become an emotional issue for many, for it reaches to the core of their sense of justice. We place a high value on a perceived equality, but it is often illusive. This could cause a reaction of extremes that either defends the disadvantaged without personal responsibility, or condemns them without applying mercy. Anticipate both the discussion and your response.
- Our groups may express a desire to respond to the poor. Compassion Unleashed is a ministry within SGC that enables and equips people to engage the marginalized and disadvantaged in very practical ways. For more information contact Rich Peterson at [rpeterson@sgc.org](mailto:rpeterson@sgc.org).

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. For what reasons might a person think he or she is more important than another person?
2. As you take a reflective inventory of all relationships (neighborhood, business, social, family, church), do you secretly consider yourself to be above some acquaintances and beneath others?
3. When visitors enter our doors, have you ever been guilty of "sizing them up" according to age, dress or physical appearance?
4. Why is it important to see the church as a Christian community centered in Christ and not just as another social club or special interest group? What are the differences?