



JAMES 1-3 | DEVOTED

INCLUSIVE (Merciful)

James 1.9-11, 2.1-13



Talk About

Have you ever felt excluded? Describe the experience using just a few words.

What concepts do you associate with the term "Inclusive"? On balance are they positive or negative?

What kind of person might feel excluded from your church community? Why might they feel this way?

Can any group be completely inclusive? Explain your answer.

Read James 1.9-11, 2.1-13

Explore

On what basis does the church community to which James is writing including some and excluding others? How would this have been seen?

Why do you think they might be acting in this way?

What reasons does James give to explain that such divisions are wrong?

- *James 1.9-11*
- *James 2.5*
- *James 2.6-7*
- *James 2.8-13*

The Law & Us

The question of the relationship of the OT Law to the Christian is one that many have wrestled with. Some will say that it has no role because we are under grace not Law. Others declare that some laws (like 9 of the 10 Commandments) are still binding. What role, if any, should the Law have in the Christian life?

First we need to affirm with the Apostle Paul that we are never declared right with God by fulfilling the Law. When he makes the contrast between grace and law, he is speaking of the basis of salvation.

So, does the Law have no role? Jesus declares in Matthew 5.17 that he came to fulfill the Law. He then goes on to state that it retains a role and should be taught (5.19). What does this mean for us?

Simply, the Law, as interpreted through Christ, stands as a guide for the Christian life. Jesus fulfilled some (eg. sacrificial laws), abolished others (eg. dietary laws), and affirmed others (eg. moral laws, marriage etc). Not as a way of salvation, but as a guide to holiness. We are not under the Mosaic law, but we are under the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6.2, 1 Cor 9.21), succinctly expressed as "love God" and "love your neighbour" (Rom 13.9-10). This is what James refers to as the "Royal Law" (James 2.8) and "the law that gives freedom" (James 2.12)

In 2.5, is James saying it is good to be poor? Why or why not?

What point is James making with respect to sin in 2.9-11? Why do you think he needed to make this point?

Is James telling us that we are obliged to obey the Old Testament Law? (see Matt 5.17-20)

READ Matthew 18.21-35. What point is Jesus making in this parable?

How does this help us understand James' warning in James 2.13?

Jesus in James

As we have stated previously, the letter of James has a lot in common with the Old Testament "Wisdom" books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes which speak a lot of the practicalities of life in this world, but not much about the Law, the covenants, or God's great act of salvation in the Exodus. Like the OT Wisdom books, James assumes that his readers have the gospel of the Lord Jesus firmly in mind as he explores the challenges facing the church. So it is helpful for us to make explicit what James assumes.

We see in the gospel of grace, that in the person of Jesus God himself came into this world, taking initiative to reach out to those who were excluded from relationship with him because of sin. In his life, Jesus showed compassion to the outcast, mercy to sinner. He embraced the leper. He displayed by his actions that the Kingdom of God was open to all. But we should never leave Jesus as merely a good example (he is the best example, but so much more).

Jesus, the ultimate insider, loved and cherished by his Father, put himself in the place of the outsider. As Isaiah states,

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem." (Isaiah 53.2-3 NIV11)

And at the cross, Jesus as our substitute, was excluded, cast out and rejected by his Father, as well as by those he created (John 1.11), so that we, the deserved outsiders, might be welcomed in. He was treated as we deserved, so that we might be treated as he deserved. Our welcome and inclusion amongst God's people is solely by grace, on basis of Jesus' perfect life and his death in our place.

Action

In your own words, explain the basis on which you are included amongst God's people?

Why should God's church be the most inclusive of all groups?

Does this mean that everyone is included? Why or Why not?

If some are excluded on what basis might that be?

How might the gospel shape the way in which we relate to these people?

What kind of people do you find it most difficult to “welcome and include”? Why do you think this might be the case?

What practical steps might you make as an individual, and also as a part of your Growth Group, to make your church a more inclusive and welcoming community?

What might it look like to boast in your humiliation?