

4

Why is the Church responsible for much injustice?



KICK OFF

People feel that they cannot identify with an institution such as the church of with Christian individuals when they see such an appalling record of injustice and hypocrisy. Discuss



KEY VERSE

James 2:5 'Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.'



BIG IDEA

Because God chooses the poor, anyone with a real connection with God will serve the poor, and flee partiality and oppression.



INVESTIGATE

QUESTIONS ABOUT RICH AND POOR

Read James 2: 1 - 16

1. How does James underscore the absurdity of Christians showing favouritism to the wealthy and the powerful? What does it mean when James says, 'God has chosen those who are poor?'
2. James reveals the irony in favouring the wealthy in verses 6—7? What is the irony?
3. What actions does James says are a sign of a Christian and the Church?
Verses 1—4

Verses 15—16
4. What does verse 13 mean?

STRENGTHENING OUR CONNECTION WITH GOD AND PEOPLE

5. James in verse 1 says 'show no partiality.' What does this mean?
6. What did Jesus do with his glory? Philippians 2: 5—11, John 12:32



DIG DEEPER

Verse 5 reflects not only Jesus' teaching but also the

historical reality. James is pointing out what everyone in his audience knew. With a few notable exceptions, the first Christians came from among the socially poor: not the poverty-stricken class of slaves and beggars but the great mass of people one step above them—artisans, farmers, fishermen and so on. P 42 Dickson

The word 'dishonour' in vs 6 does not mean that Christians are maligning the poor, he means that by favouring the rich over the poor these Christians have effectively stripped the poor Of the honour shown to them by God and His messiah. (Dickson p42-43)

The word 'oppress' in verse 6 has financial overtones and frequently appears in the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament (known as the Septuagint), from which James often cites, in the context of the rich 'oppressing' the poor. (1 Sam 12:3, Jer 7:6, Ezek 18:12, 22:29, Hos 12:7, Amos 4:1, 8:4; Micah 2:2, Zech 7:10, Mal 3:5).

The 'court' in which these Christians are being 'dragged' may be either civil courts or synagogue courts. On what charges Christians are being taken to court is not stated. (Dickson p 43)

7. 'Isn't a church a place where you would find inconsistent, broken people, who don't always get it right?' Can you give examples of people from the Bible who are thought of as great or important figures, but who were also broken or flawed in some way?



THINK &
APPLY

8. Christopher Hitchens was asked, if he was approached in an unfamiliar city at night by a group of strangers, would he feel safe if he knew they had just come from a prayer meeting? Hitchens answered; 'just to stay with the letter 'B', I have actually had that experience in Belfast, Beirut, Bombay, Belgrade, Bethlehem, and Baghdad. In each case....I would feel immediately threatened if I thought that the group of men approaching me in the dusk were coming from a religious observance.' How would you respond to Hitchens?

9. Question 7, might sound excusing inconsistent behaviour, clearly James chapter 2 is not. It was Martin Luther who said, 'All of life is repentance.' Explain.

10. Tim Keller on a DVD said: 'In the Old Testament and especially in the New Testament with Jesus, there are internal self-critiques by the believing community on....religious hypocrisy or in the New Testament 'pharisaism.' What is the difference between 'pharisaism' (or moralism) and the gospel?

People often raise the issue of the 'Crusades.' C. John Sommerville in 'The Decline of the Secular University' says 'The Anglo-Saxons too a long time absorbing the values preached by the monks. They couldn't see how any society could survive that did not respect strength. They twisted Christianity into something that could preach the Crusades, which were to protect God's honour. (p 70).

PRAISE GOD for the other-person centredness of Jesus Christ?

CONFESS our judgementalism, self-righteousness.

ASK GOD that our ministry at Scots' would be full of a Christ-centred message, and lives evident of an 'all of life repentance,'

PRAY ALSO that the Royal Commission into institutional abuse would do its work well.



PRAYER

Praise God for the challenges raised Praying for others in your group: by God's Word through this study?



FAMILY
DISCUSSION

How does this passage apply to our daily life?



READ AHEAD
19—31

For next week— Isn't the God of Christianity an angry judge? Luke 16: