

DISCRIMINATION NATION 7-12-15

(Ezekiel 44) But first, I want to use this opportunity right here at the church I pastor and from the pulpit that I love to announce that I am running for the office of President of the United States. Or maybe not. Wow! I never thought I would see an election with this many candidates in it. There are a handful now on the Democratic side, but there are twenty declared candidates for the Republican nomination and most of them are quite serious contenders. The one who has been in the news the most lately and who has been rising in the polls is The Donald. Mr. Trump. After Trump made a speech about the deleterious effects of having a non-secured border with Mexico, he was released from his relationship with NBC and then with Macy's. Macy's released a statement saying: *Macy's is a company that stands for diversity and inclusion. We have no tolerance for discrimination in any form.* Do you see any problem with that statement? *No tolerance for discrimination in any form?* What have they just demonstrated toward Mr. Trump as a result of his political views? Both intolerance and discrimination!! Is there a problem with the company's decision on Trump? No, they can do business with whomever they choose, but their failure to recognize the discrimination behind their decision is fascinating. *Discrimination.* It is a word that is all over the news in our day. It is seen as a negative word, as a really bad thing. And I find so much confusion surrounding this term that I have decided to devote this morning's sermon to the idea of discrimination and what God's word might tell us about it.

Webster's dictionary tells us that to discriminate is *to see the difference between things.* That is the basic idea. If you don't discriminate you see and treat everything as the same. To discriminate is to recognize where there are differences. So, is discriminating a bad thing or a good thing? Well – one would think from listening to our social discourse that it is always a bad thing, but, in reality, discrimination is sometimes good and sometimes bad and all the time inevitable. What I mean by that is that everyone discriminates and does so many times a day. When you chose what to wear this morning you discriminated among your clothing options. When you ate breakfast you discriminated among the foods in your pantry. When you came to church you likely drove past several churches to arrive here. Discrimination has been a big part of your morning. So, if you decide to work at Macy's, beware --they don't tolerate discrimination in any form.

Let's get to the word of God on this subject. And, I must admit that there is no "discrimination" chapter that explains the whole concept to us. But throughout Scripture it is understood that there is good and evil, dark and light, wise and foolish and that a key to the blessed life is the capacity to

discriminate between these things. In Ezekiel 44 God is speaking through the prophet to the priests of His people and he says in verse **23** *They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.* Now, look at that. Were the priests to teach non-discrimination or proper discrimination? It says we are to discriminate. We are to see things for the different things they are and relate to them differently. There are holy things and profane things, not to be treated the same. But apparently, the Jewish people lost their capacity to discriminate properly. So, in the last book of the Old Testament the Lord sends another prophet promising a future day of mercy, a restoration of Biblical discrimination. Malachi 3:**18** *So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.* Keep that verse in mind because in a little bit we are going to talk about all the various qualities of persons over which we discriminate. This passage from Malachi calls for discrimination among persons based on particular criteria, primarily that of good and evil. The sophisticated, progressive Westerner scoffs at the notion of good and evil. They are considered illegitimate categories. But not by God. He calls for some discrimination around these exact categories. Amos 5:**15** *Hate evil; love good.* Romans 12:**9** *Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.* Isaiah 5:**20** *Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil.* So, if we are going to call evil *evil*, abhor it and hate it while at the same time loving and clinging to what is good – what must we be able to do? Judge between the two. Recognize the difference. And the word for that is *discrimination*. But one of the signs of a culture spiraling downward is the increasing inability of that culture to call evil *evil* and foolishness *foolishness* and immorality *immorality*. Instead we talk about *choice* and *self-expression* and *erotic freedom*.

Oh, well come on Pastor. The term “discrimination” doesn’t refer to things like good and evil, but to people and how some folks put down certain groups and individuals for no good reason. Alright – let’s go there. Now that we understand that to discriminate can be a hugely important, healthy activity and everyone does it constantly let’s begin to consider when it is good and when it is a problem. What are the things over which we discriminate among people? (open question, write on board) Now look at that list. Do you see anything on that list that would be an illegitimate ground for discrimination? Absolutely. Do you see anything that would be a legit ground for discrimination? I hope you do. In fact, I am sure you do. Let’s talk about every one of these and see what God’s word would say to us about proper and improper discrimination.

Let's begin with economic class. Some folks are lower class, upper class, middle class. This is a tricky area because, unlike some qualities, it is hard to tell. What you live in, what you drive, where you work gives us some idea. But when we know or think we know is it legitimate to treat people differently based on their financial status? If you sell yachts for a living it makes total sense to discriminate between financial groups but apart from that kind of thing the Biblical answer is an emphatic "No!" James 2 is the classic passage on this James 2:1-5 *My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?* This kind of admonition is all over the Bible – to seek justice for the poor. Make sure they aren't taken advantage of by the wealthy. In the course of history that was usually how it happened. But it can happen the other way too, right? So, Leviticus 19:15 *You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.* Deuteronomy 1:17 *You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike.* So, clearly discrimination based on economic status or class is ungodly. As our passage in James suggests, the Lord has chosen many of the poor to be His friends. And He has chosen enough of the wealthy that we dare not discriminate against them either. Financial class is a category for non-discrimination. Clear enough.

As a side-bar on this point, there is also social class which is related but different. Part of what distinguishes American culture is the elimination of social class. It is not completely gone – but mostly it is. Nobody cares who Bill Gates' parents were. He is welcome anywhere. But – if you watch Downton Abbey you get a glimpse into a different world-view. In many parts of the world – best-known being India – your family background, your social class dictates so very much about you and is the ground for a great deal of discrimination – but here again a Biblical mindset would obliterate such distinctions in our minds.

Let's move on now to look at another category of discrimination and the most prominent one in my lifetime and that is racial discrimination. Is race a legitimate basis for discrimination? What

would God's word tell us? Once again the answer is, "No." The Bible says less about this than it does about class discrimination, but nowhere does it suggest any legitimacy for this kind of thing. Human beings, all of them, are made in God's image and worthy of esteem on that basis. That some believers of previous generations failed to reckon with this, we must admit and grieve. But clearly, when we come to the gospel era in the New Testament one of the major points is the unity and equality of all believers. We are all just sinners saved by grace. I Corinthians 12:**13** *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.* When you read *Jews or Greeks* there, think *Jews or Gentiles*. This racial divide was huge. But Paul teaches that in Christ it is abolished. In Ephesians 2, he speaks to Gentile believers and says **13-16a** *But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross.* This is all about Jesus bridging the racial divide. Racial harmony is established not by celebrating our many cultures as some would suggest. The unity comes when we celebrate our glorious Lord and make Him the center of everything. Make much of Jesus and you will find racial tension melt away because, as Paul writes in Colossians 3:**10** *there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*

Okay – let's look at another category and my transition here is going to be strategic. Shall we discriminate on the basis of one's character, of one's moral conduct? Is that legitimate biblically? Before I invoke God's word let me quote someone who seems to have a great deal of moral street cred --the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. What was it he said in his most famous speech? *I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."* *I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by...* But, by what? Did MLK preach that there should be no discrimination? No judgment or distinction between persons at all? He said *I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation*

where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. Is that a legitimate grounds for discrimination? Let me tell you who believes it is. Everybody!! Donald Trump doesn't approve the lifestyles of some of the illegal immigrants coming to our country. He wants to discriminate and allow some folks in and keep some folks out. Because he said that out-loud NBC executives don't approve Donald Trump's character and so they discriminate. A federal jury does not approve the character of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev so decided he should die. Your company discriminates against people who don't do their job. Your school discriminates against students who don't study (cartoon). Does the Bible approve of this kind of discrimination? You bet. We are told that if someone won't work they should not be given food. We are told that those who cause divisions in the body or those who are living in blatant immorality should be put out. We are told that our church leaders are to be men of godly character, temperate, respectable, faithful to their wives and their Lord. Is it okay to discriminate on those grounds? It is essential. We don't look for rich people to be officers but we do look for godly people to lead us and set the example for the flock of God. Some discrimination is critical.

Okay, what's next? Let's pick the category of appearance – appearance. This would include looks and dress. Does our society discriminate on this basis? Oh my do we! Macy's doesn't think they do. Lots of people would suggest they don't. But they are deluded. Most of you know the verse from the Old Testament where the Lord is telling Samuel that Eliab, David's brother, was not the chosen future king. There the Lord says: *I Samuel 16:9 Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.* That tell us something about God – but it also tells us something about humans. We do look on the outside and discriminate based on what we see. Is it legitimate? Careful here. Is it? This is a *yes* and *no* proposition. If I had applied for the job of pastor at North Park Church and I had shown up wearing a tank top, flip-flops and a mohawk would I be here today? Would you have wanted me here? Man looks on the outside and there is some legitimacy to this. Restaurants have dress codes. Some of them say, *No shoes, no shirt, no ___ service.* We have social standards of decency that we can and should enforce. This is a matter of putting the interest of the whole over the preference or interests of the one. But there are lines that can and do get crossed. There is discrimination against people based on height, weight, looks. Here is a little snapshot from Bruce Allison's past life. (show bald cartoon) There is no way to legislate this out of society. A person's appearance does impact us. It would be silly to

deny that. But, as we develop more and more the mind of Christ, we will come to value in others what our Lord values and appearance has very little to do with that. This is why the Lord says in I Timothy 2 that Christian women are to adorn themselves not with costly garments and jewelry but with good works.

We need to move on because there are five more categories to cover. How about age discrimination? Is that okay? Do we discriminate based upon age? We do. Should we? And the answer to that is “yes, of course.” To discriminate is to recognize differences and there are real and important differences between the ages. We don’t allow six year olds to drive or buy liquor or enter into contracts. That is a proper form of discrimination. On the other end, if you reach a certain age you get discounts. Hey! I am surprised this has not been protested by somebody. Give it time. Why should I get two bucks off the Eat N’ Park breakfast buffet on Tuesday and Kevin Sanders doesn’t? Because I’ve earned it! We also give certain social benefits to senior citizens that others cannot get. Is this legitimate biblically? You bet. Leviticus 19:32 *You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged.* There is a difference between a 20 year old and a 60 year old, One is more likely to become president and one is more likely to play for the Steelers – which is the perfect segue into our next area of discrimination.

Human society has always discriminated between persons based on ability. And since I brought up our beloved Steelers let’s talk about them. Do the general manger and the coach of the Steelers discriminate? Do they? Some might argue looking at the roster that they discriminate based on race – but we know they do not. What is their ground for discrimination? Ability. The NFL is a meritocracy. They play to win the game and because they do there is no one playing in the league who is handicapped. No one who is under 18. No one who is older than 45 and no one who is not a male. Now, if you could find a 60 year old woman who could bench press 500 pounds and run the 40 in 4.2 seconds every team would want her. They would also all want the homosexual who could do those things. Our brother Tim Tebow aside, they discriminate only on the basis of ability. Is the Bible okay with that? Of course. I have no verse on this but we really should not need one.

Time now to talk about discrimination based on gender. Our society is schizophrenic on this one. For the most part we say that we want men and women treated equally. Some want us to believe that there is no real difference between men and women and any suggested difference is sexist; but then we carve out segments of society that clearly recognize that there is a difference. Last Sunday the US Soccer team won the World Cup championship. Hey Hey! How about that!

But what exactly did we win? The women's world cup. Women and men don't play together in soccer. This weekend as well an American may win the Wimbledon tennis championship. But specifically, she may win the women's championship. Women get their own bracket and rightly so because there is a difference between men and women and it is appropriate in some contexts to discriminate, to recognize that difference and treat them accordingly. And doing so in certain contexts comports with biblical teaching which affirms from beginning to end that both men and women are created in God's image, that both men and women believers are fellow-heirs of the grace of life, but that they have been created with certain intrinsic differences that are complimentary and direct them to somewhat different roles in society, in the home and in the church.

When you read your New Testament you find instructions for women that are distinct from God's instructions to me. He tells the ladies A and the men B. Nowhere does anything like that happen with regard to race. Our society wants to conflate race and gender as if they represent the same differences but they do not. There is no substantive difference between a white male and a black male, but there certainly are differences between male and female. One of the goals of certain elements of our society is to obliterate those differences and allow no discrimination between genders. Were it not for the sports dimension I could see our society going that way very easily. In 2006 Larry Summers lost his job as president of Harvard because he had published a paper which argued that males have a greater genetic aptitude in science and engineering. No competing theory explains the difference in test scores and interest level in these fields, but Summer's view was regarded as sexist. He dared point out a difference. He was supposed to pretend. But God's word does not so pretend and neither should we. God made men and women equal in His sight, made in His image, responsible and glorious but different in significant ways we ignore to our own peril.

Two more categories to go and now we get ultra-contemporary. What about discriminating between those of diverse sexual orientation? Should we see a difference between boys who prefer girls and boys who prefer boys? And if we do, does that call for treating them any differently? Wow – sin makes life complicated so excuse me if my response is a little complicated.

First, we must distinguish between a person's drives or impulses and a person's conduct or choices. This is huge. No one goes to jail or loses his job because he wants to be rich. You get in trouble when you steal. No one gets in trouble for being angry at another person. But if you express that anger through slander or assault you could pay. Our society discriminates between the angry

man and the murderer. Rightly so. With regard to sexual orientation, we must make a distinction between those who act on their impulses and those who do not. All adults have sexual drives that are fallen, that are twisted, that tempt us toward some behavior that is immoral. But only some adults lose their marriages or their ministries or their freedom because of those desires. They are the ones who indulged them. And when they do, they are not being discriminated against because of their inclinations but because of their conduct flowing out of their character. And we have already noted that character and conduct are legitimate grounds for discrimination. Does that mean we shouldn't hire a practicing homosexual to mow our lawn? No it doesn't. In that role their personal conduct makes no real difference. But it may impact whom we hire to run our youth ministry or lead our worship or coach the school soccer team.

Now, what does God's word say on this point? First, it doesn't speak to how we respond to the sexual impulses of others. But, it says this about those who commit homosexual acts: *Leviticus 20:13 If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.* That is discrimination – not on the basis of orientation or inclination but on the basis of behavior. By the way, three verses earlier we read this *10 If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.* That is discrimination too – not on the basis of orientation or inclination but on the basis of behavior. Much more could be said on this point, but we must move on.

Our final category of discrimination to ponder is religious discrimination. There is a long history of this in every corner of the globe, even in our nation. In so many places things are much better than they used to be, but not so in Iraq and Syria, in Sudan or North Korea. Worldwide this kind of discrimination leads to the most terrible persecution. Say you are a Christian and you can lose your head. In our nation we are moving, it appears, into a new season of discrimination against, persecution of the followers of Jesus in large part because we must discriminate between good and evil, between moral and immoral between God and idols. Since the recent ruling of our Supreme Court there are calls to take away tax exempt status for churches. Christian schools with a stance against homosex are going to face tremendous pressure. Conservative believers will be fired and not hired. Already the CEO of Mozilla was forced to resign because he donated to Proposition 8 in California which endorsed traditional marriage by a wide margin in that state. David and Jason

Benham were stripped of their TV show on HGTV when their stance against homosex was made known. Eric Walsh was fired from his position as public health official in Georgia for opposing evolution and calling homosex a sin in his church. The police chief of Atlanta was likewise fired because of statements against homosex which he made in a book, even though the homosexuals who worked under him had nothing but good things to say about him. Sportscaster Craig James lost his job with Fox Sports because he ran for office and took a stance opposed to gay marriage. You likely know about the Oregon bakery fined \$135,000 for refusing to bake a cake for a homosexual wedding. Discrimination against the discriminators? No, persecution of those who discriminate as God directs us to.

My friend, every person on this planet discriminates. We call some things *evil* and some things *good*. Some things *wise* and some things *foolish*. Some things *discrimination* and some things *good judgment*. The challenge for us to discriminate discriminately, to line our views up with God's, to know the mind of Christ and then to stand firm against whatever may come. To do that in a day of moral confusion we need to get our convictions rooted in the word of God and our hearts filled with his grace so that when we speak the truth we do so with humility and love. I close with Paul's prayer for his friends found in Philippians 1:**9-10a** *this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,*¹⁰ *so that you may approve the things that are excellent.* Another way to translate verse 10 is *so that you may distinguish the things which differ*. I hope that as you go from here and read or hear about discrimination that you will do so with a new and Biblical understanding regarding what we are called to do and be as followers of Jesus and that most of all you will discriminate between the One who is worthy of your fear, your awe and allegiance and those who are not. Ultimately, as Jesus said, we cannot serve two masters. Therefore, may we choose wisely whom we will serve.