

The Book Of James: Lesson 5

Love & The Law

Key Bible Verse: “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

Illustration/Setting The Stage: I read a letter once that epitomized the true condition of the human heart. It read, “Dearest Jimmy. No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie. P.S. And congratulations on winning the state lottery.”

This letter reflects a reality that every human heart struggles with - skewed motives. Rarely is a person propelled to go out of her way, do something, make friends with, run errands for someone without the thought that there might be something in it for them. A lot of what we do can be spurred on by thoughts of self – what can we get out of this, or how can we benefit?

Motivated by thoughts of serving self individuals are also led toward prejudiced thinking and seeing others less than they are. Have you noticed that? It seems so natural to think, for example, that one culture is superior to another. Or a person who is well dressed has more value than someone who isn't. We often find ourselves trapped by thoughts that we know are out of harmony with the principles of the gospel that tells us to treat one another impartially and with genuine, biblical love. *Raccoon's don't speak English/Spanish/French.*

No matter what psychologists and sociologists say, our problem can best be summarized in the words of Jeremiah the prophet when he said, “The

heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). But thank the Lord that He offers to create in us a "clean heart" and "renew a right spirit" within us. (Ps. 51:10) God wants to train us to truly love from a pure heart that doesn't have skewed motives. This change is truly a miracle from God that occurs with the full cooperation of the believer.

Sunday – The Man In Gold

James 2:1-4; Leviticus 19:15

James highlights a serious problem in the early church – partiality (respect of persons). **Read James 2:1.** Partiality has weakened the influence of the church and corrupted its witness in the world because Christ is not represented in such behavior.

What is partiality? Prejudice, which leads to discrimination and segregation. Prejudice can be defined in this manner: "Prejudice is prejudgment, or forming an opinion before becoming aware of the relevant facts of a case." The word is often used to refer to preconceived, usually unfavorable, judgments toward people or a person because of gender, political opinion, social class, age, disability, religion, race/ethnicity, language, nationality, or other personal characteristics.

Two apples up in a tree were looking down on the world. The first apple said, "Look at all those people fighting, robbing, rioting - no one seems willing to get along with his fellow man. Someday we apples will be the only ones left. Then we'll rule the world." Replied the second apple, "Which of us - the reds or the greens?"

Favoritism, prejudice, racism, tribalism, whatever you want to call it, was a problem of 1. The early Jews toward the Gentiles; 2. Peter (Acts 10); 3. Among some in the early church (**read James 2:2-4**) – an illustration of the danger of partiality.

"Partial" – "to make a distinction, or a difference." This attitude naturally goes against the teachings of Jesus:

Exodus 23:3, 6: “You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute...You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute.”

Leviticus 19:15: “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”

Deuteronomy 1:17: “You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment *is* God’s. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.”

Acts 10:28, 34, 35: “Then he said to them, ‘You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean’...Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.’”

The gospel teaches us to value all human beings as having equal worth irrespective of gender, age, status, lifestyle, or religious conviction. Do we give greater respect to those whom we perceive to be above us on the social ladder and less respect to those below?

Monday – Class Struggle

James 2:5, 6

In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India.

So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu." That usher's prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior.

Gandhi worked to eradicate the caste system (social stratification – dividing society into different classes) existing in India during his time. Although admirable, prejudice can never ultimately be removed by coercion or laws, but only by a change of heart.

Read James 2:5-7 (poor in the estimation of this world). Experience as an LE – rich neighborhoods unreceptive, poor more receptive. The church has grown the fastest in places and periods of economic and social stress. James echoes the same sentiments of Paul and Jesus which is that the wealth of the rich man often becomes a substitute for trusting in God:

1 Corinthians 1:26-28: "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are."

Luke 6:20-25: "Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed *are you* poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed *are you* who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed *are you* who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile *you*, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to

the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”

Roman law codified discrimination against the poor and in favor of the rich. While our laws today don't do that, there is certainly a favoritism expressed toward those with fame and fortune (slap on the wrist). Paul admonishes us to “Not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s].” (Rom. 12:2)

Tuesday – Loving Our Neighbors

James 2:8, 9; Leviticus 19:18, 18; Matthew 5:43-45

The story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) exemplifies what loving our neighbor looks like. Actually that was a text question I received this week: “What does true Christianity, true love look like? In the story Jesus isn't asking us to try harder or to do more, but to treat all people with impartiality, even those who may have done you or someone you love wrong. True love involves a substantial amount of risk and calls us to tear down barriers. **Read James 2:8, 9.**

Leviticus 19:18: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: *I am* the LORD.”

Matthew 5:43-45: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

Christianity's humanitarian contributions to society: The largest single contributor of education and healthcare; pioneered social work; pioneered programs to protect the well being of children; established the Red Cross; orphanages; pioneered care

for the disabled and elderly; impact on civil liberties; prison reform; work for the blind and deaf and visually and hearing impaired; Habitat for Humanity; work for the homeless, Salvation Army, YMCA, ADRA, etc.

Question: How can we learn to express God's love toward those whom we deem undeserving? Firstly, it's not up to us to determine who is deserving and undeserving, after all God sends His gifts of life upon all people. What we need is time in the presence of Jesus so He has time to change our minds and hearts (2 Cor. 3:18). While we're not called to have warm fuzzy feelings for everyone, we are called to see and treat people as Jesus would. Our minds need re-training.

Wednesday - The Whole Law

James 2:10, 11; Matthew 22:36-40

James 2:10, 11. "Keep" - "attend to carefully". "Offend" - "to fail in one's duty". God's law is not a collection of isolated principles. It is a perfect, harmonious transcript of God's divine will. To choose one part that is most convenient and ignore the rest reveals a desire to do our own will. Glass struck at one point is nevertheless shattered. A chain is snapped by the failure of its weakest link. One note spoils the harmony. Wounded part injures the entire body.

Deuteronomy 27:26: "'Cursed is the one who does not confirm *all* the words of this law by observing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'"

Matthew 22:36-40: "'Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and great commandment. And the second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.'"

Galatians 3:10-14: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them.’ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree’), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

Romans 13:8-10: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.”

Obedience cannot be done in a vacuum. It is always relational, or it’s meaningless. Any transgression of God’s law damages to some extent our relationship to God and others. Am I pleasing God or focusing on my own accomplishments?

Thursday – Judged By The Law

James 2:12, 13; 2 Corinthians 5:10

James 2:12, 13. That we will all face the judgment is a foregone conclusion.

2 Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Acts 17:31: “because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

If everyone is going to be judged, that would include Christian’s. Why, **if a Christian is saved by grace do they need to be judged by the law?** What about John 5:24 – will not pass under judgment? Judgment doesn’t remove the basis of our salvation, but looks to see who has met the conditions of salvation, which is obedience to that law.

Appeal: God desires us to have a genuine Christian walk, one that is seen as treating people impartially, without favoritism, with respect and love. Let’s open our hearts to God’s grace so that we might experience all that God has in store for us.