

Place: Lurgan Baptist 11:1:2004

Reading: James 2:13

## PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

### 14. SOME LESSONS FOR LIFE !

A young solicitor in the U.S.A. once worked for a generous boss who every year at Thanksgiving gave all his employees a turkey. One year, before the birds were handed out, some of the solicitors co-workers replaced his real turkey with one made of paper-mach. To make the bogus bird look and feel genuine, they wrapped it in brown paper, weighed it in lead, and added a real turkey neck and tail. On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, the solicitor went to the company boardroom, picked up his assigned turkey, and thanked his boss for his job and the turkey. Later on, the bus home the young man wondered what to do with his prize. He did not know to cook it and he could not possibly it all be himself. As he was sitting there on the bus a rather run down discouraged looking man got on the bus and sat next to the solicitor. As they talked the young man learned that this stranger had spent all day job hunting with no joy. He had a large family, and that he was wondering what to do about Thanksgiving the next day. Suddenly, the solicitor was struck with an idea. Why not gave his turkey to this man ? But how ? The man probably would not accept charity. So the solicitor said, “ *how much money do you have ?* ” “ *Oh, a couple dollars and a few cents,* ” the man answered. “ *Sold,* ” said the solicitor and he put the turkey in the strangers lap. Moved to tears, the stranger later got off the bus and waved good-bye, thrilled that his family would have a turkey for Christmas. The next Monday, the solicitors friends were dying to know about the turkey. You can imagine their dismay and the young man’s horror when they both learned what each had done. For a week that young man and his co-workers rode the bus searching for the stranger they had unintentionally wronged but they never found him. Can you imagine how bad the solicitor must have felt ? But what about the stranger ? Can you imagine how he thought ? How he must have felt when he discovered that the turkey was only a glob of paper ? For all he knew that young man had intentionally sold him a fake. Was he right ? No ! But the circumstantial evidence seemed to indicate that he was, and it would have been hard to convince him otherwise.

My .... there’s a moral behind this story and it’s this.

Its impossible to judge another person’s motives on the basis of outward appearance. No one can determine the heart of another in a first time encounter. That’s why James says in these opening verses of ( Ch 2 ) that prejudice, partiality and spiritual snobbery are wrong. Do you recall what James has been speaking about ? He’s been talking about the *Dangers of Discrimination within the church fellowship*. You see, here were folk who claimed to be believers yet partiality and spiritual snobbery was written all over their lives and James says that such favouritism is (1) *Inconsistent with our Profession of faith.* ( 2:1-4 ) (2) *its contrary to the Purpose of God.* ( 2:5 ) and (3) *its not in the Best Interests of the Christian.* ( 2:6 ) You see, the very people to whom they were showing great respect where those who were treating them so violently. Now there are Some lessons for Life that we need to grasp here.

## (1) AN ACCUSATION WE MUST ACCEPT

“ *But ye have despised the poor,*” ( 2:6 ) Do you see:

### (a) *THE CONTRAST HERE:*

The word for “ *despise,*” means “ *to treat without honour, to dishonour.*” Their behaviour was in total contrast to God’s. Do you recall what James said in ( 2:5 ) ? God has chosen the poor to be rich through faith and to be heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him. This is what God has done. “ *But ye have despised the poor.*” Do you see the point ? James was telling them that their actions, motives, words all of these were running contrary to the purpose and will of God. God did one thing and they did the very opposite. Do you remember the illustration he gave ? Into a service walked Mr. Have followed by Mr. Have not. *Mr. Gold-finger and Mr. Poor-finger.* One was bedecked in gold rings and fine fabrics, while the other was wearing ragged hand me downs. One was ushered to a special seat with all due ceremony, the other was told to stand somewhere or sit on the floor. Do you see what these believers were doing ? They indulged the rich because he was rich and they were indifferent to the poor because he was poor, and is it not so easy to be guilty of that kind of thing ? To make judgements purely on superficial, financial, material, worldly levels and in so doing being at cross purposes with the will of God. My .... do you know what we need to have ? The mind of Christ ! That’s why Paul says, “ *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*” ( Phil 2:5 ) And we have the mind of Christ we’ll not court the rich and despise the poor. (a)

### (b) *THE CHALLENGE HERE:*

The Amplified puts it like this, “ *But you in contrast have insulted .... humiliated, dishonoured and shown your contempt for the poor.*” ( 2:6 ) My .... have you ever thought of the ways we can “ despise the poor.”

Well, we can despise:

#### 1. THE POOR IN NUMBER:

I recall shortly after I had started the Irish Baptist College I was sent out to preach one Sunday evening to in a little Mission Hall off the Sandy Row, a street called Well wood Street. I was sitting there waiting for the meeting to commence wondering when the people were going to come in, but they didn’t. So I preached to three or four old dears who could not get to sleep because I was shouting too much. So easy to despise the poor in number. *Yet sometimes God reaps his best and richest harvests in His smallest fields.* Do you remember the winter morning Spurgeon was saved ? The building held three hundred but only a dozen turned in that snowy morning yet that was the morning that the Lord saved Spurgeon who was the means of pointing a countless multitude into the kingdom. My .... lets not the despise the day of small things, on the other hand don’t absent yourself from meeting with God’s people. 1

## 2. THE POOR IN NATURE:

This takes a little nearer to the situation James has in mind. Do you remember how the Lord Jesus spoke with that woman at the well ? She was a street-walker, a hooker, a prostitute, but Christ did not despise her. He gave His very best to the very worst. I heard the story of a Christian who was exercised to go out on some evangelistic outreach. But he was told by the elders of his church that he could not do *that* “ *because the Lord has not put His name there.* ” Some time later this same man was with another Christian in a youth centre. The whole place was in semi-darkness with language and morals to match. They had gone into this place to distribute gospel tracts and talk to the young folk about the Lord. Remembering his previous experience with the elders he turned to his Christian friend and said, “ *I don't think the Lord has put His name here.* ” His friend replied “ *No, but the Devil has, and that is why we have come.* ” My .... there's a great danger in fundamentalism today ? Do you know what it is ? *Its the danger of becoming middle class, and despising everyone we judge to be below our station, status, quality or social level.* How it must grieve the Lord when he sees Christians who find it difficult to say hello ! Believers who find it difficult to shake hands ! Tell me, are you in danger of despising other people and other places ? I love the sign that D.L. Moody placed over his church in Chicago ? “ *Ever welcome to this House of God are the strangers and the poor.* ” Does this mean we should ignore the upper classes ? No, we're to preach the gospel to every person regardless of race, resources or respectability ! So easy to despise the (1) (2) and:

## 3. THE POOR IN NEED:

Indeed is this passage not all about poverty ? Its about the “ *have nots,* ” of this world being cold-shouldered by the “ *haves.* ” Now is there not a great danger of thinking that as long as we are preaching the gospel, evangelising the lost, then we are fulfilling all the Christian service that God requires of us. But do you know something ? We're not. You see, *the Bible speaks of the cup of compassion as well as the cup of communion, a cup filled with water as well as a cup filled with wine.* ( Matt 10:42 ) Indeed James has already underscored our responsibility to people under pressure. In ( 1:27 ) he talks about those “ *in their affliction.* ” People under pressure. Does that not open your eyes to the tremendous range of human need there is in the world today ? In the church today ! My .... there are people under pressure in your community, church, seat this .... ? Have you a heart of compassion for them ? Have you a hand of practical helpfulness for them ? (1)

### **(2) AN ALIENATION WE MUST EXPECT**

Did you notice ( 2:6 ) ? Or “ *is it not the rich who domineer over you ? Is it not they who drag you into the law courts ?* ( A.N.T. ) James is giving here a simple reason why these believers should not court the rich. You see, the very people to whom they were showing great respect were the ones who were treating them so violently. These rich men were the ones who hauled the Christians into courts. There was an alienation, a hatred, a persecution that these believers were experiencing. Did you notice:

### **(a) THE CHARACTER OF IT:**

James says “ *they oppress you.* ” ( 2:6 ) Its significant that the only other use of this particular word in the Bible is in ( Acts 10:38 ) where we read that the Lord Jesus “ *went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.* ” You see, this alienation was Satanic in its origin and ruthless in its outworking. But why ? Why were these Christians oppressed by the rich people of their day ? What was:

### **(b) THE CAUSE OF IT:**

I think what happened was this.

#### **1. THE GOSPEL HIT AT THEIR POSITIONS:**

Time and again in the Early Church we read that the Jews stirred up trouble against the disciples because their positions were in danger. ( Acts 5:17 14:2 14:19 )

You see, all the rituals and ceremonies were swept away by the glorious gospel of Christ, and when the gospel hit at their position, then they hit at those who were preaching it. 1.

#### **2. THE GOSPEL HIT AT THEIR POCKETS:**

Do you recall at Philippi ? When Paul exorcised that evil spirit from that demon-possessed girl. We read that

“ *when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers.* ” ( Acts 16:29

19:23 ) The gospel hit at their pockets and because of that, the gospel and those who preached it must go. Earl Kelly was the pastor of Ridgecrest Baptist Church, in Jackson Mississippi. A friend of his became pastor of a church in a small delta town, and that church was in the pocket of a local landowner. During that first year in the town the pastor uncovered a terrible record of economic oppression which had made that farmer rich. The pastor got increasingly angry at all he heard and so one Sunday morning he preached a fearless sermon on honesty. On Monday the landowner came to see him. He told him how much his ministry was blessing him and his family.

“ *In fact you mean so much to me personally that I want to show my gratitude.* ” He gave the pastor a cheque for a sizeable amount of money. The pastor wept. This was the exact amount of money he owned the bank which was controlled by this man. As the cotton planter was leaving he said to the preacher, “ *By the way I assume you have preached your last sermon like the one you preached yesterday we don't need that kind of preaching in our church.* ”

Without a moments hesitation the pastor tore the check in shreds and said, “ *all the money in the world could not make me alter the contents of the gospel.* ” It was alas the last message he preached on honesty in that church for a short time later he was fired on a trumped up charge. I tell you people don't like it when the gospel hits at their pocket. Incidentally, has the gospel hit your pocket ? As a Christian believer do you give to the work of the Lord ? Do you give a tenth

of all you earn ?

( Mal 3:8 ) Do you give as God hath prospered you ?

### 3. THE GOSPEL HIT AT THEIR PRIDE:

For it brought both rich and poor unto the same common platform. My .... here were believers who were experiencing alienation, suffering and persecution.

In ( Gal 5:11 ) Paul speaks of “ *the offence of the cross.* ” Do you know why Paul suffered ? Because he was unwilling to compromise the cross. You see, the preaching of the cross on our lips and the principle of the cross in our lives will always be an offence to the natural man. Man wants the results of the cross but never its requirements. He wants the happiness it brings but never the holiness it requires. He wants the comforts that it offers but not the cost that it involves. And my .... if we preach the kind of message and live the kind of life that takes man down off his self-made pedestal and lays him in the dust before a Holy God, then its not going to be popular and we’re going to be alienated. The Lord Jesus made it clear, “ *In the world ye shall have tribulation .... if they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.* ” ( Jn 16:33 15:20 ) You see, its impossible at one and the same time to walk closely with the Lord and to become comfortable in the world in which we live today. So there is (1) (2)

### **(3) AN ASSOCIATION WE MUST REFLECT**

You see, as believers we’re associated with the Lord. We bear “ *that worthy name.* ” ( 2:7 ) And we ought to reflect that in our daily lives. Now these rich folk not only dragged the Lord’s people into court, but they dragged the Lord’s name into contempt. No wonder James infers that it was the height of folly for Christians to court these men to whom Christ was just a swear word. “ *Do not they blaspheme .....* ” ( 2:7 ) Do you see:

#### **(a) THE NAME WE BEAR:**

The Amplified puts it like this, “ *that precious name by which you are distinguished and called, the name of Christ invoked in baptism.* ” ( Gen 48:16 ) Maybe the reference is to their baptism. Certainly the command of Christ was to baptise believers, “ *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.* ”

( Matt 28:19 ) The other place this phrase was used was in marriage, where the wife takes the name of the bridegroom. Whatever the picture the principle is clear.

We bear the name of Christ and ought to reveal His nature in our lives. Alexander the Great said to one of his Captains that was also called Alexander, “ *See that you do not bring dishonour to the name Alexander.* ” My .... you belong to Christ, you bear His name. But what about the people you work with, live with ? Do they know it ? Sense it ? Feel it ? (a) But there is:

#### **(b) THE DANGER WE FACE:**

“ *Do not they blaspheme,* ” Surely no Christian would ever do that ? I wonder ! What about:

## 1. OUR UNGUARDED LIPS:

One Bible Dictionary defines blasphemy as an “*act of effrontery in which the honour of God is insulted by man.*” Do you know something? God is not only insulted by cursing but by being casual in holy things.

You see, we live in an age of informality, the cult of the casual is one of the most widespread today. Today’s world is casual in its dress, in its habits, in its language, in its morality, and we are in great danger of being casual about God. There is a verse in ( Jer 23:32 ) which accuses false prophets of causing God’s people to sin

“*by their lies and by their lightness.*” Oh, we’re not high church people. We have got rid of the ceremony, and the ritual and the liturgy and at the same time we have got rid of the awe, and the reverence, and we speak to God casually. Is that not the danger? Do you know what the Psalmist says? “*God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him.*” ( Ps 89:7 ) Do you need to keep that in mind when you come into this building?

When you approach the Lord’s Table? (1)

## (2) OUR UNGODLY LIVES:

Some years ago a German philosopher called Friedrich Nietzsche became interested in Christianity. He began to move among Christian people to listen to what they were saying, to watch what they were doing. After a long time he came to this conclusion, “*these Christians will have to look a lot more redeemed before I can believe in it.*” So Nietzsche went back to his philosophy and searching and eventually became the spiritual father of Nazism and the forerunner of the God-is-dead theology. As far back as Romans Paul was able to say of some Christians that “*the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.*” ( Rom 2:24 1 Tim 6:1 ) My .... is Christ’s name being blasphemed in the area you dwell, the home you live, the place you work because of the life you’re living? Are the world saying, “*They’ll have to look a lot more redeemed before I can believe in it.*”

The Lord Jesus said, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*” ( Matt 5:16 ) Is that not the life at which we should aim? A life that does not drive folk from the Bible, from the Cross, from the Christ but a life in which we “*adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*” ( Titus 2:10 )