

Place: Lurgan Baptist 25:1:2004

Reading: James 2:1-11

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

15. THE CHRISTIAN AND GOD'S LAW

A pastor was approached by some unhappy church members who complained about too many unbelievers coming to the church. A youth pastor was confronted by irate parents who told him that they didn't like the idea of unsaved kids being involved with their young people in the youth ministry. What people with such opinions fail to realise is, that they are discriminating against unbelievers in much the same way the Early Church were discriminating against the poor. Do you recall that James has been dealing with *the Dangers of Discrimination*. He's been pointing out that prejudice, partiality and spiritual snobbery are wrong. You see, here were folk who claimed to believers and yet these things were written all over their lives, and James says that such favouritism is *(1) Inconsistent with our Profession of our faith: (2:1-4) (2) Its Contrary to the Purpose of God: (2:5) (3) Its not in the Best Interests of the Christian: (2:6-7) and now he says that partiality, snobbery, favouritism is (4) Inconsistent with Scripture:* Which says, " thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Now this passage (2:8-11) is all to do with *the Christian and God's Law* ! What exactly is our relationship to the Law ? The *Legalists* say we are bound to it and therefore we should meet on the Sabbath which is Saturday. They say that salvation is not obtained by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, but by following the law. But my the ten commandments cannot save. On the opposite end of the scale are *the Libertarians* who say they are totally free from the law. They cite (Rom 6:14) as their flagship verse, " *For sin shall not have dominion over you for ye are not under the law but under grace.*" Does this mean that Christians are permitted to be lawless ? Or does it mean that our relationship to God is not based on law but on grace ? Its interesting to note that the Moral Law is repeated in the N.T. epistles. Christians today keep the Moral Law, not because it was enjoined by Moses, but because such behaviour is the natural response of a changed heart to the love of Christ.

Do you recall Paul words to the Galatian believers ?

" *Stand fast therefore in the liberty, with which Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*" (5:1) You see, the believer is not governed by external laws and rules but by the internal royal law the law of love, and when he loves God with all his heart and his neighbour as himself, he will certainly live within the parameters of the moral code of the Mosaic law. Now having said all of that lets get down to examine this passage this ! Notice here:

(1) THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS LAW

" *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, as thyself,*" (2:8) Do you see how this law is described ? " *The royal law,*" now in what ways can that be said to be a valid description of God's Word ? Well, I think we can say:

(a) ITS SOURCE IS ROYAL:

At one point during our Coronation Service a Bible is handed to the incoming Monarch with these words,

“ We present you with this Bible, the most valuable thing this world affords. Here is wisdom. This is the Royal Law. These are the lively oracles of God.” Did you notice that phrase ? *“ The Royal Law.”* My when we hold the Scriptures in our hands we are holding a Book whose source is Royal. It has God as its author. Nearly 4,000 times in the Old Testament alone, 700 times in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible and the most disputed part of the Scriptures, 40 times in one chapter the writers claim to be speaking God’s Word. *“ God spoke,” “ The Word of God came,”*

“ God commanded,” “ Thus saith the Lord,” “ The Lord spake these words,” this is the language of the O.T. from beginning to end. But what about the New Testament ? Well, it contains approximately 600 quotations from the O.T. all of them taken as authoritative. When the N.T. comes to speak of itself listen to the terms it uses. Paul says, *“ the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”*

(1 Cor 14:37) John says, *“ this then is the message which we have heard of Him.”* (1 Jn 1:5) My Its source is royal. You see, when the Scripture speaks, God speaks. When God speaks, the Scripture speaks.

(Exod 9:16 Rom 9:17) In every sense, when you pick up the Word and read it, you’re hearing God’s voice. Is that not exciting ? God is the Author of this Book ! Outside Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee there is a quotation engraved on bronze open Bible. It reads like this,

“ The Bible is the Word of God, In exhaustive in its adequacy. It is harmonious in infinite complexity. Supernatural in origin, Divine in Authorship, Human in Penmanship, Infallible in Authority, Infinite in Scope, Universal in Interest, Eternal in Duration, Personal in Application, Regenerative in Power. Immortal in its hopes and Immeasurable in its Influence. Inspired in Totality. The Miracle book of Diversity in Unity. There is not a sin it does not condemn, not a virtue it fails to mention. It is an oasis in a desert of despair. This wonderful Book of Harmony in Infinite Complexity, travels more highways, walks more bypaths, knocks at more doors, speaks to more people in their mother tongue than any book ever printed.” Amen ! (a)

(b) ITS SUBJECTS ARE ROYAL:

James says, *“ If ye fulfil the royal law ye do well.”*

Perhaps James refers to this as a royal law because it’s the law of Christ’s kingdom. In (2:5) he reminds that we are *“ heirs of the kingdom,”* and therefore are under the laws of the kingdom. We’re part of a *“ royal priesthood,”* (1 Pet 2:9) and therefore must be guided by His Law. For the unbeliever, the Bible helps them to Find Christ, for the believer the Bible helps them to Follow Christ. You see, every part of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, the Law and the Gospels, the Psalms and Prophecy, the narrative and the epistles, are written for the blessing and benefit, the guidance and comfort, the encouragement and enabling of God’s people that they

might be “ *conformed to the image of His Son.* ” (Rom 8:29) Do you know what Paul says ? “ *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* ” (2 Tim 3:16) And for what purpose ? “ *that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* ” (a) (b)

(c) ITS STANDARDS ARE ROYAL:

“ *If ye fulfil the royal law as thyself,* ” (2:8)

Do you recall that in answer to the question, “ *which is the first commandment of all ?* ” (Mk 12:28) the Lord Jesus said, “ *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength this is the first commandment. And the second is like namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* ” (Mk 12:30-31)

“ *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* ” (Matt 22:40) Now do you see what the Lord Jesus was doing ? He put the first four commandments of the Decalogue into His first commandment, this has to do with our dealings with God. Then Christ put the final six commandments of the Moral Law into His second commandment, this has to do with our dealings with one another. Now James takes Christ’s summary of the last six commandments, “ *you shall love your neighbour as yourself,* ” and he calls it

“ *the royal law.* ” Now its not only royal because its given by the King of Kings, but its royal because it’s the King of all laws. You see all our relationships with each other are to be governed by the royal law of love. Now wouldn’t it be wonderful if that were the case ?

But the fact is, that we have all certain built in prejudices that colour our reactions to people. Some hold prejudices against people whose marriages break down, those who have been emotionally ill, those who belong to a different group socially, economically. Now do you know what these prejudices do ? They produce cliques, gossip mongers, power hungry groups who put enormous pressure on people to conform to their rules of behaviour. Each group has its own unwritten royal law of love that states, “ *We’ll love if you have money if*

you’re educated If you dot our “ I,” and cross our

“ t,” my the list is endless. But listen, there is no

“ if,” with Christ. “ thou shalt love as thyself.”

Full stop. Here then is (1)

(2) THE DEMANDS OF THIS LAW

And this can be summed in one word. Love !

“ *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,* ” now notice:

(a) THE MENTION OF THIS LOVE:

In the Scriptures ! You see, James reached back into the Old Testament for one of God’s laws. God gave it in

(Lev 19:18) “ *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,* ” the Father gave it, and then the Son reaffirmed it to his disciples. Do you recall this was the Saviour’s last charge to His disciples

before He went to the cross ?

Oh, Christ could see down through the ages. He knew that His people would be living in a hostile world. He knew that in the world they would experience all kinds of hostility and so He commanded them. “ *Don’t hate one another, don’t be ungracious, unkind, discourteous.* ” “ *Love one another as I have loved you.* ” (Jn 13:34) the Father gave this command in the Law, the Son gave this command to His disciples and the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with God’s love and expects us to share it with others. (Rom 5:5) Is that what you are doing ? Has God shown love to you ? Are you showing love to others ? Are you characterised by love for your fellow believers ? Or have you permitted jealousy, malice, bitterness to well up within your heart ? (a)

(b) THE MEANING OF THIS LOVE:

Do you know what Christian love means ? Lets imagine here’s a young fellow in university, who sees a young lady and thinks he falls in love with her, but she is not the least bit interested in him. So he goes up to her and says, “ *I command you to love me.* ” Can a fellow do that to a young girl ? Of course not. Then how can God command us to love one another. Well, we must understand that Christian love is not an emotional thing that we manufacture. Christian love means this. *We treat each other the way God treats us.* How does God treat us ? God forgives us, so we forgive one another. God is kind to us, so we’re kind one to another. God receives us so we receive one another. My we may not have the same personalities, interests, we may disagree on a lot of things but we willingly treat each other the way God treats us ! (a) (b) But did you notice:

(c) THE MAGNITUDE OF THIS LOVE:

“ *Thou shalt love thy neighbour,* ” “ *And who is my neighbour ?* ” (Lk 10:29) Do you remember that it was in response to that very question that the Lord Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan ? Would his Jewish listeners not have been startled ? A Samaritan. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. My the last person you would expect to help a Jew would be a Samaritan. But help him he did. You see, he did not allow racial or religious barriers to hinder him helping this half-dead Jew. “ *And who is my neighbour ?* ” Anyone who needs our help. Its not a question of geography but opportunity ! The important question is not “ *Who is my neighbour ?* ” But “ *To whom can I be a neighbour ?* ” Tell me, does your love reach out to all irrespective who they might be ? Many years ago in the city of Chicago a little ragged boy walked several miles across the city in the cold of winter in his hand me down clothes to attend a S.S. class that D.L. Moody was teaching. One Sunday one of Moody’s assistants said to the young fellow, “ *Son why do you come all the way across this city to this S.S. when there is one closer to where you live.* ” Do you know what he said ? “ *They love a fellow over here.* ” Is your love limited by class, creed, colour or country ? James also speaks of:

(d) THE MANNER OF THIS LOVE:

Do you see what he says ? “ *Thou shalt as thyself.* ”

How does a man love himself ? Well, Paul says, “ *No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but*

nourisheth and cherisheth it.” (Eph 5:29) Is that how you love your neighbour ? The way you love yourself. Paul says,

“ *look not every man on his own things but every man on the things of others.*” (Phil 2:4) You see we’re either living self-centred lives or the good of each other is our deep concern. Now James is talking here about

“ *The Christian and God’s Law.*” (1) (2) and now he turns to:

(3) THE DESECRATORS OF THIS LAW

And he points out something very interesting, that the law of God is an entity and to offend in one point, to make a very small slip up, makes one a law breaker. He speaks here of those who are guilty of:

(a) ADULTERY: *That’s on the MORAL LEVEL:*

“ *Do not commit adultery,*” (2:11) Do you what the Lord Jesus called His age ? “ *An evil and adulterous generation.*” (Matt 12:39) Two thousand odd years later His words are a precise description of our 21st century world. My we are living now in an age when the word sex, is associated with words like perversion, prostitution V.D. and Aids, when it ought to be associated with beautiful words like marriage, home, love and children. Some years ago The Readers Digest did an article on Venereal Disease in Britain. It disclosed that every day in Britain 50 teenagers were contracting syphilis or gonorrhoea. It also disclosed that 200 venereal disease clinic’s could not cope with the numbers that were coming to them. And that’s only a small part of the moral cancer that’s eating away at our country. Bur before we catch up our righteous robes and say that we are at least from that sort of thing, that we have never committed the act of adultery, lets remember that the Lord Jesus made it clear that if a man looked on a woman with lust he was guilty of adultery in his own heart. (Matt 5:28) *Men you know we commit it in our minds and many of our minds are sewers and not sanctuaries.* That’s why Paul says, “ *Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report think on these things.*” It all begins in the mind. Does this mean the fault is always with the man ? No ! For Christian woman and girls can dress, speak, and act in a way that is calculated to stir up lust in the mind of a man. (1 Tim 2:9)

(a)

(b) MURDER: *That’s on the EMOTIONAL LEVEL:*

“ *Do not kill,*” (2:11) Alas, how many thousands of babies are killed every year by abortion. You say, “ *I’ve never killed anyone directly or indirectly.*” Do you know what the Saviour said ? If you are angry with your brother without a cause you’re guilty of murder. Do you know what John says ? “ *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.*” (1 Jn 3:5) Are you innocent now ? Are you nursing a grievance against a brother ? Are you harbouring resentment of any kind ? Is there someone with whom you’ve broken off communication because of the bitterness and resentment in your heart ? I wonder how many heart-murderers there are in this church this ? (a) (b)

(c) PARTIALITY: That's on the SOCIAL LEVEL:

Do you see what (2:9) says ? “ *Transgressors,*”

(parabatai) refers to a man who has a prescribed course to walk, but steps over the line and walks beside the intended path instead of on it. In other words he deviates from God's intended course. My you may not commit adultery, or murder but what about partiality ? Have you ever discriminated on material grounds ? Then you have broken God's law, and are guilty of sin ! For what is the royal law concerning our relationships with one another ? “ *Thou shalt love as thyself.*” (Lev 19:15) Have you loved them regardless of their rank, resources, or reputation ? James says,

“ For whosoever,” (2:10) Do you see that word

“ *offend.*” It means a very small slip up. James says that to commit even one little sin is to be “ *guilty of all.*” That is he is guilty of not keeping every part. D.L. Moody compared God's Law to a ten-link chain onto which a man was holding while suspended over a great cliff. Moody said that if all ten links were to break, the man would fall to his death. But if only one link were to break the man would fall just as far and just as fast.

My do you see this that you cannot reach heaven on the basis of your good works, reputation or

morality ? We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. *Do you know what God's Law does ?*

It leaves us without a leg to stand upon. It condemns us, it shuts us up to Jesus Christ, the only Saviour.

(Rom 2:12) There is not one of us here this who does not need a Saviour, and you have not a hope of heaven apart from Jesus Christ. My do you know Christ ? Have you received Him as your personal Saviour ? Have you taken refuge in Him who became a curse for you that you might be delivered and saved ?

Can you say this with the hymn writer ?

***“ The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.”***