

The Book of James

The Everlasting Gospel

Lesson #13 for December 27, 2014

Scriptures: Hebrews 4:2; 10:1-4; Psalm 103:3-4; Luke 15:11-32; Romans 3:24-26; Revelation 12:17; 14:12.

1. We are now coming to the end of our discussion of the book of James. The authors of the lesson are stepping back from the text of the book of James itself to take an overall look at how James fits with Scripture as a whole. They have chosen to talk about *the gospel* throughout Scripture. It is interesting to note that *the gospel* is not mentioned at all in the book of James.
2. Read Revelation 14:6. Seventh-day Adventists have claimed the three angels' messages as our final message to the world. Those three angels' messages begin with Revelation 14:6 and "the everlasting gospel." What is the everlasting/eternal gospel?
3. Could you define the meaning of *the gospel* in a few words? How did Paul describe the gospel in Romans 1:16-17? Why do some translations sound so different from others? Why are we so prone to listen to the Devil instead of God?

Romans 1:17a:

"For the gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself. . . ." (*GNB*)

"God's way of putting people right. . . ." (*The Message*)

"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed. . . ." (*KJV*)

"For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed. . . ." (*NASB:1995*)

4. Many Bible translators have struggled with how to interpret Romans 1:17. The Greek says simply, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed." But, without an understanding of the great controversy, they asked themselves, "Who would dare to question the righteousness of God?" And so, they choose a rather strange translation of this verse, "A righteousness of God." And what is that righteousness of God? With their understanding of how the gospel works, that righteousness of God must mean how God justifies or makes human beings right. They think that it could not be about God's own righteousness!
5. But, Seventh-day Adventists recognize that in the very first pages of the Bible, in Genesis 3:1-5, Satan speaking through the serpent in the tree accused God of lying. And all through Scripture, we see a storyline which tells us how various individuals and groups—especially the children of Israel—have responded to Satan's lies and how other individuals have responded to the truth about God.
6. Read Hebrews 4:2. **For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.** (*NIV*)
For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. They heard the message, but it did them no good, because when they heard it, they did not accept it with faith. (*GNB*) [Bold type is added.]
7. So, here we have two contrasting views of the gospel in this lesson. One view suggests that the good news is that when human beings sinned, God demanded that someone pay the price for that infraction. Jesus offered to pay that price by His death. As a result, God—perhaps reluctantly in some views—accepted the payment and agreed to save us.

8. A second view suggests that from the beginning the question has been: Who is telling us the truth? Is it God? Or, His great adversary? God has said that sin is deadly. (Genesis 2:17) The Devil said, "That is a lie." (See Genesis 3:1-4.) So, who is telling us the truth? Who can we trust? Surely, no Christian would openly choose the Devil! Jesus came not only to tell us the truth about the gospel but to live it out. He did not die of crucifixion; He died of sin; and He arose in His own power to prove His divinity.
9. Are we convinced that sin is deadly? Do we really believe God's words? Do we tend to believe the Devil when he suggests that God is requiring things of us which are unreasonable and unfair? Every time we sin, aren't we suggesting that we do not believe that God's ways are best? God is the only source of life. (See Psalm 36:9; Acts 17:25,28; *MB* 74.3; *Ed* 197.3; *RH*, December 2, 1890 par. 15.) If we are separated from Him, we die.
10. So, which of these two versions of the gospel seems more important to you? And more truthful? That Jesus by assuaging the wrath of God paid the price for our sins and our salvation/healing? Or, that God is not the kind of Person His enemies have made Him out to be, and He is waiting with longing desire to welcome His children home? (*COL* 69.1)
11. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. Notice that when we get to know the Lord, it will transform/heal us. And as a result, when God welcomes us home, our past sins no longer matter. But, that is not all. By beholding we are changed to become like Him. (*The Great Controversy* 555)
12. Is the best news of all that God has made some kind of legal arrangement to pay for your sins? Or, is it that we have discovered that God is totally and completely loving, and He can hardly wait to welcome us home? (1 John 4:8,16) But, is it safe for Him to save us?
13. Our lesson suggests that some people have a hard time finding the gospel in the Gospels! Jesus came to a tithe-paying, health-reforming, Sabbathkeeping, law-abiding group of people awaiting the arrival of the Messiah. What more could they possibly need?
14. But unfortunately, to the Pharisees and most of the Jews in Jesus day:

The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and **God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary.** He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. **Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth.** Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. **The only way in which he could set [justify] and keep [sanctify] men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes. . . .**

Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God. In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, "I have manifested thy name." [John 17:6] "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." [John 17:4] When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men. *The Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890, par. 6,9. [Bold type and

content in brackets are added.]

15. Did Jesus come primarily to “pay the price for sin”? Or, did He come “to set men right through the revelation of God”? How are these two approaches different? Could both be true? What price needs to be paid to deal with sin? (Romans 8:3)
16. Read Luke 15:11-32 and Luke 18:9-17. Who are the surprising characters in each of these stories? The actions of the prodigal were not really that surprising to an ancient Jew. The behavior of the Pharisee seemed obvious to the Jews of Jesus’s day. The surprising characters in the stories were the prodigal’s father and the tax collector. The story of the prodigal teaches us that God loves sinners even when they are covered with the “mud” of sin. And God loves traitors—for that is what the publican was thought to be—when they come humbly before Him. The prodigal’s re-exposure to the father was transformational for him. The tax collector’s prayer before God was transformational for him. But, the main character behind both of these stories is God the Father.
17. Read Matthew 26:28, *NASB*. Compare Mark 10:45. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* goes on to say: “Thus, salvation is free to us because He, Jesus, paid the full price for it.” When we read such a statement, shouldn’t we ask the questions: What was the price? And, to whom was it paid? Where do you think you would fit in these two parables?
18. Read 2 Corinthians 3:14-16 and 3:2-6. What did Paul seem to suggest is required for salvation?
19. We know that at the time of the Divine revelation on the Damascus road, Paul experienced a “fruit basket upset” in his thinking. It took him nearly three years to sort it all out.
20. Read Romans 3:25-26. We could spend a lot of time looking at these verses. But, it is important to notice that three times Paul said that God’s righteousness must be demonstrated *before* He talked about setting men right! There is nothing in the text about appeasing God’s wrath! Why do you think that is? Do we really need to see the truth about God demonstrated before we can come to fully trust Him? Are we ready to do that? How do we get to know God better?
21. Read Hebrews 7:19; 8:1-2,6,9; 10:1-4. It is very clear from Hebrews 10 that the sandbox demonstration of the gospel in the Old Testament could never be a full and complete portrayal of the gospel. Hebrews 10 suggests that while the blood of the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament could never take away sins, “The offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” does atone for sins including those committed under the old covenant. (Hebrews 10:10, *NKJV*; and Hebrews 9:15) Did sacrificing a lamb cause them to stop sinning?
22. Was the author of Hebrews suggesting that the problem was that the people in the Old Testament brought the wrong blood? Is there something magical about the blood of Jesus Christ? Back in the Garden of Eden, God had said that sin leads to death. (Genesis 2:17) The deaths of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (See *DA* 693.1.) and again on the cross demonstrated that fact completely and finally.
23. Could we ask for any clearer demonstration? That death and the subsequent resurrection on the third day proved unequivocally that Satan is the one who has lied and misrepresented God at every step of the way. Jesus was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Revelation 13:8. See also Jeremiah 32:40; Hebrews 13:20-21; John 13:34.) Sin leads to death!

The covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant. The plan of

redemption was not conceived after the fall of man to cure the dreadful evil; the apostle Paul speaks of the gospel, the preaching of Jesus Christ, as “the revelation of the mystery, which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith.” [Romans 16:25-26] (Revised Version)—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times, August 24, 1891 par. 10; The Faith I Live By*, p. 77.5. [Content in brackets is added.]

24. We hope that it has been clear in our lesson so far that the questions which arose at the very opening of the great controversy on this earth were convincingly answered by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The covenant has been the same, the law has been the same, the gospel has been the same from Adam’s day to ours. (John 8:56; Romans 4:13; James 2:21-23)
25. Read Revelation 12:17 and 14:12. Seventh-day Adventists have quoted these verses along with Revelation 19:10 to prove that we are the final, end-time people of God on this earth. Is that a valid claim? What is the testimony of Jesus? See #14 above. Could we be witnesses to the truth about God as He was? Are we so settled into the truth both intellectually and spiritually that we cannot be moved? (4SDABC 1161.6) Do we know for sure that we trust and obey God because He has proven that He can be trusted?
26. Read Revelation 13-14. Are the fearsome words in the three angels’ messages recorded in Revelation 14 a new and distinct message? Or, are they a response to the enemy’s threats recorded in Revelation 13? Ultimately, they are a response to the Devil’s ongoing lies.
27. Is it true—as has been suggested on many occasions—that to know God is to love Him? If we do not love Him as we should, is it because we do not know Him as we should? Do we believe that God the Father is just as happy and excited to welcome us home as the father was in the story of the prodigal?
28. Review again the story of the prodigal, the father, and the older son. Try to imagine what was going on in the mind of each one at each phase of the story. Would your father have been willing to divide his estate and give the appropriate portion to a younger son so he could take it away and spend it in riotous living? What does this tell us about God the Father’s recognition of our freedom?
29. The prodigal came to his senses when he found himself hungry and associating with pigs in the mud. When God looks down at our world today, does He see us wallowing in sin? Are we prepared to get up and return to Him? When the prodigal returned home, the father killed the fatted calf in his honor. Did the calf have to die for the father’s love to be manifested? Did that father in any way suggest that he could not accept the son back until a calf died? Or, even until the son repented and asked for forgiveness?
30. Why did Jesus have to die? Was it to appease the wrath of an angry God? (See the sermons of Jonathan Edwards.) Or, did Jesus die to teach us the truth about the results of sin? What do you think happened in the prodigal’s family in the subsequent weeks and months? What will happen in God’s family?

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