

The Book of James

Love and the Law

Lesson #5 for November 1, 2014

Scriptures: James 2:1-13; Mark 2:16; Leviticus 19:17-18; Romans 13:8-10; John 12:47-48.

1. The purpose of this lesson is to discuss the relationship between law and love. Jesus clearly taught that to love God and to love our fellow humans is the essence of keeping the law. In Romans 13:10, *GNB*, Paul wrote: "If you love someone, you will never do them wrong; to love, then, is to obey the whole Law."
2. Read Luke 10:30-37. One of the most famous stories in the Bible is the story of the good Samaritan. This story teaches some vital truths that are very difficult to live up to.
3. Ellen White had some incredible things to say about this. (See *The Desire of Ages* p. 497-505.)

Among the Jews this question [Who is my neighbor?] caused endless dispute. They had no doubt as to the heathen and the Samaritans; these were strangers and enemies. But where should the distinction be made among the people of their own nation, and among the different classes of society? Whom should the priest, the rabbi, the elder, regard as neighbor? (DA 498.3)

[Luke 10:30-32, *R. V.* quoted] **This was no imaginary scene, but an actual occurrence, which was known to be exactly as represented. The priest and the Levite who had passed by on the other side were in the company that listened to Christ's words.** (DA 499.1)

The angels of heaven look upon the distress of God's family upon the earth, and they are prepared to co-operate with men in relieving oppression and suffering. **God in His providence had brought the priest and the Levite along the road where the wounded sufferer lay, that they might see his need of mercy and help.** All heaven watched to see if the hearts of these men would be touched with pity for human woe. (DA 500.1) [That road was a dangerous place.]

The lawyer would not, even now, take the name Samaritan upon his lips, and he made answer, "He that showed mercy on him." Jesus said, "Go, and do thou likewise."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 503.4. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

4. Read James 2:1-4. Does reading this passage raise any questions in your mind? Have you ever been guilty of discrimination? What do you think James was talking about? Was he aware of this kind of discrimination actually taking place within the early Christian church? We know that there were misunderstandings and arguments between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. (See Acts 6 and Acts 15.) We also know that most of the Christian groups actually met in private homes since Christianity was technically illegal. (Acts 18:7-8)
5. But, even in that setting, some who were a little more wealthy than others and perhaps offered their homes as places in which to meet in certain cities might have expected privileged treatment. Mark 2:16 and Luke 11:43 point out some of the challenges that Jesus Himself faced when dealing with discrimination even among the Jews. Are we tempted to discriminate—even at church?
6. Why is it that we tend to look with favor on those who are socially "above" us while we tend to look down on those who are "below" us? Is it possible for Christians to live above societal norms?
7. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has become famous for reaching out to the poor, to the uneducated, and to the downtrodden of this world and raising them up through our

educational system and through our health facilities to become outstanding citizens. Unfortunately, some who reach that level then leave the church. Why does Adventism affect people like that?

8. Is it truly easier for the poor to accept the gospel than it is for the rich? (See James 2:5-6.) Should we put forth special efforts to reach those who are wealthy, educated, and connected? Why do such people tend to think they do not need any help and look down on people of religion?

9. In Jesus's day, those societal distinctions were actually codified into laws.

Persons of lower class, who were thought to act from economic self-interest, could not bring accusations against persons of higher class, and the laws prescribed harsher penalties for lower-class persons convicted of offenses than for offenders from the higher class.—Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 694.

10. One philosopher observing the behavior of people in this world suggested that the golden rule should read, "He who has the gold makes the rules." Doesn't it seem like most of the time that is the way it works? In our world today, Christianity is being despised and scoffed at by many of society's leaders both politically and intellectually. How should we relate to that discrimination?

11. Read James 2:7. Are those scoffers justified in their thinking? Do Christians always behave in the way they should? Or, is that an intentional move on the part of Satan in preparation for the final days? Are we being true, good ambassadors for Jesus Christ and Christianity?

12. Read James 2:8-9. How do these verses compare with Leviticus 19:17-18,33-34, and Matthew 5:43-45? Based on these verses, would it be correct to say that all discrimination is sin? Would it be correct to say that discrimination is the opposite of love? If we truly love our neighbors, would we discriminate against them? We do need to discriminate between good and evil.

13. Many people have thought of the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew 5-7 as a kind of Magna Carta for Christianity. Do you think that is what James had in mind in James 2:8 when he talked about the royal law of liberty or the law of the kingdom?

14. How much do we know about the discrimination that was taking place in the days of Jesus? The members of the Qumran community separated themselves from the rest of the Jews because they thought that the Jewish leaders—especially those in Jerusalem in charge of the temple—were evil. In their document entitled "The Community Rule," (1QS 1:10; 9:21-22) they were specifically taught to hate the "children of darkness" and "the men of perdition." Who do you think they had in mind? They practiced discrimination between what they thought were good and bad people!

15. Jesus Himself was certainly the greatest Example of love for one's neighbors that ever could be given. He even died for His enemies!

Sin is the greatest of all evils, and it is ours to pity and help the sinner. There are many who err, and who feel their shame and their folly. They are hungry for words of encouragement. They look upon their mistakes and errors, until they are driven almost to desperation. These souls we are not to neglect. If we are Christians, we shall not pass by on the other side, keeping as far as possible from the very ones who most need our help. **When we see human beings in distress, whether through affliction or through sin, we shall never say, This does not concern me.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 504.3. [Bold type is added.]

16. In one way or another, do we always reach out to fellow human beings who are in distress? Remember that selfishness is the very essence of Satan's kingdom while love is the very

essence of God's kingdom.

17. In James 2:10-11, the author became very blunt in his evaluation of people and their ability to keep the law. Is practicing real love the same as keeping the law? Read Matthew 5:18-19; 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 3:10; 5:3,14. In these passages what seems to be the relationship between truly loving fellow humans and keeping the law? Jesus and Paul seemed to be clear about the fact that love is the fulfilling of all law.
18. Think how radical that idea was in Jesus's day. The Jews had determined that the books of Moses included 613 separate laws: 248 of them were considered to be positive, and 365 were considered to be negative. For people in Jesus's day who were trying to keep all those 613 laws, how do you think they responded to Jesus's comment that loving is the fulfillment of all law? At least some of the Jews understood the implications of all those laws. (See Matthew 22:34-40.)
19. We need to remember that love cannot exist in a vacuum; it is always relational. When Jesus talked about the weightier matters of the law—judgment, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23)—He was speaking about relationships.
20. So, what is our attitude toward the law? And what is our attitude toward loving our neighbors? Does keeping the law seem to be some kind of obligation? For example, if we observe the Sabbath faithfully because we think we need to, isn't that all right? Wasn't that what the people who crucified Jesus thought they were doing?
21. Ellen White had some very strong words to say about those who keep the law because they think they have to.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. **When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life.** True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* 97.3-98.0 (1900).

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.—Ellen G. White, *MS 20, 1897 (MR # 970); Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897 par. 11 - section in brackets, [. . .], is omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120.4. See also *12MR* 236.1. [Bold type is added.]

22. Many people are very concerned about keeping the law because they are afraid of the judgment. What do we know about God's judgment and how it works? Read James 2:12-13; John 3:17-21; 12:47-48; Romans 2:12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; and Revelation 20:12-13. These verses should make it very clear that God's records are perfect and that we are judged based on our behavior which in turn is a revelation of our true selves. In other words, we are judged by the truth.
23. James 4:17 seems to suggest that we will be judged not only by what we have done but also by what we should have done. Ecclesiastes 12:14 says even our secret thoughts. That could be a recipe for paranoia. But, we must remember that God is doing everything He can to save as many as possible. If we are developing a right relationship with Him through Bible study, prayer, and witnessing for Him, God will do His part in transforming our lives.

God has acknowledged you before men and angels as His child; pray that you may do no dishonor to the “worthy name by which ye are called.” James 2:7. God sends you into the world as His representative. In every act of life you are to make manifest the name of God. . . . This you can do only through the acceptance of the grace and righteousness of Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 107.1.

24. Whether we like it or not, Christians are judged by their behavior. (Matthew 5:16) Mahatma Gandhi, the early-mid 20th century Indian leader who advocated the nonviolent pursuit for civil rights, had some interesting things to say about Christians. The following is a report of one occasion when he was talking to a Christian.

Then we were surprised when he [Gandhi] said, “I have a great respect for Christianity. I often read the Sermon on the Mount and have gained much from it. I know of no one who has done more for humanity than Jesus. In fact, there is nothing wrong with Christianity, but the trouble is with you Christians. You do not begin to live up to your own teachings.” That made us all the more humble. (By James E. McEldowney, August 1997.) [Content in brackets is supplied.]

I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. The materialism of affluent Christian countries appears to contradict the claims of Jesus Christ that says it's not possible to worship both Mammon and God at the same time.—partly quoted in *Christianity in the Crosshairs: Real Life Solutions Discovered in the Line of Fire* (2004, p. 74) by Bill Wilson. I have found no authoritative source for Gandhi saying this. The actual quote is attributed to Bara Dada, “Jesus is ideal and wonderful, but you Christians—you are not like him.” Source - Jones, E. Stanley. *The Christ of the Indian Road*, New York: The Abingdon Press, 1925. (Page 114)

25. Do you think there is any discrimination taking place in your church? Looking back over your own behavior, do you see any unloving actions taking place relative to your neighbor or even your God? What does it mean to really love God? How do we show such love? Do good works really demonstrate the truth about our faith?
26. Think about your attitude toward keeping the law. Are you inclined to have one of the following two attitudes: 1) I must be good, and that goodness is shown by how I keep the commandments? Or, 2) I do not have to do anything because Jesus did it all for me? Clearly, both of these approaches are wrong primarily because they focus on the wrong person: me! True Christians will be focusing on what they can do for others. That is not easy for inherently-selfish human beings; but, it is the standard to which we will all be held.
27. Consider the following story related in the *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p 61.

Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, a German diplomat in Denmark, informed his friend Hans Hedtoft, a leading Danish Social Democrat, of a secret plan. Following the German invasion of Denmark, 7,500 Jews would be rounded up and deported during the Jewish New Year’s Eve—Rosh Hashanah—October 1, 1943.

Hedtoft immediately informed the head of the Jewish community and the chief rabbi. Plans were quickly made to hide or evacuate all Danish Jews. Duckwitz made a secret and dangerous journey to Sweden to discuss with Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson the possibility of Jews finding refuge in Denmark’s neutral northern neighbor. Additionally, at the risk of their own lives, Danes did everything possible to support their Jewish friends and neighbors.

As a result of Duckwitz’s passing on secret information to the right sources,

as well as the actions of the Danish people and the Swedish government, it is estimated that 99 percent of all Danish Jews survived. (“10 People Who Saved Jews During World War Two,” *Listverse*, Nov. 6, 2008, <http://listverse.com/2008/11/06/10-people-who-saved-jews-during-world-war-two/>).

28. Are there any rifts in your church? Are there groups within the church who do not associate with other groups within the church? How do you think God regards that? For Christians in our day who are sort of drifting along comfortably in their church membership, it would be good to read the chapter in *The Great Controversy* entitled “Facing Life’s Record.” (GC 479-491) How do you suppose the onlooking universe regards our behaviors? They see even the things done in secret.

29. God has called us to be ambassadors for His kingdom. Consider these comments from two well-known ambassadors as also quoted in the *Adult Teachers Guide*, page 64.

“[The qualities of a diplomat are] sleepless tact, unmovable calmness, and a patience that no folly, no provocation, no blunders may shake,” said American Benjamin Franklin, a well-respected eighteenth-century diplomat. Charles W. Freeman’s *The Diplomat’s Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006), p. 88.

Francois de Callières, an 18th-century author on foundational diplomacy, is recorded in the same source as having made a similar comment: “The good diplomatist must have an observant mind, a gift of application which rejects being diverted by pleasures or frivolous amusements, a sound judgment which takes the measure of things as they are, and which goes straight to the goal by the shortest and most natural paths without wandering into meaningless refinements and subtleties. . . . The diplomatist must be quick, resourceful, a good listener, courteous and agreeable.”—Pages 87,88.

30. What would happen to your church if every member in the church was truly loving and totally nondiscriminatory? Would people be attracted and want to join you?

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