

Believe Right – Do Right

#8 in series “Doing What We Believe”
(A Study in the Book of James)

On the outset of this series, I shared a quote with you that impacted me in my thinking when I was in my teens... It is a statement that has been attributed to different authors – and it goes like this; “*We do what we believe – all the rest is just religious talk.*”

If there is any section in this book that proves that statement – it is our focal passage today. In fact – this passage is a call to *Believe Right* and then *Do Right*... If we truly believe that which is true – it will be reflected in what we do.

Hear the Word of God:

James 2:1-13 (NASB)

¹My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. ² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit

adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

In chapter 1 of this book, God calls us to be patient in times of testing, while being committed to practicing the truth... Practicing the truth / living out the truth – is the theme of chapter 2...

An immature person may do a lot of talking about their beliefs – but the mature person seeks to live out the faith that God has indeed called us to... Merely hearing God's Word (James 1:22-25) and talking about God's Word can never be a substitute for doing God's Word!

Every believer has a testimony...

1 John 5:11 (NASB)

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

We express what we believe – by living out what we believe...

Most churches have a statement of faith, that the members covenant together to hold to and practice... Statements of faith and church covenants are good and useful, but they do not in themselves constitute the fulfilling of all of God's will for our lives... As a pastor, I have known members who declared their allegiance to a statement of faith and church covenant and then came to a Members' Meeting / business meeting and acted out in ways completely contrary to what they say they believe...

The Lord wants us to live out the truth He has revealed in the most practical ways. So, He had James give us a simple test... He hypothetically sends two visitors to a church service – a rich man and a poor man. And he watches to see how we will treat them...

Listen – The way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God! We cannot – and dare not – separate human relationships from the fellowship we have with God.

1 John 4:20 (NASB)

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

In James 2:1-13 the Lord is giving us a very practical view of four basic

doctrines – in fact, you can call these “practical doctrines” – for they are not only truths to be believed – they are truths to be seen in our lives! These doctrines are seen lived out in our lives, by the way we treat other people.

1. Reflect The Character of Christ (2:1–4)

¹My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of personal favoritism*.

The literal translation of that phrase is – “My brothers, don’t hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, by showing favoritism”. As a general rule – many of the Jewish people in that day actually coveted recognition and honor. They would vie for the praise and accolades of others...

Our Lord addresses these issues through His parables in **Luke 14**, as well as openly condemning the Pharisees for this in **Matthew 23**.

We have this same problem today... There is something in our fallen human nature that craves the praise of people. We see evidence of this throughout our culture...

I remember the power of peer pressure in my heart as a young person... In order to “fit in” there was a lot of pressure to “go along” with the crowd and adopt the attitudes and behavior of those whom you desired to accept you... That motivation – to have the acceptance and approval of others – does not just go away because you become a follower of Jesus...

Almost every church has its cliques, and often, new Christians and new church members can find it difficult to get in... Sadly there have been some church members who have sought to use their position in church to enhance their own image of importance... Evidently there were some believers that James was writing to, who were trying to seize spiritual offices – such as becoming “*teachers*”, and James warned the church to be careful:

James 3:1 (NASB)

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

So – if we are to be on guard against such motivations – what should our focus be?... We are to – according to verse 1 – “**hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ**” – just not in a such a negative way...

So what does it look like to “**hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ**” in a proper way?...

Whatever it is – it will reflect well upon Him and it will reflect Who He is in our lives... In other words – if we are “holding to our faith in Christ” well –

we will be like Him in how He related to others.... For example”

- **Jesus was not a “respector” of persons**

Even His enemies admitted –

Matt. 22:16 (NIV)“... You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are”

Jesus did not look at the outward appearance of a person – He looked at the heart... He was not impressed with riches or social status. The poor widow who gave her mite was greater in His eyes than the rich Pharisee who bragged about his large donation...

Jesus saw what a converted sinner could become:

- In Simon – He saw a rock.
- In Matthew, the publican, He saw a faithful disciple who would one day write one of the four gospels.
- The disciples were flabbergasted to see Jesus talking with the sinful woman at the well – but Jesus saw her becoming an instrument that would lead to the reaping a great harvest.

We are prone to judge people by their past, not their future.

When Saul of Tarsus was converted – the church in Jerusalem was afraid to welcome and receive him!... It took Barnabas – who believed in Saul’s conversion – to break down the walls ([Acts 9:26–28](#))... Sadly, we are still prone to judge a person by their outward appearance rather than by the inner attitude of the heart...

I believe it grieves the Heart of God to His kids not enjoying sitting with other others in church because they “are not our kind of people”...

Jesus was the Friend of sinners – though He disapproved of their sins... It was not compromise – but compassion, that HE demonstrated when He welcome them – and as a result – they trusted Him and He forgave them.

- **Jesus was dismissed and hated (Isaiah 53:1-3)**

This fact was prophesied in [Isaiah 53:1-3](#)... Jesus was “the poor man” who was rejected by the self-righteous – when He did come the first time...

“Unlike the foxes and the birds, He had no home. He grew up in the despised

city of Nazareth in a home that knew the feeling of poverty. Had you and I met Him while He was ministering on earth, we would have seen nothing physically or materially that would attract us” to Him... (Warren Wiersbe)

Yet – Jesus is the very glory of God!.. In the Old Testament, God’s glory dwelled first in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-38) and then in the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11) – but Jesus came to earth – God’s glory flowed through Him!

John 1:14 (NASB)

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Today, God dwells in the believer individually (1 Cor. 6:19-20) – our individual bodies are His Temple... And, the Lord indwells the church collectively – “WE” together are His Temple (Eph. 2:21-22).

The religious crowd of Jesus’ day were guilty of judging Him by their expectations and desires... and they rejected Him!... As far as they were concerned:

- Jesus came from the wrong city – Nazareth of Galilee.
- He was not a graduate of their accepted schools.
- He did not have the official approval of the people in power.
- He had no wealth.
- His followers were made up of a bunch of ordinary, common people that included the hated publicans and sinners...

Yet He was the very glory of God! No wonder Jesus warned the religious leaders in –

John 7:24 (NASB) “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” It is truly sad – that many Christians are guilty of committing the same sin as those self-righteous Pharisees of Jesus’ day...

When we have visitors – we need to be guarded against judging them on what we see outwardly rather than what they are inwardly... Don’t be swayed by their attire – the color of their skin – and other superficial things... But rather, look for the fruit of the Spirit that may well be characteristic of their lives...

Churches can too easily be guilty of catering to the wealthy because we hope to get something out of them – and we can be guilty of avoiding the poor for

whatever reasons... Jesus did not do this, and He will not approve of it in us!

How do we reflect Christ in our relationships with others?... It is much more simple than many realize: Begin by trying to look at everyone through the eyes of Christ... “If the visitor is a Christian, we can accept him because Christ lives in him. If he is not a Christian, we can receive him because Christ died for him. It is Christ Who is the link between us and others – and He is a link of love. The basis for relationship with others is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ!... Any other basis is not going to work... Furthermore, God can use even the most unlikely person to bring glory to His name. He used Peter and Zaccheus and John Mark” (Warren Wiersbe), and the Lord may well want to use that “poor person” – that we might want to reject!...

2. Focus on The Grace of God (2:5–7)

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?* ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

The emphasis here is on God’s choosing – which involves the grace of God. If salvation were on the basis of what we do, it would not be by grace... By its very definition, grace implies God’s sovereign choice of those who cannot earn and do not deserve His salvation (Eph. 1:4-7; 2:8-10)... God saves us completely on the basis of the work of Christ on the cross and not because of anything that we are, or do, or have!

- **God ignores national differences**

That is a truth that Peter had to come to:

Acts 10:34 (NASB) “Opening his mouth, Peter said: ‘I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality’”

The Jewish believers were shocked when Peter went to the Gentile household of Cornelius, preached to the Gentiles, and even ate with them... The issue that led to the first church council was the question – “*Must a Gentile become a Jew to become a Christian?*” (Acts 15)... The answer the Holy Spirit gave them was, “**No!**” In the sight of God, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile when it comes to our condemnation (Rom. 2:6-16) or our salvation (Rom. 10:1–13).

- **God ignores social differences**

Whether a person is a master or a slave (Eph. 6:9), rich or poor – all are alike to Him... James taught us that the grace of God makes the rich man poor, because he cannot depend on his wealth; and it makes the poor man rich, because he inherits the riches of grace in Christ.

We would be mistaken to conclude that James is saying that the rich are categorically bad and the poor are categorically good. Some rich men are very godly and some poor men are very evil. But James' point is that any judgments based on outward factors alone are wrong judgments, because they do not discern the heart. Only God can judge the heart, and so we are wrong to usurp His place as judge.

1 Samuel 2:7-8 (NASB)

⁷ The Lord makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts. ⁸ He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with nobles, and inherit a seat of honor; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He set the world on them.

From our vantage point – it seems that God chooses the poor instead of the rich...

1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong

Those that the world would consider poor – can actually become rich in faith. As children of God – they – in reality – inherit the wealth of the kingdom of God!

The reality is – that it is possible to be poor in this world and rich in the next – just as it is possible to be rich in this world and poor in the next! – Consider Paul's admonition to the young Pastor, Timothy:

1 Timothy 6:17-18 (NASB)

¹⁷ Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

On the other hand – you could be poor in this world and the next – or rich in

this world and the next!...

It all depends on what you do with Christ and the material wealth He has entrusted to you... God promises the kingdom to “those who love Him” (James 2:5), not to those who love this world and its so-called riches.

Look at the strong rebuke in 2:6-7:

⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

What is he saying? – “When you despise the poor man, you are behaving like the unsaved rich people”.

In that day, it was easy for the rich to exploit the poor... They could influence decisions in the courts, and make themselves even more financially wealthy on the backs of the poor...

Unfortunately, we see the same sins being committed today – and these type of sins especially – dishonor and blaspheme the very Name of Christ!

The doctrine of God’s grace – if we really believe it – forces us to relate to people on the basis of God’s plan – and not on the basis of one’s social status...

When Jesus died – He broke down the wall that separated Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-22)... But in His birth and life, Jesus broke down the walls between rich and poor, young and old, educated and uneducated... It is wrong for us to build those walls again – we cannot rebuild them if we believe in the grace of God.

By the way... That is why I am opposed to just about everything being pushed upon us in the name of “social justice”. Hear me carefully. The so-called “WOKE” movement is actually trying to divide people, rather than address injustices... Christians are to be against injustice, but there is no such thing as white justice, or black justice, or male, or female justice! What is right – is right. And what is wrong – is wrong!

The problem I am having with today’s “social justice”, is that it is the social, rather than the Sovereign that is determining justice!

Ok... We are to reflect the character of Christ, and focus on the grace of God.

Next we are to –

3. Obey The Word of God (2:8-11)

⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

I remember well the battle that Southern Baptist went through over the inspiration and authority of the Word of God!... It was – and remains a good thing – to defend the truth of God’s Word – but we must never forget that our lives and ministries are the best defense.

D.L. Moody often said – “Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather!”

James quotes from **Lev. 19:18** from one of God’s laws: “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself**”. In His parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus told us that our neighbor is anyone who needs our help (**Luke 10:25-37**). It is not a matter of geography, but opportunity. The important question is not, “Who is my neighbor?” but “To whom can I be a neighbor?”

Why is “**love your neighbor**” called “**the royal law**”? For one thing, it was given by the King. God the Father gave it in the law, and God the Son reaffirmed it to His disciples (**John 13:34**). God the Spirit fills our hearts with God’s love and expects us to share it with others (**Rom. 5:5**). True believers are “taught of God to love one another” (**1 Thess. 4:9**).

1 Thess. 4:9 (NASB) “⁹ Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another”

But “**love your neighbor**” is the royal law for a second reason: it rules all the other laws.

Rom. 13:10 (NASB) “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.”

There would be no need for the thousands of laws that are on the books – if everyone truly loved his neighbors...

But the main reason why this is the royal law is that obeying it makes you – like the King!... Hatred makes a person a slave, but love sets us free from selfishness and enables us to reign like kings. Love enables us to obey the Word of God and treat people as God commands us to do. We obey His law, not out of fear, but out of love.

Warren Wiersbe – “Showing respect of persons can lead a person into disobeying all of God’s law. Take any of the Ten Commandments and you will find ways of breaking it if you respect a person’s social or financial status. Respect of persons could make you lie, for example. It could lead to idolatry (getting money out of the rich) or even mistreatment of one’s parents. Once we start acting on the basis of respecting persons and rejecting God’s Word, we are heading for trouble. And we need not break all of God’s law to be guilty. There is only one Lawgiver, and all of His laws are from His mind and heart. If I disobey one law, I am capable of disobeying all of them; and by rebelling, I have already done so.”

Christian love does not mean that I must like a person and agree with him on everything. I may not like his vocabulary or his habits, and I may not want him for an intimate friend. Christian love means treating others the way God has treated me. It is an act of the will, not an emotion that I try to manufacture. The motive is to glorify God. The means is the power of The Holy Spirit within (“**for the fruit of the Spirit is love**”). As I act in love toward another, I may find myself drawn more and more to him, and I may see in him (through Christ) qualities that before, may well have been hidden to me.

Also, Christian love does not leave the person where it finds him. Love should help the poor man do better; love should help the rich man make better use of his God-given resources. Love always builds up – it edifies (1 Cor. 8:1); hatred always tears down.

1 Cor. 8:1 (NASB) “Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but **love edifies.**”

We only believe as much of the Bible as we practice. If we fail to obey the most important word—“**love your neighbor as yourself**” – then we will not do any good with the lesser matters of the Word... It was a glaring fault in the

Pharisees that they were careful about the minor matters and careless about the fundamentals (Matt. 23:23). They broke the very law they thought they were defending!

Matt. 23:23 (NASB) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”

So – from this text we see that we are to – **Reflect The Character of Christ**, and to **Focus on The Grace of God**, and to be faithful to **Obey The Word of God**. Now finally, we are to –

4. Beware of The Judgment of God (2:12-13)

¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Every major statement of faith ends with a statement about the return of Jesus Christ and the final judgment... Not all Christians agree as to the details of these future events, but no one denies the certainty of them!...

Nor would any deny the importance of a final judgment. Both Jesus (John 5:24) and Paul (Rom. 8:1) assured us that Christian believers will never be judged for their sins, but our works will be judged and rewarded (Rom. 14:10-13; 2 Cor. 5:9-10).

So, what is God going to judge when we stand before Him and give account?

First –

- **Our words will be judged**

Note the words spoken to the two visitors in James 2:3. What we say to people, and how we say it, will come up before God. Even our careless words will be judged (Matt. 12:36). Of course, the words we speak come from the heart; so when God judges the words, He is examining the heart (Matt. 12:34-37). Jesus emphasized caution when speaking in some of His warnings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-26, 33-37; 7:1-5, 21-23).

- **Our actions will be judged**

Col. 3:22–25 gives us additional insight into this... It is true that God remembers our sins against us no more (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 10:17), but our sins affect our character and works. We cannot sin lightly and serve faithfully. God forgives our sins when we confess them to Him, but He does not change their consequences...

- **Our attitudes will be judged (:13)**

James contrasted two attitudes: showing mercy to others, and refusing to show mercy. If we have been merciful toward others, God can be merciful toward us.

However, we must not twist this truth into a lie... It does not mean that we earn mercy by showing mercy, because it is impossible to earn mercy... If it is earned, it is not mercy! Nor does it mean that we should “be soft on sin” and never judge it in the lives of others...

Mercy and justice both come from God, so they are not competitors. Where God finds repentance and faith, He shows mercy – where He finds rebellion and unbelief, He must administer justice.

It is the heart of the sinner that determines the treatment he gets...

Listen – we also need to understand that *liberty* does not mean *license*... License (doing whatever I want to do) is the worst kind of bondage. Liberty means the freedom to be all that I can be in Jesus Christ. License is confinement; liberty is fulfillment.

Finally, the Word is called “**the law of liberty**” because God sees our hearts and knows what we would have done had we been free to do so... The Christian student who obeys only because the school has rules is not really maturing... What will he do when he leaves the school? God’s Word can change our hearts and give us the desire to do God’s will, so that we obey from inward compulsion and not outward constraint...

There is another obvious message to this section: our beliefs should control our behavior... If we really believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that God is gracious, His Word is true, and one day He will judge us, then our conduct will reveal our convictions. Before we attack those who do not have truthful doctrine, we must be sure that we practice the doctrines we defend... Jonah had wonderful theology, but he hated people and was angry with God (**Jonah 4**).

One of the tests of the reality of our faith is how we treat other people. Can we pass the test?... Can YOU pass that test?

Questions to consider in Community Group

Every believer has a testimony – and according to 1 John 5:11 “And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” In short – what does that testimony *look* like?

It was stated in the message that – “The way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God!” How so?

The first major point has to do with how we are to reflect the character of Christ. How do we do that? How is Christ’s character reflected in the lives of His followers?

Matt. 7:1 says; “Do not judge so that you will not be judged.” Based on that, many people erroneously think that all judgments are wrong. Why is this view wrong? (see Matt. 7:6, 15)

Where is the boundary between godly discernment (which we all need) and ungodly judgment (which is sin)?

What does God think about the “rich” and the “poor”?

Often the rich got rich because they are wise and disciplined. The poor are often poor because they are foolish and undisciplined. How does this fit with James’ theology? (not looking for a specific answer, but think this question can help generate healthy application of the truths presented in the message)

What is the “royal law” that James referred to? Why would it be called “royal”?

Why should we be “aware of God’s judgement”? What is God going to judge us for?