**LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE RIGHT**

**The Marks of a mature Christian**

**He Practices the Truth (part 1)**

**Sermon 3: James 2:1-13**

**(Slide 1)**

This morning we will be continuing the sermon series on Living the Christian Life right; the marks, or characteristics, of a mature Christian. In the first two messages of this series we covered James’ intent (Conduct not Creed) in his message to believers to develop spiritual maturity. As a quick review, James identified five marks of a mature Christian **(slide 2).** The focus is on how Christians should be living their faith. In my previous messages I discussed how we needed to learn to be patient in testing and turn trials into triumphs by applying the four principles of**:** Count - a joyful attitude; Know – an understanding Mind; Let – a Surrendered Will; and Ask – a Believing Heart. We also looked at the dangers of temptations, the process of sin, and the need to be Doers, not just Hearers of The Word. As you can begin to see, all of this fits in nicely with James’ mantra of Conduct not Creed. Today, we will continue to build on this theme with the second mark of a mature Christian; He practices the Truth. Note the VERY important word here, ‘Practice” the truth…not just “speak” the truth. It is all about Living the faith we profess.

Not only is the mature Christian patient in testing, but he also practices the truth. This is the theme of James 2. **(Slide 3)** Immature people talk about their faith; mature people live their faith. *Hearing* God’s word and *talking about* God’s word can never substitute for *doing* God’s Word. Every believer has some statement of faith or expression of what he believes. And most churches have such statements and ask their members to subscribe to it. These statements are good and useful, but they are *not* substitutes for *doing* God’s will.

James provides us with **(slide 4)** two benchmarks against which we can measure how well we *practice* the truth and live our faith:

 - Faith and Love

 - Faith and Works

Each of these benchmarks is worthy of our careful consideration so I have divided my examination of the second mark of a mature Christian into two messages so we can adequately cover the topic. Today we will look at *the relationship of faith and love with respect to practicing the truth* and next week we will address the very important topic of faith and works. **(Slide 5)**

**Faith and Love** *the relationship of faith and love with respect to practicing the truth*

James wanted to help us practice God’s word, so he gave us a simple test. He sent two visitors to a church service, a rich man and a poor man; and he watched to see how they were treated. *The way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God!* Let’s set the stage by reading the story, --(Scripture). We cannot separate human relationships from divine fellowship. 1 John 4:20 tells us, “20If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can[[c](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%204&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30624c)] he love God whom he has not seen? 21And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also.” Are we really practicing the truth in how we are showing God’s love to others? Or do our actions (or inactions) belie our words? **(Slide 6)**

In James 2: 1-13, he examines four basic Christian doctrines in the light of the way we treat other people. This will help us see if our stated beliefs are evident in our actions. These four basic Christian doctrines are:

 - The Deity of Christ (James 2:1-4)

 - The Grace of God (James 2:5-7)

 - The Word of God (James 2:8-11)

 - The Judgment of God (James 2:12-13)

I want to spend a little time to look at how each of these four doctrines should influence the way we treat other people (how we show brotherly love). First, we will discuss the **…(Slide 7)**

 Deity of Christ. Right off the bat in verse 1 James tells his audience, “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with partiality (which, literally interpreted, means ‘by showing favoritism’).” Jewish people in that day coveted recognition and honor, and vied with one another for praise. Our Lord’s parables in Luke 14:7-14 deal with this problem as does Jesus’ denunciation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23. This problem persists in our culture today. There are ladder-climbers and egotists in every segment of society – even in the church. I know a lot of people who are their own biggest fan and legends in their own minds. These people seek out titles and positions of authority not for the good of the organization or the Glory of God, but for their own self-glorification. I am VERY Grateful that I have not seen evidence of this behavior at Valley View. During this period of transition at Valley View, I have been blessed to see the congregation stepping up to the plate and volunteering to serve for the right reason – being obedient to God.

 Scripture clearly points out that Jesus was not a respecter of persons. In Matthew 22 even His enemies admitted that “You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.” Our Lord did not look at the outward appearance; 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 boastfully gave his large donation. Furthermore, He saw the potential in the lives of sinners. 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 amazed to see Jesus talking to the sinful woman at the well of Sychar, but Jesus saw in her an instrument for 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 receive him! It took Barnabas who believed in Saul’s conversion to break down the walls (Acts 9:26-28). We also judge by outward appearance rather than by the inner attitude of the heart. How often do we avoid really reaching out to someone at church just 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 caused Him to welcome them. Who do you know in this congregation or in your life that would benefit from you extending Christ’s love and compassion to them? **(slide 8)**

Scripture also shows us that Jesus was *despised* and *rejected*. He was the “poor man” rejected by the self-righteous nation. He grew up in the despised city of Nazareth in a home of lowly means. Had you and I met Him while He was ministering on earth, we would have likely seen nothing physically or materially that would attract us. Yet, He is the very glory of God! 1Corinthians 6 and Ephesians 2 tell us that today the glory of God dwells in the believer individually and the church collectively.

The religious experts in Jesus’ day judged Him by human standards, and they rejected Him. He came from the wrong city, did not have the right education, was not approved of by the current leaders and had no wealth. Yet, He was the very glory of God! No wonder Jesus warned the religious leaders, “Stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment.” (John 7:24). Sad to say, we often make the same mistakes. When visitors come to our church we tend to judge them on what we see outwardly rather than what they are inwardly. Jesus did not do this and He cannot approve of it.

How do we practice the deity of Christ in our human relationships? It is really quite simple: look at everyone through the eyes of Christ. If the visitor is 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. God can and has used the most unlikely person to bring glory to His name and He can use that “poor man” which we might reject. The next doctrine James considers is**…(Slide 9)**

 *The Grace of God* In Verses 5-7, the emphasis is on God’s *choosing*, and this involves the grace of God. If salvation were on the basis of merit, it would not be by grace and we would all be doomed. Grace implies God’s sovereign choice of those who cannot earn and do not deserve His salvation. God saves us solely on the work of Christ on the Cross and not because of anything we are or have.

Note that God ignores national differences (Acts 10:34). The Jewish believers were shocked when Peter went to the Gentile household of Cornelius, preached to the Gentiles and even ate with them! The topic of the first church council was, “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.

God also ignores social differences. Masters and slaves (Eph 6:9) and rich and poor are alike to Him. James teaches 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. From a human point of view, God chooses the poor instead of the rich. 1Corinthians 1:26-27 says, “26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.* 27 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.” The poor of this world become rich in faith; as sons of God, they inherit the wealth of the Kingdom. It is possible to be rich in this world and rich in the next just as it is possible to be poor in this world and poor in the next. It all depends on *what you do* with Christ and the material wealth He has given you. God promises the Kingdom to “those that love Him” (James 2:5), not to those who love this world and its riches. If we really believe the doctrine of God’s grace, it forces us to relate to people on the basis of God’s plan and not on the basis of human merit or social status. In Jesus’ birth and life, He 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. The third doctrine James discusses is**(Slide 10)**

 *The Word of God.* In recent years, believers have waged battles over the inspiration and authority of the Word of God. Certainly, it is 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. 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 of *opportunity*. The question is not, “who is my neighbor”, but “to whom can I be a neighbor?” In verses 8-9, James reminds us to fulfill the royal law to love our neighbors as ourselves. Why is this referred to as the royal law? For one thing, it was given by the King! God the Father gave it in his law; God the Son reaffirmed it to his disciples; and God the Holy Spirit fills our hearts with God’s love and expects us to share it with others (Rom 5:5). It is also called the royal law because it rules all other laws. Love enables us to obey the Word of God and treat people as God commands us to do.

Showing partiality of persons can lead a person into disobeying all of God’s law. Take any of the Ten Commandments and you will find a way of breaking it if you are partial to a person’s social or financial status. It is easy to see, for example, how you could lie if you were partial to one person over another.

Christian love does not mean that I must like a person or agree with them on everything. Christian love means treating others the way God has treated me. It is an act of will not emotion. The motive is to glorify God. 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’s eyes) qualities that before were hidden to me.

We only believe as much of The Bible as we practice. If we fail to obey the most important word – “love thy neighbor as thyself” – then we will not do any good with the lesser matters of The Word. It was a glowing fault of the Pharisees that they were careful about the minor matters and careless about the fundamentals. They broke the very law they thought they were defending. The final doctrine I want to look at this morning is**…(Slide 11)**

 *The Judgment of God.*  Every orthodox statement of faith ends with a statement about the return of Jesus Christ and the 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). In verses 12-13, James instructs us to speak and do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. James points out three specific areas of judgment; words, deeds, and attitudes.

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. The words we speak come from the heart; so when God judges words, He is examining the heart (Matt 12:34-37). Jesus also emphasized caution in speaking in his sermon on the mount.

Our *deeds* will be judged. Colossians 3 says,22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. 23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians%203&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-29542a)] you serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.” While it is true that God remembers our sins against us no more (Jer 31:34; Heb 10:17), it is also true that our sins affect our character and works. We cannot *sin lightly* *and serve faithfully*. God forgives us our sins when we confess them to Him, but He doesn’t take away their consequences.

Our *attitudes* will be judged. In verse13, 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 to others, because it is impossible to earn mercy. If it were earned, it would not be mercy! Nor does it mean we should be “soft on sin” and never condemn it in the lives of others (be careful to condemn the sin, not the person).

Mercy and justice both come from God, so they are not competitors. Where God finds repentance and faith, He is able to show mercy; where He finds rebellion and unbelief, He must administer justice. It is the heart of the sinner that determines the treatment he gets.

James uses the phrase “law of liberty” as his title for God’s law. Liberty means the freedom to be all I can be in Jesus Christ. Liberty is fulfillment. 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 confinement.

There is one obvious message in James’ first test to map our faith with love; Our beliefs should control our behavior. If we really believe that Jesus is The Son of God, and that God is gracious, and His Word is true, then our conduct will reveal our convictions. Before we attack those who do not have orthodox 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. One of the tests of the reality of our faith is how we treat other people. Can we pass the test?

Next week I will continue our study of Practicing the Truth by looking at the second half of James 2 as we consider the relationship of faith and works.

**James 2:1-13**

### Beware of Personal Favoritism

2 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* *of glory*, with partiality. 2For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” 4have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? 7Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

8If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,”[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30302a)] you do well; 9but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point,* he is guilty of all. 11For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,”[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30305b)] also said, “Do not murder.”[[c](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+2&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-30305c)] Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

As you know, the Southern Baptist denomination has as one of its primary tenets the spread of the Gospel Message in obedience to The Great Commission in Matthew 28. I was recently having a conversation with a fellow pastor who related to me that, when he first arrived at his church up here, the Chairman of the Deacons, who was a pillar in the church and had been a member there for decades, told the pastor that ‘his’ church did not practice active evangelism since it was ‘God’s job’ to save people and then God would lead them to the church. The church would then educate them and make disciples of them. Besides the fact that the Deacon was being disobedient to God, he was using his position and title to wield that influence over others. We must be ever careful to guard against mis-using positions of authority, especially in the Church. The old adage that, “Power Corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” has merit.