



Helping people encounter God in His Word



For use on Sunday, October 5, 2003

Introduction

30

*Core Competencies
of a follower
of Christ*

10 Core Beliefs

TRINITY
SALVATION BY GRACE
AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE
PERSONAL GOD
IDENTITY IN CHRIST
CHURCH
HUMANITY
COMPASSION
ETERNITY
STEWARDSHIP

10 Core Practices

WORSHIP
PRAYER
BIBLE STUDY
SINGLE-MINDEDNESS
BIBLICAL COMMUNITY
SPIRITUAL GIFTS
GIVING AWAY MY TIME
GIVING AWAY MY MONEY
GIVING AWAY MY FAITH
GIVING AWAY MY LIFE

10 Core Virtues

LOVE
JOY
PEACE
PATIENCE
KINDNESS/GOODNESS
FAITHFULNESS
GENTLENESS
SELF-CONTROL
HOPE
HUMILITY

This week's Core Competency:

LOVE
*I unconditionally
love others.*

Reality Check: When Life Requires a Balance *Brand Behavior . . . When Status Matters Too Much*

Emily plodded through the door, her shoulders were stooped and her eyes were red. Nanci, Emily's mother, saw her nine year-old's face and was saddened by her daughter's appearance. Nanci came to Emily and said, "Emily, are you okay? You seem sad." "I am, Momma," said Emily.

"What happened that made you sad?" asked Nanci concerned.

"Ashleigh, Jessica, and Meredith were really mean to me today. They said we were poor. They called me 'white trash.' Momma, what does 'white trash' mean?" asked Emily.

Nanci, looking into the innocent eyes of her daughter, debated whether to answer the question or deflect her daughter's attention. She realized that at age nine being popular and 'in' was something Emily would face on a daily basis. Deciding to answer her daughter's inquiry Nanci said, "Well, that is an unkind thing to say. The girls probably don't know what it means. Do you really want to know what that means?"

"Yes, Momma," said a disheartened Emily.

"Okay, it means, people who are poorer and do not have expensive things and good manners. It is a phrase that we would never use," said Nanci, "You know what?"

"What?" asked Emily.

"We are not 'white trash,' and do you know why?" asked Nanci.

"Why?" asked Emily.

"We have good manners and know that treating people kind and well is what God wants us to do. People who make fun of people with less are trying to make themselves feel better by making someone else feel bad. Behavior like this has a high cost for them, for they may grow up to be unkind and bitter adults. They may never know or appreciate the priceless value of each person."

"But, Momma, I don't want to be called 'white trash,'" pleaded Emily.

"Emily, I am really sorry that these girls called you this. One thing that you can be assured of is you are not 'white trash,' and you will never be 'white trash,' as long as you follow God and do not let the words of others destroy you. People are unkind, but God is bigger than them, and can make you stronger than those who hurt you. Money cannot buy good manners or character. It doesn't matter that we cannot live in a great big house, cannot buy the latest fashions, or do not have a car. We have respect for others and respect for ourselves. Others may not share our view of ourselves, but God does because He has given us His name. No other name matters, and being called other names by someone else doesn't impact who we are in God," explained Nanci.

"But, Momma, it still hurt my feelings," explained Emily.

"I know it did, honey," said Nanci, "But remember that any name they call you is untrue. In fact, you could tell them this, 'I respectfully decline to accept your invitation to be less than who I am,' and turn and walk away. That way you let them know that they don't have any power over you. It can be hard and seem lonely, but remember God never leaves you and is always with you. He was called names too; He even loved those who hurt Him. He will help you too!"

Nanci gave her daughter a hug and said, "Let's pray about this and then have a snack."

Observation

What do you see?

James 2:1-13 *Favoritism Forbidden*

¹My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ²Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? ⁸If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. ¹²Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

Record your first impressions from what you read.

Interact with the passages

- Draw circles around the words "show," and "shown." Draw arrows to the words that one is to show, not show or have shown to them.
- Draw a square around the words "judges," and "judgment."
- In 2 different colors highlight the financially "poor," and "rich." Then highlight, in the same color you chose for "poor" and "rich," the phrases describing actions by and toward those groups.
- Underline the word "law," and "love," then draw arrows to the phrases that describes the consequences of following "law" and "love."

Interpretation

What does it mean?

Showing favoritism to someone because of their wealth is not only shortsighted but also a sin in God's eyes. Judging someone by their appearance of wealth attracts God's judgment while showing love and mercy to all regardless of their financial stature attracts God's grace and favor.

Insights

- The phrase "do not show" is a command. A literal translation would be, "Do not have your faith in Jesus with personal favoritism." The two are incompatible.
- James writes about rings worn by people because in that culture the number and quality of rings worn showed one's social stature.
- The clothing worn in James' day was normally a white toga. When the cleaning of the white toga was remiss the term "shabby," or filthy was applied. This "shabbiness" would be evident in the poor who couldn't afford to clean their clothing often.

- The “you say,” in v. 3 is a subjunctive verb indicating a 3rd class condition which assumes the possibility of the condition cited in the synagogue.
- The words that are spoken to the poor man are commands while the rich man is told “please.”
- The term “distinguish,” is the same root word used in James 1:6 for “doubt or being divided within one’s self.” But the meaning here is “to judge between two things.”
- The word “chosen,” in v. 5 is a middle voice where God chose them for himself.
- The terms “exploiting,” “dragging,” and “slandering” are present verbs and show ongoing activity.
- The “if” in v. 3 shows a converse action that believers should show; this is found in the command to “love.” The verb “love” is a future tense but is a command.
- The “show favoritism,” in v. 9 is a subjunctive verb and first-class condition which assumes the situation is true. James assumes his readers were showing favoritism.
- The “have become,” in v. 11 is a perfect tense and refers to the continuing results of the action into the eternal future.
- “Speak and act,” are commands in v. 12.

Answering Questions of Interpretation

How does one keep one’s self from showing favoritism in church today? Does a church culture dictate who is accepted into their congregation or not? Why or why not?

How does “love” and the “law of freedom” help us address the issues of the poor? James has made it clear that we are freed by love. But if the rich use their “freedom” to not help the poor, is there something that believers should do or not? Why? How does one understand that judgment occurs on those who have not been merciful? Who is the one who judges?

Application

What do I do?

Do I show favoritism in my life? When is the last time I had interaction with the poor? How comfortable would I be if a homeless believer who was unkempt sat next to me in church? How comfortable would I feel if my next door neighbor sat next to me in church instead? What do I sense God is trying to teach me regarding my interaction and attitudes towards the poor?

They say that one’s checking account is an indication of what ‘gods’ we serve. If you look at your checking account what does it say about your generosity to helping the poor? Do I give to agencies or individuals who serve the poor? Am I, even if by omission, helping in some way oppress the poor by the way I spend my money? What would I do if I actually found out that my spending habits were oppressing others? How can I show ‘love’ to the poor through my spending habits? What do I sense God wants me to do?

Correlation

How do we work this into our Home Group, Family, youth group, ministry, class, small group?

Core Competency: Love

Creed: I unconditionally love others.

Commentary: In our culture, wealth is glamorized and we are told to pursue it. With a mindset of gaining money, favoritism towards the rich can occur in people, and even in churches. “The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want,” is recorded in Mark 14:7. Jesus says we, as believers, can help the poor at anytime. But upon inspection we may find that helping the poor consistently is missing in many believers’ lives. And when favoritism occurs in church or a believer’s life, it is sin because we dishonor those who are equal in Christ but have less material wealth.

The key to overcoming tendencies of favoritism comes through intentional love. It is acknowledging our own comforts, tendencies and attitudes and laying them before the altar of Christ and allowing His Spirit to help us show genuine unconditional love. Love is a virtue that comes from the Spirit of God.

When we ask the Lord to help us love others, we can. We receive God’s perspective that He determines who is valuable and honorable. He shows us that He does not play favorites and that we were once spiritually poor and unlovable when Christ went in love to the cross for our benefit. We are called to intentionally exemplify that same love to those who are poor and those who are rich and honor them both equally as Christ did on the cross.

Question: Tell of a time that you showed unconditional love to the poor? Tell of a time that you believed you showed favoritism toward the rich? How can you consistently show unconditional love to people regardless if they are rich or poor?

Kid’s Corner – The Flavor of Favor

Say: We’re going to act out James 2:1-13. I need a judge, a rich person, a poor person and two church people. Church person #1 your name is Favorite, #2 you are Polite. Favorite you need one chair and Polite you will need two chairs. Rich person & poor person you come in and act out what I read. Judge, you sit so you can judge which church person is naughty and which one is nice at the end.

Read: One day a poor man came into Favorite’s church. Favorite gave the poor man a chair to sit on. After the poor man sat down, a rich man came into Favorite’s church. Favorite wanted the rich man to sit so he said meanly to the poor man, “Get off the seat and go sit on the floor over by the door.” Poor man, who was very sad, did as Favorite asked him to. Then Favorite said to the rich man, “Please have this fine seat.” So rich man sat in the chair that poor man once had.

Similarly, a poor man came into Polite’s church. Polite gave the poor man a chair to sit on. After the poor man sat down, a rich man came into Polite’s church. Polite set another chair down, next to poor man and said to the rich man, “Welcome, I’m glad you joined us to praise God together.” The rich man sat down next to the poor man and both were able to worship God together even though one was poor and the other rich. Thank you actors!

Now, Judge, who was naughty and who was nice, Favorite or Polite? Why do you think that? Playing favorites because someone is rich is wrong. In Jesus, all Christians are equal and valuable. God wants us to show all Christians the same love regardless of what they have.

