



Blackfoot Church of Christ

Published by Blackfoot Church of Christ
Blackfoot, ID

Volume 6 Number 22

June 3, 2018

Mercy, Judgment, and Doctrine

By Doy Moyer

“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jas 2:13).

The context of this passage highlights the way the rich were treating the poor. This is about showing compassion to the poor and needy as opposed to showing partiality and judging with evil motives. This is seen from the end of chapter 1 (pure and undefiled religion) to chapter 2 where a poor man enters the assembly and is mistreated because of partiality and prejudice. Faith acts by showing compassion and treating others as those made in God’s image. One might not commit murder or adultery, but if he shows a lack of love and compassion in how he treats another, then he has violated God’s will and failed to show godly faith. James is echoing the teaching of the prophets. For example, Zechariah says,

“Thus has the Lord of hosts said, ‘Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.’”
(Zech 7:9-10)

It’s not uncommon to hear a passage like this invoked to argue that we should tolerate all sorts of differences over doctrine and practice. Bearing in mind that doctrines and practices are freely chosen, this isn’t about giving doctrines a free pass in the name of mercy. This is about the way we treat others in different socio-economic positions or stations in life (see Jas 2:14-17).

There are differences between brethren on many matters. We ought to show love and respect, even when differences are too great to bear (Col 3:12-15). Yet James has a specific point he is making about the way we show our faith as it involves those who might have less in this world. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Mercy does not wipe away doctrinal differences. Mercy does dissolve the partiality shown against others who are in different circumstances. Compassion helps others. Love wipes away prejudice, and there are many applications for this in our current world.

Yet if we extend James' point to chosen positions of doctrine, the problem (besides being out of context) will quickly become one of consistency. If showing mercy equates to tolerating chosen doctrinal differences, then what happens when we can no longer tolerate a position (that time will come)? All have lines that they don't think should be crossed. What happens then? Do we then cut off compassion?

Does James really have in mind the idea that there are no lines at all in what one believes? That mercy means being willing to have fellowship no matter the difference? No matter the practice? That would be absurd, and we know it (I'm not saying anyone is teaching this). The mercy James is talking about, however, is to be shown all the time. There are no merciless moments here. There is a difference between judging the truthfulness of a doctrine one is arguing (which must be done, 1 Jn 4:1) and judging someone based on outward appearances (which ought not to be done, Jn 7:24). These two should not be conflated. This is not to say that we should not give some room for people to study and draw their own conclusions, but it is to say that doctrine does not get a free ride just because someone drew a conclusion from a text. All conclusions are open to scrutiny, including this one. This is not to say that we should be unkind in critiquing a conclusion, but it is to say that we must still test conclusions by Scripture. Disagreeing with a conclusion and critiquing it is not being merciless; it is being responsible. Are we saying that there is no room for any differences at all? Of course not. I've never known anyone who teaches that there can be no differences whatsoever within a local work. Yet all believe that differences have limits,

and there is no getting around drawing conclusions and disagreeing with someone else in the process. Still, James is making another point.

Fellowship generally works itself out over time. Differences in personal beliefs and practices are common, and we are to treat one another with love. Christians are not to despise one another, even if the differences are so great that there can be no fellowship. How we ought to treat one another with love is found in a number of passages (cf. Phil. 2:1-5; Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 13). Be loving, kind, and forbearing (Eph. 4:1-3). Even so, the context of James is about being merciful by not judging a person outwardly. It's not about judging differences in beliefs and practices.

Be merciful toward those who may not have much or who are different from you. Welcome them into your midst. Serve God together. Don't judge based on appearance. Seek unity, and through love serve one another. This is the point James is making about the demonstration of faith.

Freedom in Christ

By Ross Ward

One of the great doctrines of the Gospel is that of freedom. Jesus spoke of this freedom to believers in Jn 8:31-32, "If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." This passage gives great comfort to believers but it also indicates there are conditions to the freedom. The condition is that they should live in the word. Christians are to live according to pattern that the word reveals. Paul addresses freedom in Gal 4:21-5:12 where he also teaches that the Christian has been set free. In the text following, Gal 5:13-6:10, he then begins to enumerate the obligations of those that have been set free. Within this scripture we see many behaviors that a Christian must avoid, lest he will not inherit the kingdom of God, this is referencing the heavenly reward of the saved. There are also see in this passage many behaviors a Christian must mimic (Fruit of the Spirit). From the Galatian letter we come to understand that the freedom of a Christian is not without bounds but is limited. These truths are established by our creator. By adapting our lives to them, we can live as God intended.

Prayer Requests & Announcements

- Brenda's cataract surgeries went very well.
- Elaine (friend of Brenda's family) had surgery this week for a broken hip.
- Shirley Torres, Seattle WA (Torres' have visited our congregation) is fighting cancer. Chemo treatments have not been successful. They have decided to stop the Chemo and pursue other treatments to help enhance her quality of life.
- Kass' Grandmother has been diagnosed with Lung Cancer.
- Keep April in your prayers as she deals with health issues
- The Christians in the Philippines.
- Bible class tomorrow night 7:00pm at Chad and Kass' on evangelism
- Business meeting after services today

Assignments

<u>Today</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Tom Mitchell Lord's Table – David Porter Sermon – Ross Ward	<u>Wednesday</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Chad Mitchell Invitation – Ross Ward
<u>Next Sunday</u> Bible Study – Song Leader – Chad Mitchell Lord's Table – Tom Mitchell Sermon –	<u>Next Wednesday</u> Bible Study – Song Leader – Invitation –

Blackfoot Church of Christ
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Meeting Times:

Sunday Morning Classes 10:00AM
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00AM
Wednesday Evening 7:30PM

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