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A0723 – June 10, 2007 – Jas 2:5-7 – Love For God

Last week we looked at the Doctrine of Inheritance. To inherit means “to possess, to obtain by lot”. There are three heirs; 1) Christ is heir of all things, 2) All believers are heirs of God (a free gift), 3) Spiritually obedient believers are joint-heirs with Christ (a reward). James 2:5 fits in the third category of inheritance. It is a reward for putting on humility, being rich in faith and continually loving God by means of works of obedience. These will be heirs of the kingdom. The Jews at the assembly who are showing partiality are in danger of not being heirs of the kingdom. But if they put on humility they will co-reign as kings with the King of kings in the earthly, Messianic, Davidic, Theocratic, Millennial Kingdom.

Finally, 2:5 closes by saying that being an heir of the kingdom is **promised to those who love Him** or literally, **those loving Him**. It’s a present active participle, ongoing love, continual love, steadfast love. James has already used this exact phrase in the Greek in James 1:12 (*tois agaposin auton*), “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those loving Him.” There the crown of life was a promised reward and here being an heir of the kingdom is a promised reward. Both are promises made to believers who continually love Him. Some promises in Scripture are unconditional and some are conditional. Both of these are conditional promises. The condition is **loving Him**, that is **loving** God. The present tense does not mean the believer will never fail to love God. Perfectionism cannot be reached until you receive a resurrection body. But what is meant is a sustained expression of love for God. It may surprise you to know that all believers do not love God. Probably very few believers love God this way. When we read the word “love” in the Bible what does it mean? Typically, American Christian’s have a very shallow understanding of love. If you don’t believe me just look at the divorce

rate! Barna Research group claims that the divorce rate among conservative Christians is higher than that of other faith groups including atheists and agnostics.ⁱ This raises a lot of questions, of course, but one thing is clear, American Christians have a shallow understanding of love. Typically Christians define love in terms of Romantic love; that warm, fuzzy, electric feeling you had for a girlfriend when you first held her hand. After a while holding hands isn't enough and you have to kiss to get that same feeling. After a while that's not enough so you go further and further until you've had sex before marriage. "Neurobiologists have found that there is a chemical released in the brain when a couple falls in love. This chemical is called phenylethylamine and it functions in the body much like an amphetamine thus explaining the superhuman feelings of a couple who is falling in love. They often make statements like "I feel like I can walk on air", "I don't need to eat", "The grass is greener", and "The sky is bluer." Since phenylethylamine is released in the presence of your partner, you want to spend every waking moment with him and most couples do just that. Amazingly enough during this stage of their relationship, they never seem to tire of one another. But unfortunately there is a villain in this fairy tale. Phenylethylamine highs cannot last. As with any chemical your body builds up a tolerance to it and the body requires more and more of the substance to acquire love's special spark. Neurobiologists say it takes about four years for the chemical to fade, to run its course. Once the chemical is gone, the couple is faced with the difficult challenge of doing love with their own basic brain chemistry. This can create quite a struggle for many married couples." So, because so many Christians think of love in terms of Romantic love many Christian marriages fail today because it requires more chemical stimulus to create that feeling.ⁱⁱ They've identified "love" with a chemical reaction. When the chemical reaction stops firing the relationship dies because it was built on a chemical reaction that is no longer firing. An interesting study would be to monitor brain activity and neurological activity in contemporary church worship services. I am inclined to think that the results would reflect this idea of Romantic love. They try to create an atmosphere where you can have a warm, fuzzy electric feeling. It's very interesting to observe that one author even uses sexual words like "kissing Jesus" to describe intimacy with God in worship. There is little doubt in my mind that many of these people have read into the biblical concept of love for God the existential, Romantic concept of love. In other words, Christians are trying to have sex with God in church. Just like a young couple thinks they are so "in love" with one another so these

Christians think they are so “in love” with God. Of course, this is sickening from a biblical perspective but what’s clear is that very few American Christians have a concept of biblical love for God. So, we have to understand what it means to have love for God since only believers who are loving God are promised to be heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5). Of course, the Greek word here is *agapao* which is a love that is interested in the other person. It’s not selfish. It’s not looking for a good feeling. It’s selfless. Its action devoted to the interests of the other person. So, to love God a believer’s actions have to be devoted to God’s interests. Ooh, this doesn’t feel good, I’m not getting a chemical reaction out of this. Well, it’s not about feeling good. It’s about Him. Do all genuine believers love Him? Well, perseverance theologies say “Yes”. Perseverance theologies are those that say that a person has to persevere until the end of life in order to be saved. Some perseverance theologies say “if you don’t then this only manifests you were never a genuine believer to begin with” and others say “if you don’t love God you will lose your salvation”. But the Bible teaches neither of these. The Bible teaches that we should love God because we are saved and if we love God we will be rewarded.

But what is genuine biblical love. Let’s turn back to the OT to the Book of Deuteronomy. What I want you to see is the close connection between love and obedience in both the OT and NT.

Deuteronomy 11:1 “You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.

Deuteronomy 11:13 “It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul,

Deuteronomy 11:22 “For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him,

Deuteronomy 13:3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Deuteronomy 19:9 if you carefully observe all this commandment which I command you today, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in

His ways always—then you shall add three more cities for yourself, besides these three.

Deuteronomy 30:16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.

Deuteronomy 30:20 by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

Psalms 31:23 O love the LORD, all you His godly ones! The LORD preserves the faithful And fully recompenses the proud doer.

John 14:15 “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

John 14:21-24 “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. “He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.

Time and again the connection is made between loving God and obeying God. Therefore, being an heir in the kingdom is a reward for obeying Him. Not all believers are experientially sanctified by continually obeying His commandments under the filling of the Spirit so not all believers are loving Him and not all will be heirs of the kingdom. Those who don’t will enter the kingdom but not inherit the kingdom. The promise is solely for **those loving Him**. So, the first issue is love for God.

Importantly, whenever we find the concept of love for God we normally find the concept of love for others nearby. That’s exactly what we have here. Notice verse 8. Verse 8 is the hinge verse in this section.

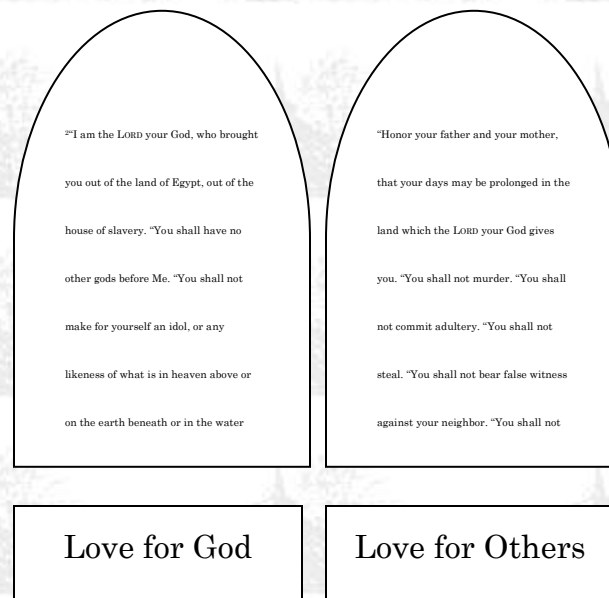
James 2:8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well.

Everything is leading up to this verse which is a quote from Lev 19:18, one of the most quoted verses from the OT (Matt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jam 2:8). It is the key to James 2:1-13. So, if you miss the importance of loving others you’ve missed this entire section. We’re going to look at another place Lev 19:18 is quoted in a minute. But the point we want to make here is that loving God at the end of verse 5 forms a bridge to verses 8-9. We’re going to work our way from loving God to loving others and we’re going to find that love for God and love for others is inseparable. You cannot love God and hate your brother at the same time (1 John 4:20). It’s simply not possible. Now, let’s turn to Matthew 22:34. What I want to show you is that the entire OT depends on the commands to love God and love others. Now, in this passage the Pharisees were happy that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees because the Sadducees were their opponents. So, they come to him to test Him and they send a lawyer (*nomikos*), literally, an expert in the Law of Moses. There was a debate among the experts regarding the greatest commandment and they wanted to find out where Jesus stood.

Matthew 22:34-40 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. ³⁵One of them, a lawyer, asked Him *a question*, testing Him, ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ ³⁸“This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹“The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ ⁴⁰“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

The Law and Prophets was a common way for referring to the entire OT. Jesus is saying the whole OT depends on these two commandments. Love for God is the greatest commandment in the OT. Jesus is quoting from Dt 6:5. He says this is the great and foremost or primary commandment. Notice then how Jesus ties love for others with love for God by saying, “The second is like it” and He quotes Lev 19:18. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”. Then He says “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the

Prophets.” Note that He does not say “On the Ten Commandments depend the whole Law and Prophets.” It’s not the Ten but the Two that are the most important. Let’s see how the Ten depend on these Two. If you were with us in our study of Exodus you might recall that the Ten Commandments are divided into two sections. The first three commandments concern Israel’s relationship to God and the last seven commandments concern Israel’s relationship with their neighbors. Love for God is what binds together the first three commandments and love for one’s neighbor binds together the last seven commandments.



So, if a believer is loving God then he is not committing idolatry, taking His name in vain or violating the Sabbath. And, if a believer is loving his neighbor he is not murdering them, committing adultery, lying to them, coveting their possessions, et. al.. The whole Law and Prophets depend upon love for God and love for others. Logically these Two are more important than the Ten.

James is trying to impress upon these Jews that loving God is foremost and loving others is next. “Were they loving the poor man?” No, verse 6 says they had “dishonored the poor man” and verse 9 says they “are committing sin”. Far from loving the poor man they were not loving God or others. This was serious enough to infringe up their being heirs of the kingdom since the promise is only for those who love God.

James 2:6-7 Ὑμεῖς δὲ ἠτιμάσατε τὸν πτωχόν. Οὐχ οἱ πλούσιοι καταδυναστεύουσιν ὑμῶν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔλκουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς κριτήρια; Ὅκ αὐτοὶ βλασφημοῦσιν τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς; **(BYZ)**

James 2:6-7 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you and dragging you into courts? Do they not blaspheme the excellent name which has been called upon you?

(Author’s Translation)

James 2:6-7 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? **(NASB95)**

Probably the verse division should come after the first part of verse 6 rather than before. Verse divisions are not inspired. They were added by Robert Estienne (Stephanus) around 1550 and have remained the same ever since. But the first part of this verse fits better with verse 5. **You have dishonored the poor man.** They were not showing poverty of spirit, humility, toward this **poor man** and this, of course, was inconsistent with the Christian faith which centers on the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. Since all people are made in the image of God all people should be honored and respected as the image bearers of God. **dishonor** comes from the Greek word *atimazo* meaning “shamed”. The Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures were all strongly honor-shame oriented. For example, in Jewish cultures the rich and the elders of the land wore highly decorated robes and cords signifying their honor but the poor were often shamed. There was nothing culturally unacceptable about the honor-shame orientation in these cultures. So, when James says **You have dishonored the poor man** he means you have gone beyond even the cultures treatment of the poor. The BAGD says this word conveys “an especially grievous offense in the strongly honor-shame oriented Semitic and Gr-Rom. societies.”ⁱⁱⁱ Of course, a continuation in such grievous offenses would disqualify them from being heirs of the kingdom.

With that said James now goes to the second reason believers should not show partiality. Remember, we have the illustration of partiality in verses 1-4, the first argument against partiality in verse 5-6a and now we are looking at the second argument against partiality.

It is three facts about the rich; their oppression, legal persecution, and blasphemy. In short, the rich oppress you, persecute you and blaspheme the

name of Jesus. Why then do you show favor to them and by so doing persecute the poor? So, this argument shifts back to deal with the rich and poor materially. It is not the “rich in faith” (v 5) who oppress them but the rich in money, probably very zealous Jewish unbelievers. We might think of someone like Saul, later known as Paul, as an example of the kind of person exemplified by these rich persecutors. Saul was a Jew from the wealthy city of Tarsus and attended the very best schools as a child, had Roman citizenship probably purchased by his father and attended school in Jerusalem under the great rabban Gamaliel. During this stage of life he was quite wealthy because of his family connections. He had a lot of time on his hands and we find him using that time to persecute the church in Acts 8:3 “Saul *began* ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.” The word “dragging” used here is the same word used in James 2:6 of the rich “dragging” them to court. It’s the Greek word *helko* and it’s a violent word. Here it refers to being forced to go against one’s will. They were dragged into court. What legal right did they have to drag them to court? Turn over to Acts 9:1-2, “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” This “testifies to the authority that Rome handed over to the Jews.”^{iv} The Jews could get permission from the high priest to arrest those belonging to “the Way”. “The Way” was a title for the followers of Jesus. Notice that Saul was going “to the synagogues”. That’s where James’ readers met to worship (Jam 2:2). So, put yourself in these people’s shoes. Two men come in to the assembly, one rich, one poor. It’s the rich that have enough time on their hands to run around arresting followers of Jesus. But they are seating them in the chief seats when they might be planning to arrest them and drag them off to court just like Saul had been doing. Saul was a brilliant man and he actually started a movement on how to persecute the church and stomp it out. He regretted this later of course but his initial followers carried on the work he started and here we hear of it in James.

We are not sure what happened to Paul’s riches after his conversion but he probably got cut off from the family due to his conversion (Luke 12:49-53). After this we see him having to make tents to make a living (Acts 18:3) and rather than persecuting the church he is persecuted and dragged before the

authorities (Acts 16:19). The once persecutor became the persecuted because of his identification with Jesus Christ.

ⁱ http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm

ⁱⁱ <http://www.loveevity.com/marriage/collectiveguidance/article15.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Frhchristlichen [Sic] Literatur, Sixth Edition, Ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, With Viktor Reichmann and on Previous English Editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker.", 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 148.

^{iv} Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), Jas 2:6.

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