

“Evidence of Love”

True Faith is Faith That Works. Play on words: It's a faith that works, that isn't afraid to put action behind the belief in God and it's a faith that works in the good times and is just as solid in the not-so-good times. The times of trials and testing's in our lives.

James 2:8 (NIV) If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.

This command went WAY BACK to Lev. 19:18. Of course Jesus quotes this when asked what the greatest command was, breaking down all the 613 Jewish laws down to 2 (Matt. 22:37-40).

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus says to love your neighbor and he shows us how to love our neighbor. So, to “love your neighbor” is both what Jesus Christ, the King of Kings says and the way that Jesus lives it out.

Ephesians 5:2a “And walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”

Who is my neighbor? What does loving my neighbor require of me?

Luke 10: 25 – 37 (NIV) On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’^[a]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b]”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. **31** A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when

he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. **32** So too, a Levite, when he came to

the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

Samaritans were Jews who had intermarried w/foreigners. Idol worship. A place of refuge for Jewish criminals & refugees from justice.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** The next day he

took out two denarii^[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Mercy: Not getting or receiving what we deserve.

Love is the process of meeting needs.

This parable illustrates a pure and undefiled heart that was revealed in showing merciful love toward someone in need. The religious characters in the story proved to have hearts stained by the world. True religion that pleases God was seen by showing mercy in love.

Our neighbor is thus anyone in our proximity with whom we can share God's love. We are called not only to love those who are like us or with whom we are comfortable, but all whom God places in our path.

James 2:9 (NIV) But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

Favoritism is the sin of NOT loving my neighbor like myself.

Matthew 7:12 (NET) In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you, for this fulfills the law and the prophets.

God's Laws reflect God's character. *Favoritism Contradicts the Character of God.* God gave every one of them. When we disobey any law, we ultimately disobey the God who gave us that law.

Apparently, the early church was "picking & choosing" which laws they wanted to obey. Favoritism is no big deal. Trivial. Insignificant. James says God doesn't have any "little laws"; there are no "little sins".

When we pick and choose which laws we are going to follow; when we only choose to follow the laws we like, we make ourselves the final authority on what truth is. That's a problem b/c that's God job, not ours. We enthrone self, not God in our hearts.

James 2:10 – 11 (NIV) 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Windshield analogy. A little chip versus the whole things shattering.

How do we respond to our sin?

Excuse it. No big deal. Blame others – they provoked me. Blame God. "When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me."

Justify it. Redefine what we did to sound better.

Succumb to our shame. Give in to Despair & Guilt. Fall deeper into sin, thinking any effort is useless.

Work harder. Pull ourselves up by the boot straps. Deeper resolve. Redouble efforts.

Take it to God and plead for mercy. "God, I did it again. Please forgive me."

Love can handle sin. Jesus proved it on the cross.

But the GOSPEL - the good news - is this: Jesus has made payment for ALL our sin - lying, stealing, adultery, murder...AND favoritism. HOW WONDERFUL it is to KNOW that you are forgiven!!!! Those who have surrendered to Jesus ARE NO LONGER JUDGED GUILTY!

Instead, Romans 8:1 (NIV) says Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

And IF that is true of our lives...IF we ARE no longer condemned - set free from our sin, shouldn't that make a difference in our daily lives?

James 2:12 (NIV) 12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Greek: "So speak and so act" b/c we will be judged by the law that gives freedom. Not the legalistic law the Pharisees followed. It's by the royal law of love which we can live by b/c of the Holy Spirit in us.

How We Love Others is the Greatest Evidence of our Love for God.

The world doesn't know the love of God b/c they don't see the evidence of the love of God.

What the world is looking for is for people who claim to have faith in God to express that through the way they love others. Tangible. They can see it.

Cal Thomas: "Love talked about is easily ignored. But love demonstrated is irresistible."

LIPS + LIVES = CREDIBILITY. LIPS - LIVES = HYPOCRISY

Share Mercy in the Same Manner we've been Shown Mercy.

The God who demands we show mercy, shows mercy.

(1 Corinthians 13:4 - 8) Love is patient (slow my pace to meet yours)

Love is kind (I'm going to loan you my strength & not remind you of your weakness, over & over again).

It does not envy (It celebrates your accomplishments, even when ours are overlooked), it does not boast (When we get credit, it's only b/c of our giftedness & God gave us this too), it is not proud.

5 It does not dishonor others (love never dishonors another person. As dishonorable as I am, God still honors me. How can I dishonor someone else?)

It is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered (not never angered, not easily angered), it keeps no record of wrongs (knows what we did but doesn't but doesn't treat us like we deserve & hold it against us).

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. (I should never celebrate the failure of someone, even if I don't like them) **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

There is war of kingdoms that rages in our hearts, and one of the first casualties is mercy. Believers in Jesus fail at times, but, because of our faith in Jesus, God's mercy triumphs over the judgement we deserve.

We are called into a different story than the rest of the world, b/c we serve a different King and are citizens of a different kingdom.

Why are judgment & condemnation often our more natural responses to the sin, weakness & failures of others than offering them the same mercy & grace we've been given? Why are we so impatient when God is so patient?

Our struggle to love, to show mercy to others, demonstrates how much our hope still rests on a God who will love us and show us mercy, even on our worst days.

Love is the process of meeting needs. How We Love Others is the Greatest Evidence of our Love for God. Family member? Spouse? Kids? Neighbor? Co-worker? Classmate?

We don't deserve the merciful love we are given daily & we are called to give love & mercy to others who are as undeserving as we are.

Small Group Questions

- What stood out to you in this week's message?
- Read James 2:8. Why do you think this is called the royal law? How did Jesus live this out as an example for us?
- Read Luke 10:25 – 37. What did the expert in the law ask Jesus and why did he ask? Who showed themselves to be a neighbor? Why would this have been controversial to Jesus' original audience?
- What is the definition of mercy? How was love defined? How does the parable Jesus shared show mercy & love in action?
- Who is our neighbor? What does loving our neighbor require of us? What opportunities are around us in everyday life?
- Read James 2:9 – 11. What does James say about favoritism? What is the danger of "picking & choosing" which laws of God we will obey? What are some negative ways people respond to their sin? How can the good news of the gospel change the way we deal with sin?
- Read Romans 8: 1 – 2. What does it say? Does that make a difference in your life? Share about it.
- Read James 2:12. What does it say we are to do? Why? What happens when we withhold mercy? How does God show us mercy, even when we mess up and sin?
- How We Love Others is the Greatest Evidence of our Love for God. Do you agree or disagree? Share your reasoning. Where have you seen this to be true?
- The God who commands we show mercy, shows mercy. What can you do to develop a more merciful spirit? Who do you need to show love to this week? How does our struggle to show mercy demonstrate how much we still desperately need it?
- Close in prayer. Ask God for his strength to show love & mercy to your "neighbor" this week.