

Joel and Virginia Cook, Awana missionaries: praise for the six salvations that occurred during the next two Awana game events; for safe travel and for God’s spirit to move during the next two game events

President Obama: the Lord will impart wisdom, restraint and courage in his response to the provocations by Russia in the Ukraine; the Spirit will call him to be an advocate of peace as well as of justice in the preservation of international order, advocating religious freedom and defending Christians as well as others around the world

Deacons and Deaconesses: the Lord will encourage them as they seek ways of meeting and drawing new people and visitors into the life of the church; the Spirit will be a spirit of wisdom as they respond to requests for aid from the community and seek to discern and respond to the needs of people in the church

Young Adult/College Student: Ryan Boettcher, Butte College (son of Bob and Karen): that he continues his positive focus on his education goals, that he can find a job that will work well around his school schedule, and that he will be richly blessed with his current life plans while remaining on a strong Christian path.

Military/Emergency Services Personnel: Jonathan Sweetman (son of Catherine): that the Lord will continue to bless and guide him in his personal, education and business life.

Please pray for our homebound family members: Fred & Jean Pauly, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Hilda Chapman

(please call the office to request updates)

I am going to ask you all in just a moment to stand and recite the Lord's Prayer. We tend to have an attitude about repetition, feeling that anything you do in the life of the church that is – here it goes – “just repetitious” isn't worth doing. That is not true. So what I would like us to do is to develop again as a body of believers the habit of reciting the Lord's Prayer. I would like us to have the habit so that when we think of God we think of the Apostles' Creed; we know the God we are thinking of. We don't have to battle with ourselves, but we simply say, “I believe in God the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. . .” I don't have to reach into my mind to ask “Is that what I believe, is that what I remember, is that what the Bible says?” We know those are true and you want to drink that truth as a glass of cold water again and again and again so that becomes part of the broadening foundation of your love for God. Please stand with me. I fully recognize we may be a little shaky with the Lord's Prayer because we have not often done it in our services but we are going to be doing these things once a month at least.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from all evil.
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen

It is good for us to realize that when we gather together on a Sunday morning as we have today we come as the people called by God into His presence and that our primary purpose for coming is to bless the Lord. That is our primary reason for being here; it is to worship God, to praise Him, to thank Him, and if we did nothing other than that for the morning it would have been well worth our time.

But of course I have a few things to say to you! You do realize that an aspect of our worship is that you come into submission to His Word. My prayer always is that as I talk you listen to the Holy Spirit. My words will accomplish exactly nothing; but the Spirit of God, taking anybody's words and pressing them home to the heart, will effect a remarkable change in the life of those who hear.

“In God We Trust”: how many know where that little motto comes from? How many know why I have a question mark behind it? We face some major issues. In God we trust? In God we trust? Do we trust? James 2:1-13 actually raises that issue from a different perspective than what we have in our situation today. But it is a profoundly important perspective and we will be looking at it together and seeing if we can't hear what the Spirit of God has to say to us and understand it and how it applies in our own situation. Join with me as I read these verses.

(2:1) *“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*
(2:2) *For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, (2:3) and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit down at my feet,’ (2:4) have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (2:5) Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (2:6) But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? (2:7) Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

(2:8) *“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. (2:9) But if you show partiality you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (2:10) “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. (2:11) For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (2:12) So speak*

and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. (2:13) For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Those are powerful words. I suspect that they are familiar to many. Put in the context of James' letter the arrival of a rich man and a poor man at the church door is a test or a temptation to that body of believers. You can put the terms of the test in any number of ways, but all of them come to be pretty much the same thing. Do we put our trust in God? Do we trust that God has brought both of those people to the door? Do we trust that both of these people are occasions for us to receive good and perfect gifts from God? Or, are we tempted? Do we remain focused on God as we greet them, or does our focus shift to what stands in front of us? The way I put it on the [power point] is, do we remain focused on God as the giver or do we let our focus shift to the gift and what we think of its worth?

Recognize that we have already met the players in this little drama that James sets before us in chapter 2:1-7, the rich man and the poor man. We have already met them in chapter 1. We have already been told that if they are godly they have experienced a values shift. This is part of the new creation in the image of Christ. So we know of these two individuals that they have experienced a values shift and here that shift is articulated. The poor man, [James] says boasts in the fact that he has been chosen by God: “I am saved by God! God's grace has reached into my poverty and grabbed hold of me and lifted me up to a high place in His estimation.” That is the poor man. It does not say that he is no longer poor in worldly terms. It merely says that he now has a clear eye that sees the grace of God and how it has exalted him. Then there is the rich man. If the rich man has also undergone this values shift as being a new creature in Christ, the rich man exalts, he boasts in the fact of his humiliation: “I have been brought low by God in order that I can freely receive what He freely gives.” There are those two men, remarkably shifted. The rich man suddenly understands the ephemeral, the transient, the passing and ultimately the meaningless value of worldly riches when compared against the reality of eternal life with Christ.

So we see that the poor man and the rich man meet on a common plain. We often say where they meet at the foot of the cross. Each of them understands that they were completely dependent upon the grace of God to get them there; the poor man's poverty couldn't get him there and the rich man's wealth couldn't get him there either; it is the grace of God. So they meet together on a common plain, these two men who stand who stand at your door and have knocked and you have seen that one is rich and one is poor.

Understanding that and drinking in, as it were, the full wonder and goodness of that promise is essential for tracking what James has to say in chapter 2. For partiality in and by those who are a part of the body of Christ is a fundamental denial of the gospel. To respond to one of these differently than to the other is somehow to ignore the overshadowing reality and presence of the Lord in the life of each one. Looking instead at the distinctions as opposed to the unities, the work that Christ has accomplished in each of them, what it means to have become saved and a part of the new people of God. All who are saved are in Christ. All who are saved have now in baptism been named with the name of God. All who are saved have now received the Holy Spirit. All who are saved, therefore, are temples, dwelling places of the Holy Spirit. All that I am doing – and you know this well- is I am picking out affirmations scattered at one place and another through the Epistles primarily telling us who we are, telling who the rich man and the poor man are standing at the door, knocking and desiring to come in.

We are all of us members of the body of Christ. How, therefore, could we possibly treat these two men differently than we treat each other when these are the realities that define who they are, realities that transcend every distinction upon the face of the earth? These realities tell us not just who they are presently, but who they will be for eternity, and we are going to treat them differently?

James deals with this issue in two paragraphs, the ones we have read. The first paragraph and the second are quite different in the approach James makes and it is important for us to note that difference. The first paragraph is what

we might call a socio-economic sort of sketch. The second paragraph is an ethical or spiritual assessment of what is going on. Both are revealing. James says that we are to show, by the way, no partiality. I want us to pause for a moment [and think about that]. “No partiality”: I have been emphasizing that up to this moment: how could they possibly treat these two people differently? But is that realistic; is that an absolute truth, as if we were bound by our Christian faith to treat everyone in all things in exactly the same way? There are all kinds of people in the body of Christ. Look around you; I have to look at all of you! I have often asked myself, “Why on earth did God save these people—or me?” People differ according to their gifts, their callings, their maturity levels, their dependability, their steadfastness as well as their material circumstances: of course they do. It is very interesting if you read the Gospels. It is quite clear that Jesus preferred three of the disciples over the rest.

What kind of partiality is it that James is saying is forbidden? It is not all partiality. What he is telling is that we are forbidden to be partial according to one’s material circumstances and accomplishments. It is the contrast you see between those fine clothes and the golden ring and shabby apparel that clearly announces the relative socioeconomic standing. Initially as you read the little tale here James says nothing of the two individuals except to note the outward sign of their relative prosperity. That is what makes the point. How we greet people, do we filter it through a set of values that says the well-dressed are the ones we care about, and the less so, down goes our esteem?

The point behind this is that we are easily deceived by appearances, particularly appearances that appeal to our carnal, worldly desires and fears. We are easily deceived because we so readily deceive ourselves. In the case before us the assembly potentially has been deceived by the outward markers of merely apparent worth: clothes and jewelry. We are well acquainted with this, all people around the world are. We make this assumption, we assume that the finely dressed are worthy of the clothes they wear and the poor are as well. James presses the point, specifying by shabby clothes on the one side and the gold ring on the other, what attracts our eye. Are those real distinctions? What do they mean? Why do we take notice of them? Do we assume the rich will be a fountain, overflowing with good things? Do we assume the poor will be a drain, sucking out of us? James is not faulting the assembly for noticing the obvious; he finds fault with them for shallow thinking, for carnal calculations.

The essence of salvation, the essence of being saved is the recognition of one’s total dependency upon God. It saddens me that in our day so many present the gospel as “a means for further enriching my life”. Because the reality of the gospel is first of all a statement of my absolute and total bankruptcy, such that without the intervening grace of God I have nothing at all. So I am entirely dependent upon His grace to me in Christ. We are wholly dependent upon God: but this is only the beginning. When we are saved we understand our comprehensive dependency upon God. Paul wrote this to the Ephesians (2:8-9, and how well know this, most of us in this kind of a congregation, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* None of us are clever enough to save ourselves. None of us are in fact clever enough to put faith in God. It is God who draws us to Himself through Jesus Christ. If He were not drawing us, we would not go. The reason you are here, beloved, is not because you were so clever as to get up this morning, get dressed and get here, although it does represent a certain degree of cleverness I would agree. The reality is you are here because the Lord God of Heaven has been at work and pulling you into His presence. That is why you are here. You may say, “I don’t think so”, but you are wrong!

But it is not just the beginning [of the life of faith], it is the continuation of the life that we live [in complete dependency on God]. In Romans 8:32 Paul writes, *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* Some of us are praying about water for the summer. The drought is a serious matter. Some farmers who are in this congregation, [it’s] no water for you. It is hard to be a farmer and have no water. Hard to be a householder and have no water. So, does that invalidate Romans 8:32? No it does not. We are entirely dependent upon God. We come under His sovereign care when we accept Christ as

our Lord. In that situation we recognize and we celebrate that God will take care of us. May my well run dry? Yes, it might. If it does, God will make sure water gets to me in some other way. Do you believe?

The point is that we are not to trust in the fine clothes and gold rings. We are not to put aside those whom God has brought out way but outwardly have little to commend them. To make his point, James applies a bit of reality therapy. This is in the first paragraph. In socioeconomic terms, who are the poor and who are the rich? This is in reference to the day in which [James] wrote. In James' day the poor were those whose life situation taught them the truth of their complete vulnerability, their need for someone to protect them, to provide for them in all ways. They had nothing to fall back on. They needed a savior. James puts it this way, “...has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom...?” The idea is that having little to no hop for happiness or even security in worldly terms, the poor are ready to receive hope from heaven. We have talked about, and someone actually had the appalling gall to walk up and say he is not sure he wants to pray for rain because maybe we all need to learn a new lesson in dependency upon God. He is right, of course. The tragedy of God's blessings is that often it seems they steel our hearts against the reality of our further need. What a sorrow, what a sorrow! We are dependent upon God for all things.

By contrast James says the rich, so far from being fountains of life and of good things for other people – people of generosity and kindness is what they should be – instead the rich, he says are those who use any means possible not only to secure but to increase their advantages: whatever the cost is to you, too bad, you just have to take it. There is, in other words, a reason why the rich people are rich, and the reason isn't a good one. That is what [James] says regarding his day.

You and I both know that James is not claiming that the rich are always so as the fruit of oppression or that the rich are necessarily cruel and corrupt. His words instead reflect the words of Jesus, his older brother, words that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. How hard is it? [It is] harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. With God all things are possible: hallelujah! But the fundamental point is this one: riches tend to ensnare the soul and bind the heart. Jesus made this comment also: “Where your treasure is your heart will be also.” And your heart is what worships. So the rich are continually tempted to worship their wealth – of course! The temptations of riches were if anything far greater in the ancient world than in ours. Poverty in that day consigned you to a life of unremitting labor and constant uncertainty with virtually no access to the powers let alone the pleasures of the world. We would need perhaps today to go to India to observe a culture equal in its cruelty and barbarism, its utter indifference to the poor. When Christians rescued the abandoned children, orphans, and cared for widows who had no other support, who risked their lives to rescue the victims of plagues and epidemics, the Greeks and Romans considered them to be fools. They did not admire them for their generosity, for their sacrifice. But you and I are Christians. When you become a Christian, if it is a true conversion, there is a shift in your values, a different way of perceiving the issues of life. To put it in a nut shell, we become like the Savior who has saved us.

James 2:8, the defining value for all of those who are in Christ, the company of those who follow Him, is love. Notice again what James says: “*If you really fulfill the royal law according to scriptures, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well.’*” That, James says, is the royal law. Love your neighbor as yourself. We are wise to pause and consider for a moment, how would any of us want to be treated when we entered a worship assembly. Surely we would want to be treated with respect. It is telling that Jesus refers here to honor. We are to honor all who are in Christ, all of them, even if we know nothing more about them that they have arrived at the door and they want to join us. We assume therefore that they are interested in Christ. We assume that therefore the Spirit of God is at work in them. We assume, therefore, that they are worthy of our respect and our honor and we draw them into the assembly and we celebrate the fact that they are with us. They do not have to earn our respect; it is given to them freely because they have arrived. Good thing!

One of the books I purchased at the Desiring God Conference when I was back in Minneapolis enduring the sub-zero weather – the things I do for you! – was entitled, “Ethics and Moral Reasoning”. I hardly need say that we are today in a time of extreme confusion as a culture regarding both ethical principles and moral norms. There are many reasons for this, not least being the concerted effort by many of the ruling class, the ruling elite to remove whatever is left of any Christian influence in our political and public life. There was deep confusion in the world of the New Testament. Rome had brought together virtually all of the civilizations that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea, pulling together a *mélange*, a big mix up of all those cultures which did not necessarily think or act the same way. The one moral certainty that governed the life of Rome was this: you must honor the emperor and the empire. That, by the way, was why the Christians were slaughtered. They were not slaughtered because they said, “Jesus is my Savior.” Rome could have cared less. But when they said, “Jesus is Lord, He has authority over me; it is His will that guides my life; I am in submission to His authority, I serve His majesty. I serve His glory.” The Roman emperor said, “Change your mind or die.” They died. The body of Christ enjoyed virtually no support from the world around them for their beliefs and practices. When I tune my ear into the Christian bloggers and commentators one of the things that deeply troubles me is the amount of whining I hear. “Nobody loves us, nobody is supporting us, nobody agrees with our ideas! Everybody. . . what happened? The whole culture should be behind us!”

Well perhaps so, but what if they are not? Do we wait for them to agree with us before we speak up and speak out? How willing are we to stand against the tide of a culture that has turned its back on the God we love? Do we draw our strength from social affirmation and political permission, or do we draw our strength from an undivided devotion to the God who saved us? That is the issue; that is where we are at. Christianity triumphed in the ancient world because they paid the price for being faithful to the Lord. We should not complain about needing to pay the price, which will first of all be financial. When you stop receiving credits for making donations to the church, how much less will you give? Beloved I am not speaking to the issue of this church’s financial wellbeing, which has been consistently amazing. But the comments made at the offering were right on: what we give to the Lord in an act of worship. What we give to the Lord: do we calculate that according to how much it benefits us tax wise? It would be foolish to ignore those advantages at this time; it will be sinful to let those advantages, or their loss, govern our decisions when they are lost. That is the line, beloved, that is the test; that is where we begin to sense the reality that God is saying, “Are you Mine, or are you not?”

When the body of Christ brought [its heaven-minded sensibilities] into the world what sustained them in their confrontation with that world was a passionately held set of moral convictions rooted in the ethics of God. What is ethics? It is a system of moral values. Here is a definition: a set of principles of right conduct, a theory or system of moral values, the study of the general nature of moral and of the specific choices to be made by a person; moral philosophy. That is the whole definition; I pulled out “a system of moral values.” For Christians our ethics is determined by the Word of God. The governing ethic or principle is the one stated by James 2:8, it is the royal law of love. Please understand that when it says “Royal Law of Love” it is directly from the king; it bears the whole weight of His authority and it pressed upon us. This ethical principle is of course rooted in the nature of God Himself. God is love. It is the love of God which explains and manifests the plan of salvation, the plan by which a Holy God determines to save sinners from the justice due to them for their sin. The right conduct which that calls for, the system of moral values which guides the thoughts and actions and the love acts of believers in the world is known to humanity through Moses as the Ten Commandments. Here is the question: do you know them? The love of God creates a moral people, a people whose ethics is the application of the love of God in all their relationships. What are the Ten? I am going to put increased pressure on our good “Banner Committee” – we have talked about this before – but knowing that repetition is the heart of learning, we are going to have banners, five to a wall, which give you the Ten Commandments, so every Sunday you come in here you will say to yourself, “Well, well, I guess God’s got expectations! Maybe I will go become a Baptist!” Alright, alright, I’m sure the Baptists have expectations too!

Here are the Ten:

1. You shall love no other gods before Me.
2. You shall make no images
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
4. You shall remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy
5. You shall honor your father and your mother
6. You shall not commit murder
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
10. You shall not covet

All of those ten we are told by Jesus Himself are summed up in “the Two”? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself. Right!

I emphasize this because in what might seem like a rather sudden and stunning move when you come to James 2 :9-23, James turns from this sociological observations to an exposition of the Mosaic Law. What I think oftentimes ultimately troubles us in dealing with God is that the purpose of God in calling a people who will be called by His name, a people for His own possession in the world is not to make them nice and happy. The purpose of God is to make them godly; He wants to make us godly people who live the law of God in the world. That is His intention. To not do this, to fail at this, to not be steadfast, to fade or cave in in the face of whatever trials might be encountered is to sin. Most will agree that hearing this is rather awkward. Listen again to what James has to say in 2:9-13. If you show partiality you are committing a sin. This why I have taken this detour, beloved. If you show partiality you have committed a sin, and are convicted by the Law as transgressors. *“Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said ‘Do not commit adultery’, also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do commit adultery but do not murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty, for judgment is without mercy to those who show no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*

What is mercy? Compassion or forbearance [shown] especially to one under one’s own power; lenient or compassionate treatment. The following distinguishes mercy from grace: The compassionate treatment of those in distress; works of mercy. Mercy is God not punishing us as our sins deserve. Grace is extending kindness to the unworthy. As we said before, this doesn’t make people happy as much as it makes them thankful. You might consider this, beloved; the next time you enter into this assembly you might consider falling on the floor and saying, “God of heaven, I am so thankful that in spite of the fact that I have sinned this week You have allowed me to assemble with the holy ones, the saints of God, in Your presence. You have not cast me out, you have not cast me apart; you have not subjected me to condemnation; You have extended You grace to me yet once again and I can freely enter into the assembly of those who like me live by the grace of God. Praise the Lord! Amen.

The first thing that James does here is to clarify the true nature and importance of the topic. One of the numerous small groups that we have in our church is presently working through a book by Jerry Bridges is entitled like this: “Respectable Sins”. How many of us know others who have those sins? Ah! These are the sins which we generally pass off with a, “Well, it’s not the best but there’s really no need to over-react in this. We only human! We can’t expect perfection. So we will let it slide.” These are the sins with which we are generally rather comfortable. They are the ways in which our lives fall short of the biblical standard. We make this decision regarding these respectable sins. We say, “This doesn’t really touch on the core of what it means to be holy and to walk with God. Even though I am involved in this sin, really it’s ok; I can still read my Bible and pray. It’s ok! It is not that big a deal. It

doesn't touch the core.” Partiality, favoring some over others: They say that birds of a feather flock together. Well in this case it is not the flocking that bothers God, it is the idea that those with the wrong kind of feathers don't belong.

The question arises: partiality: do you think God really cares about this? What we are being told here is that He cares. He cares with the same intensity that He cares about murder, adultery, theft, lying. We like to live in a gray world of uncertainties. I think the scriptures tell us that in the presence of God [there is] nothing but blazing light and absolutely nothing is hidden from His eyes.

However that little phrase, “God cares” might be misleading [because of how] we use the word “care”. We're likely to think that God's primary concern is for us, that He cares about us. He does care about us, doesn't He! But beloved, it is not His primary concern. The primary concern is for the true character of holiness, for the absolute and perfect integrity of His own law. Does this mean that God is vain and self-centered? We know that is not true. So what is happening here?

Consider this: God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the forbidden tree which was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. Did He care about Adam and Eve? He cared about Adam and Eve. Did He care about that tree? He cared about that law? He cared about that law. Why? He said if they ate of the forbidden tree which was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die. They didn't know what that meant, but God did. We still do not know what it meant, or what it means, not fully. Only one man has experienced the full reality, the full consequence of that sin. Only one man has full knowledge of good and evil. That man is Jesus Christ. Jesus knows the whole weight and reality of the corruption and iniquity of sin. He knows it because He has taken it upon Himself and He has suffered the wrath of God against it that it might be purified and you and I are set free. Hallelujah! Do you think God cares about our small sins? There aren't any.

In the meanwhile as the years and ages unfold the sons and daughters of Adam continue to learn by means of one sorrow after the next the knowledge of good and evil. It is horrible almost beyond imagination. Sometime I cannot read the internet as I learn of what is happening in Syria, or I learn of what is happening in Central Africa, because it is so horrific when you consider what men do to men. God would have us escape that knowledge by adhering to the Law, living according to the true wisdom which brings life and peace to the one who obeys. This is the way to happiness and to the life that endures. The measure of God's caring for us is seen in the Father's surrendering of His beloved Son to the cross of judgment.

Here, then, is the royal law, the law of love. Jesus has made it possible for us to live according to this law. The heart of the law, its central, defining tenet is that we love others not according to our imagination but according to the way Jesus loved us. That is the measure, the pattern, the model. This is why when James comes to the end here James says, “Mercy”. Mercy is God not punishing us as we deserve. How about us with each other?

We are to discipline ourselves to treat each other with compassion, with forbearance, shown especially to an offender that is subject to our power. Neither mercy nor grace require that we be blind to the faults and failings of others. On the contrary, it is very likely that grace and mercy will give us greater clarity regarding those faults and failings and their consequences. The love of God alive in us what us to help bind up the wounds, build up the weak, bring reassurance to the fearful. The application of the royal law of love which is the law of liberty is that we are free to love, and love calls us to rejoice in what is good. Let us seek to live by that law.

Please pray with me: our heavenly Father, may the words which Your Spirit prompted James to write down, be carried by Your Spirit to write down, be carried into the deepest places of our self-understanding. Gracious Father by that grace through the power of the Holy Spirit which illumines that word so that we might understand You

and ourselves and be transformed into the image of Christ, O Father, may it burn brightly and set us free from the night that so often lingers in our souls. We ask this giving thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. How soon do you tend to “size people up” after meeting them, and does your “assessment” include the question of whether they will be a gain or a drain in your life?
2. In what way(s) have you experienced a values shift in thinking of people since being saved?
3. Why is partiality in dealing with Christians a denial of the gospel?
4. Is any form of partiality acceptable or is all forbidden?
5. Ephesians 2:8-9 and romans 8:32 indicate two different kinds of dependency on God. Which of these is he more challenging for most of us and why?
6. What is the challenge or danger of riches?
7. What are some practical ways we can honor fellow Christians? In what ways have you been most honored?
8. Do Christians today “passionately” hold to moral convictions, and if so, what are those convictions?
9. What is the difference between being nice and being godly?
10. How do mercy and grace differ?
11. Why is it right that God loves His law more than He loves us?