

The Book of James

One Lawgiver and Judge

Lesson #9 for November 29, 2014

Scriptures: James 4:11-17; Acts 17:11; Hebrews 4:15-16; 12:13-21; Ecclesiastes 2:15-19; Titus 2:14.

1. What are the relationships among God's law, our love for God, human laws, and our relationships with other people? This lesson will suggest that being critical of law or being critical of other human beings should not characterize Christians.
2. Have you ever thought that you were above the law? Have you ever wanted to criticize any of God's laws? What about human laws? Why do societies in our day tend to be so disrespectful toward law enforcement? How should we draw the line between being too rigid and legalistic about keeping the law versus being casual about law-keeping and taking an attitude that it is of little concern to us because God's forgiveness will take care of every sin?
3. Read James 4:11. What does it mean to slander or judge another Christian? When you do so, are you being critical of the law itself? If you are critical of the law itself, are you implying that you are superior to law and, therefore, do not need to keep it? If we believe that we should "do what is right because it is right," (*Christ's Object Lessons* 97) does that make us above the law? How should God deal with people like those described in Joshua 1:16-18?
4. Read Matthew 7:1-3. How can we determine if we have a "log" in our own eye? Is there a safe way to develop a wise judgment standard even of ourselves?
5. What is spiritual discernment? Is that somehow related to spiritual maturity? See Ephesians 4:13-16; and Hebrews 5:11-6:3.
6. What biblical guidance is there regarding spiritual discernment? Read Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 6:1-5; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Philippians 1:9; 1 John 4:1; and Galatians 6:1. Are we able to say with certainty that we know the truth because we have investigated it for ourselves? Have we demonstrated wisdom in solving differences within our church? Do we honestly evaluate ourselves on a regular basis to make sure we like the Bereans are part of the solution and not part of the problem? Remember also that our faith must keep growing. A faith that stops growing is dead. Dead faith is no better than an idol. Especially in these last days, we are to test everything. Remember that the Devil is working especially hard in our day. It is a life or death matter for him. But, as we look to others, we must help those who have fallen, and we must constantly beware lest we ourselves fall.
7. When we see someone doing something that we perceive as wrong, do we very carefully evaluate the situation from a biblical perspective before we say anything? Do we clearly understand where the line needs to be drawn between spiritual discernment and judging others?
8. One of the important things that we need to remember is that while there are many laws of varying degrees of importance and application explicitly stated in the Old Testament, every valid law throughout Scripture came from Jesus Himself. Even those laws which are called the laws of Moses (2 Chronicles 33:8; Nehemiah 10:29) were given by Jesus through Moses. Jesus Himself made it very clear that He was the Leader of Israel in the Old Testament. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4; John 5:39; Luke 24:27,44) Thus, when judgment day comes, each one of us will be judged by the words of Jesus. (John 3:17-21; 12:47-48)
9. Aren't you glad that Jesus is the Judge? (John 5:22) It is so much better to let Him do the judging because He knows the full details of every case. There really is only one legitimate Lawgiver and Judge. (James 4:12) We could not ask for a more compassionate Judge. (Isaiah 33:22; 11:1-5; Hebrews 4:15-16; Revelation 19:11-16)

10. The Pharisees and the scribes were constantly looking for an opportunity to trap Jesus and to condemn Him based on their interpretations of the laws that—while they did not recognize the fact—were actually given by Jesus Himself in the Old Testament. He broke many of their man-made rules and interpretations of those laws but none of the actual laws that He had given earlier. Why don't we sacrifice animals? Remember that they had developed 613 laws from the books of Moses. It takes much effort to become a lawyer or to—as many of the Pharisees did—memorize large portions of the Old Testament. But, no matter how well you understand the Old Testament, you cannot possibly understand it better than the One who gave those laws in the first place. When Jesus comes back, we will be judged by the truth.
11. There are some apparently contradictory words about the judgment in the Gospel of John. Read the following paragraphs from Ellen White, and notice carefully the biblical references.

God has committed all judgment unto the Son, [John 5:22] for without controversy He is God manifest in the flesh. [1 Timothy 3:16]

God designed that the Prince of sufferers in humanity should be judge of the whole world. He who came from the heavenly courts to save man from eternal death; **He whom men despised, rejected, and upon whom they heaped all the contempt of which human beings, inspired by Satan, are capable; He who submitted to be arraigned before an earthly tribunal, and who suffered the ignominious death of the cross,—He alone is to pronounce the sentence of reward or of punishment.** He who submitted to the suffering and humiliation of the cross here, in the counsel of God is to have the fullest compensation, and ascend the throne acknowledged by all the heavenly universe as the King of saints. **He has undertaken the work of salvation, and shown before unfallen worlds and the heavenly family that the work He has begun He is able to complete.** It is Christ who gives men the grace of repentance; His merits are accepted by the Father in behalf of every soul that will help to compose the family of God.

In that day of final punishment and reward, both saints and sinners will recognize in Him who was crucified the Judge of all living.—Ellen G. White, *MS* 39, 1898; *RH*, Nov. 22, 1898; *TABC* 483.2-4; *6BC* 1100.6; *Mar*, p. 341.5; *HP* 359.4. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

12. In your mind do you regard the final judgment of God at the end of this world's history to be in any sense arbitrary? Is God, or perhaps Jesus, the One who will decide whether or not each person should be rewarded or punished? Read again John 3:17-21 and 12:47-48. In the judgment, Jesus simply reveals the truth as to who is safe to admit to the heavenly kingdom! We can be sure that He will take everyone to heaven who is safe to be there.
13. Read James 4:13. Next, James turned his attention to the rich. Is it wrong to plan for your financial future? Of course, in Jesus's day, there were no retirement plans, 401(k)s, or government pension plans. In order to be certain that one would be cared for in his old age, he might have needed to have a large amount stored away.
14. Read Luke 12:13-21. Was this man, who probably was a hard worker, wrong in trying to secure his future? Doesn't God want us to have not only short-term but also medium-term and long-term plans for our lives? How do medium-term and long-term plans fit with the fact that we know that one day everything left on this earth will be consumed in the flames? (See 1 Peter 3:10-12.) Are these two concepts diametrical opposed to each other? Someone has suggested that we should "plan as if Christ is not coming for years but live each day as if Christ is coming tomorrow."
15. What is implied when we make a statement about the future and then say, "The Lord willing"?

Do we have any way of knowing for sure if the Lord wills it? Is it reasonable to ask God to show us if our plans are wrong?

16. James went on to point out that for Christians—and especially those who believe in the imminent return of Jesus Christ—storing up more and more supplies for the future is a mistake. In James 4:14, he reminded us that, in fact, our lives are nothing more than a wispy cloud or as Solomon suggested a vapor or a breath of wind. (See Ecclesiastes.) Like Solomon, James reminded us that we can never know for sure what tomorrow will bring.

Beware of procrastination. Do not put off the work of forsaking your sins and seeking purity of heart through Jesus. Here is where thousands upon thousands have erred to their eternal loss. I will not here dwell upon the shortness and uncertainty of life; but there is a terrible danger—a danger not sufficiently understood—in delaying to yield to the pleading voice of God’s Holy Spirit, in choosing to live in sin; for such this delay really is. Sin, however [33] small it may be esteemed, can be indulged in only at the peril of infinite loss. What we do not overcome, will overcome us and work out our destruction.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 32.2-33.0.

17. Look at what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes on this subject. Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:15-19; 4:4; 5:10; 9:11-12. Look around our world today, and watch to see what people are striving for. Would it be correct to say with Solomon: “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity”? (Ecclesiastes 1:2, KJV) How should Christians relate to injustice, cruelty, and unfairness that is going on around us all the time?
18. How can we avoid being caught up in all the rat races that consume our world? Have we carefully balanced our Christian concerns and needs with our own financial needs and the needs of our families? If we put Christ first in our lives, could we possibly lose?
19. Read James 4:15-17. What was James trying to tell us? Does this seem like an impossible standard? How much do we owe God for all that He has done for us? Could we ever repay Him? Do we recognize our complete and total dependence on Him?
20. In James 4:17, James introduced a new definition of *sin*. Sin is not just avoiding doing what is wrong; it also includes failing to do what is right. At first glance, that might seem like an impossible challenge. There must always be more good that one could do. God recognized that even Jesus needed time to rest. (Luke 5:16; Mark 6:31) Jesus was so excited about the possibility of witnessing that even though He was tired and hungry, instead of eating He said to His disciples: “The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38, GNB) Notice that He did not just tell His disciples to work harder.
21. So, what was James implying when he talked about doing the right? In Ephesians 5:8, Paul called us to be “children of the light”; and in Matthew 5:16, Jesus told us to let our light shine before others. So, how can we be “children of the light”? How many Adventists today have any idea about how to do effective witnessing? How well do we know our Bibles? Using the Bible, can we answer questions about our beliefs and answer them in a convincing manner?
22. There is a very big world out there. How can we know where God wants us to go and what He wants us to do? It is so much easier just to do what we feel like doing. But, are our plans better and more rewarding than God’s plans for us? Do we have the courage to step out in faith and do something for God and see what happens? Do you think God would reward such behavior? Is it time for Seventh-day Adventist Christians to stop criticizing their fellow church members and get out into the community and witness? If we were busy witnessing, would we have time to criticize? Notice these comments about criticizing other Christians.

Let no one among you glory any longer against the truth by declaring that this

spirit [of discerning the evil motives of others] is a necessary consequence of dealing faithfully with wrongdoers and of standing in defense of the truth. Such wisdom has many admirers, but it is very deceptive and harmful. It does not come from above, but is the fruit of an unregenerated heart. Its originator is Satan himself. Let no accuser of others credit himself with discernment; for in so doing he clothes the attributes of Satan with the garments of righteousness.—*RH*, March 12, 1895 par. 6; Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 936.12-937.0. [Content in brackets is added.]

He who is guilty of wrong is the first to suspect wrong. By condemning another he is trying to conceal or excuse the evil of his own heart. It was through sin that men gained the knowledge of evil; no sooner had the first pair sinned than they began to accuse each other; and this is what human nature will inevitably do when uncontrolled by the grace of Christ.—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 126.1.

23. However, are there times when we must deal with the sins of church members? In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus laid out a clear plan for how to do that.
24. Do you know any church members who love to spread gossip? Could you give a clear definition of *gossip*? What about *faultfinding*, or just *negative criticism*? Certainly, we should be able to recognize that gossip is really baseless words, often lies; and it almost never builds up. When we practice gossiping, we are violating the words of James and the words of Jesus as well.
25. When we hear someone telling some juicy bit of gossip, how often do we make an intentional effort to turn the conversation into something positive? We need to remember that the person who is criticizing someone else in our hearing will probably be just as willing to criticize us in that other person's hearing! Can you remember a recent episode when you heard someone gossiping? What did you do? How can we lead out in a program to inspire action to forward the gospel on the part of church members and minimize idle gossip?
26. Sometimes, we are tempted to say something sarcastic about another church member. Gossip often includes sarcasm. When we are tempted to gossip, we need to remember that the word *sarcasm* comes from the same Greek root that gives us the word *sarcophagus*, meaning a coffin. A sarcophagus is a "flesh eater." Are people who spread sarcastic, gossipy rumors really cannibals in disguise? In effect, when we criticize another church member or even someone in the world, we are sitting as a judge over them. And only God has been given that authority. Do we really believe we are qualified to take God's place in judging?
27. Where would you place yourself in the parable of the good Samaritan? Are you truly a neighbor to all around you? If we reach out a helping hand to those who are in need, is that not a great opportunity to witness for Jesus Christ? Would it be fair to ask God to help and protect us when we might be in a dangerous situation while trying to help another?
28. In this part of his book, James seemed to be telling us that we do not have time for idle gossip. Our lives are very short, and we need to make the best of the time we have allotted to us. Pursuing a course that might lead to great financial gain cannot be compared to bringing souls into the kingdom of God. Wouldn't you prefer to have friends in heaven who thank you for helping them get there rather than having your treasure consist of earthly material things that will be consumed in the final flames of this earth's history?

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