

Exhortation: Bristol Horfield

Date 8/6/08

Title: Living under the shadow of judgement?

Reading: James 2

In 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 and at verse 10

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

Whether we like it or not brethren and sisters we are all living under the shadow of the judgement seat of the Lord Jesus Christ our Master. His return is indeed imminent, as I am sure we would all agree. *Yet just how much are we daily aware of this impending occurrence?* Indeed does *this future event shape our thinking, our speech and our actions, as it should?*

Now this fact can effect us in one of two ways, negatively or positively. Firstly it can affect us negatively filling us with fear and foreboding about our current position before our Heavenly Father. Possibly even paralysing our faith altogether, rendering us completely self absorbed and unable to function within the body of Christ.

Or secondly and more positively it can provide a means of evaluating our daily lives in light of this future event. Spurring us to individually correct our lives in the truth, as we read elsewhere *“for if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.”* Surely this second means of looking positively at the judgement seat of Christ is the means the Eternal Spirit wishes us to take.

Indeed in our New Testament reading in the Epistle of James and in the second chapter we read:

In James Chapter 2 and at verse 12

“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.”

Consistency in thought, speech and action is what the Eternal Spirit is here reminding these first century brethren and ourselves. Specifically consistency in our dealings one with another, learning to treat everyone alike, without any manner of partiality, whether good or bad.

We are therefore being exhorted here to be like both our Heavenly Father and our beloved Master who treated all after the same manner. To be no respecter of persons, a thing, which is very easy to say, but extremely difficult for us to do, because of the nature we bare.

The first half of this second chapter concerns this problem of respecting persons, which is a work that negates rather than reflects faith. Because our faith is energized by love and when we are partial there is a lack of love manifesting that our actions are fleshly. Whether we perceive them to be or not, thus this sin of respecting persons is incredibly subtle and easy to fall into.

In order to avoid this problem of partiality in respect of persons we are exhorted to live as those about to be judged by our Lord.

In verse twelve the later half of the verse reads, “*as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty*”. Now the phrase “*shall be*” in the Greek, is a strengthened form of a word, which means to personally “*care about*” something. In this context it means to have the context of the judgement always in our mind, because we care about the outcome of it. This phrase also implies that this judgement being considered is indeed imminent.

The Greek for this phrase “*shall be*” is a present active participle, which indicates to us brethren and sisters that this is a principle that we should all live by. More than this brethren the use of the participle here indicates that each one of us has consciously, freely and joyfully chosen to live under this shadow of judgement.

Thus we are to be living each and every day as if we are about to be judged. Indeed there is a truth to this on two counts, firstly we know not the day or the hour of our Master’s return and secondly the same is true concerning the possibility of our falling asleep in Christ.

Yet how hard this is for us brethren and sisters to consciously live aware of this great foreshadowing event.

The verse goes onto speak of the standard of judgement by which we are judged being “*the law of liberty*”. A law no longer based upon the legal commands of the Mosaic

code, but upon moral principles, which were the very spirit of those legal commandments. Thus the moral precepts, which our Master taught in the Sermon on the Mount, become our code of practice and our rule for life.

Now liberty does not mean we can live as we please, because if we were to do so, we would quickly find ourselves slaves once more to our sin. That is the illusion of freedom, which the world tries continually to beguile us with. No brethren and sisters the liberty is the freedom from sin to act as our Heavenly Father designed for us in the first place to manifest his character and glory. Liberty then is the choice to follow that, which is right in the sight of our God.

Now in the Greek the word “*judged*” in verse twelve is a present passive infinitive, which means that this law we are called upon to live by in Christ is presently judging us day by day in our walk in the truth. Since this judgement is passive, it is happening to us, actually as a direct outcome of our thoughts, speech and actions as is outlined in the first half of verse.

We could explain it in this way imagine you are walking across country following a map with a compass, then depending on a number of factors (terrain, visibility etc) and your ability to read the two instruments. You will either, be on course to reach the destination or off course, which will require continual adjustment.

Apparently one of the Apollo rockets that travelled to the moon a journey of around a quarter of a million miles was only on course for around 7,500 miles of the journey. If we convert that distance to time, it may be easier to grasp – for every half an hour that it was in flight, the rocket was only on target for one minute. Yet because of its instruments constantly correcting the missions course it still safely got to the moon.

The same is true of our every day lives we are either on course manifesting our Heavenly Father after the example of the one we are here to remember or we are not. Yet how are we to achieve these necessary course directions day by day like that Apollo rocket?

In Chapter 1 and at verse 25

*“But whoso **looketh** into the perfect law of liberty, and **continueth therein**, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”*

The law of liberty is also our manual for course adjustment, as we walk forward in faith. Those two words “*looketh*” and “*continueth*” are both Aorist active participles in the Greek, meaning they are principles that we should daily live by. That first word “*looketh*” means “*a careful and close inspection*” and the second word means to “*abide, remain in or near*”. So we are then brethren and sisters to observe the principles of the word then stick by them as our rule of life.

For by this law of liberty we are able to evaluate our lives day by day and see what corrections are necessary. Thereby judging ourselves so that we should not be condemned with the world.

Returning to this twelve verse in the first half we read “*so speak ye, and so do*”. The idea here is of fulfilling the royal law and so doing well. In other words applying the law of liberty in our lives as best we can with respect to our dealings with one another. For the royal law was “*thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*”.

Our Heavenly Father wants us brethren and sisters to follow in the footsteps of our Master and practice what we preach in our daily lives. For the two occurrences of the word “*so*” in the first half of verse twelve indicate how our Father wants us to apply the principles of the first eleven verses in our daily lives.

We are to “*so speak*” and “*so do*” in accordance with this royal law for in loving our neighbour, as our self there will be no partiality shown on our part towards others. Now both the words “*speak*” and “*do*” are present active imperatives in the Greek. They are commands given to us so that we each might be continuously speaking and always acting in accordance with the moral example of our Master.

When we examine the uses of this word “*speak*” in this particular form in the Greek we learn that in most of the cases it is concerned with being always truthful and communicating the truth of the gospel. Thus our words are to be only “*that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*”. Let us remember for do we not read elsewhere:

Matthew Chapter 12 and at verses 36 & 37

“But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

The same is to be likewise true of all our actions, our labour with regards to one another, “*whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*”. The Master in the Sermon on the Mount and that seventh chapter, which is particularly strongly linked with this chapter James two, records:

Matthew Chapter 7 and at verse 12

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”

The problem here in James chapter two was one of judging one’s brethren and treating them practically in the light of that estimation. We find a similar situation in the Epistle to the Romans.

Romans Chapter 14 and verses 10 – 13

*“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. **Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.**”*

Now let us remember brethren and sisters, that Romans, chapter fourteen is a chapter that delineates what to do with regards to secondary or non-fundamental matters of personal conviction. That final verse from this quotation in Romans presents us with two great evils, which we can personally place in the way of our brethren and sisters.

- Stumbling block is an obstacle (*following our example*)
- Occasion to fall is a snare or trap (*violating their conscience*)

So when we “*speak*” and when we “*do*” in relation to one another we must judge and ensure to the best of our ability by looking carefully into the law of liberty that we are not causing either of these two problems.

No one was able to convict our Master of sin, even though they tried relentlessly to perform both these evils by putting obstacles in his path or through trying to trap him in his words. Now we have a high priest brethren and sisters who was tempted in all points, as we yet without sin from whom we are able to find grace to help in time of need to overcome our sin.

Interestingly in the first Epistle of John there is a very similar exhortation to what we find here in James.

1st John Chapter 3 and at verse 18

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

You will **notice** that the practical illustration in John occurs before, but with James the exhortation appears first. As it is the finish of one section and the bridge into the second half of the chapter. Now these two similar illustrative tests are means to test whether we indeed have faith and whether our faith is energised by our love one for another after the example of the Master, as we see in the emblems before us upon the table.

Returning to James chapter two we are given this simple and seemingly insignificant passing situation to assess whether we are individually manifesting the law of liberty by loving our neighbour as our self and so fulfilling that royal law.

James chapter 2 and verses 15 – 16

“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?”

Let us firstly **note** brethren and sisters that the particular context here of this divine sacrificial love is in having mercy. Remember the key thing about the practice of “*agape*” in our lives is that it requires a decision of the will in choosing to love another sacrificially. It is this decision of the will that these first brethren and sisters and indeed we today need help with brethren and sisters, “*for our spirit is indeed willing, but our flesh is weak*”.

Now this need of practical provision was a very real issue for these first century brethren. We must remember that the early Jewish brethren were being persecuted and had to flee from Judea to elsewhere in the Roman Empire. This meant that they often arrived, elsewhere destitute and required immediate help from their brethren.

Now when the gospel was first preached and then persecuted under Saul many of the Jews refused to help the early brethren and so they left and moved elsewhere within the Empire. Which was exactly what the Eternal Spirit wanted of them in the first

place. Later those Jewish brethren, who were now established outside Judea, resented helping those later converts from Judea, because some of those same Jews had refused them help earlier.

Thus one would say to the needy “*depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled*”.

Apparently this was a common benediction of the time, but what is fascinating about it is that the words “*depart*”; “*warmed*” and “*filled*” are all commands in the Greek. Indicating that person speaking these words thought themselves to be spiritual and only concerned themselves with spiritual issues. This can be another subtle error we can make like these Jewish brethren in the first century; to negate temporal concerns altogether.

In Matthew Chapter 23 and at verses 3 & 4

*“All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: **for they say, and do not.** For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”*

Here then in this illustration we see the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who regarded themselves as righteous and entirely spiritual. Faith to them was more theoretical than practical and this is a criticism that is often aimed at brethren of our persuasion and sadly more often than not I think with some justification.

So the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle asks the question (*end of verse 16*) if you fail to provide those things, which are necessary, then *to what profit is your faith?*

Indeed brethren and sisters who can dismiss that our Heavenly Father indeed provides such opportunities in our lives, so that we would become a conduit of his love and grace to the individual in need? How often have you reacted after a situation and said I should have said this or done that, but you were either distracted or unable to perceive the issue clearly enough at the time.

Thus how many opportunities do we each miss to be such conduits of mercy in the lives of one another and so equally miss out on the transformation in our lives those opportunities would bring. Let us not be as the Pharisees who said, but did not, but let us be truly godly brethren who “*so speak and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty*”.

The Eternal Spirit through the Apostle Paul gives the following exhortation:

In Philippians Chapter 3 and at verse 17

“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.”

This is an exhortation to be observant and to locate faithful brethren who so speak and who so do. When you have found such examples then carefully observe their behaviour, their speech and their manner of life and model your speech and actions upon it.

In verse seventeen the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle states clearly that the faith of the one who said those things to the needy brother and who helped him not was dead, totally lifeless. Now verse eighteen brethren and sisters provides’ us with the proper contrast.

Verse 18

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.”

Now it is thought that the “*a man*” here is actually a reference to James himself, as a faithful brother in Christ. The Apostle then continues to show the necessary interplay between faith and works with the examples of Abraham and Rahab. As brother Thomas clearly shows Abraham was firstly justified by faith and then confirmed that justification by his subsequent works through, which his faith was matured.

The same is equally true of us in terms not only of our faith, but also with regards to the atonement in the Lord Jesus Christ we are here to remember in the emblems before us upon the table. Our faith in the efficacy of the Master’s sacrifice and our faith in the faithfulness of the promises of Almighty God related to that sacrificial work. Must then develop into a faith that is active in each of our lives faithfully living the implications of our beliefs concerning the event we are gathered to remember.

Our faithfulness does not add to the efficacy of the Master’s work in any shape or form that is why we can never be saved by our works, rather our works are a visible witness that our faith is indeed real and has substance. Thus by our works we prove the efficacy of the Master’s sacrifice in becoming participatory representatives in the outworking results of the atonement.

In faithfully manifesting our faith by our works in all that we say and do, as verse twelve exhorts us; we likewise become examples to one another and by that example we influence others for good or ill. Thus our witness then has a much wider ripple effect than just our own judgement. No brother, sister, family or even an ecclesia is an island, but we are all interconnected and none of us have any idea just how broad our individual witness and influence can be?

Brethren and sisters our speaking and our doings are meant to edify one another. So that our influence will be positive not only for today, but also more importantly that our edifying witness will stretch unto the judgement seat of Christ.

In 1st Timothy Chapter 4 and at verse 12

“Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

The word for “*example*” in this verse carries the idea of being the substance a living embodiment, a pattern to follow. **Notice** again that we have highlighted for us, both speaking and doing with the two words “*word*” & “*conversation*”. This exhortation carries a command at the beginning of it to make our example so faithful that no man is able to “*despise*” our witness. That nothing can be laid against us to nullify that witness and limit its influence upon one another.

Now if we all think carefully and observe one another we could all find something that if we dwelt upon could lead to us despising the witness of one another. Because in close relationships our nature will spill over from time to time brethren, but rather than despising one another we are to extend mercy.

Think for a moment about the three examples the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle speaks of here in this chapter. The first two are Abraham and Rahab and if we were to manifest that fleshly mind we could easily find something to despise both of their examples (*Abraham had lapses of judgement and Rahab’s background*). The third witness is one that is only alluded too and that is to David in verse eleven.

Verse 11

“For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.”

Now how do we know this is the case well in the way these two commandments from the ten given at Sinai are reversed, for they should be the other way round? Yet they are given here exactly as David committed them. David failed terribly to uphold the royal law in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah.

The Eternal Spirit is exhorting us not to display the mindset of the Pharisees held by some first century Jewish brethren who were overtly judgmental of their brethren and sought to uphold their own righteousness. None of us would place our selves on a par with any of these three worthies from the Old Testament. Remember what we read earlier from Romans *“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ”*.

We are constantly being brought back to this principle of the judgement to come must regulate our conduct now. It has a regulatory force in our lives brethren and sisters not because of fear, but rather on account of love. On account of our love for our Heavenly Father for what has been accomplished in our Lord, as is evident before us upon the table in the bread and wine. On account of our fervent love one for another, because we are aware that we are unable on our own to overcome.

Fear as a motivational principle will only take you so far, but love is the greatest means of motivation and that is able to cover a multitude of sins. We must learn the lesson of verse thirteen.

Verse 13

“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment”.

Let us then learn this fact expressed elsewhere by our Lord *“blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”*. David’s sinned greatly affected him, as did Yahweh extending mercy to him. So that he became a very compassionate man who cared deeply for his people seeking to teach others our Heavenly Fathers ways. We likewise are to consider ourselves like David did and learn to balance these two characteristics of mercy and judgement.

Now we shall not always get them in the correct balance, because of our nature and our finite ability to understand circumstances. Yet we must try and if we are honest it will be safer for us to fall on the side of mercy if we are unsure of an issue.

In Zechariah Chapter 7 and at verse 9

“Thus speaketh Yahweh of armies, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother”.

Now brethren and sisters as we come to contemplate the one who will shortly execute true judgement and show mercy and compassion to every man his brother. *“For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren”*, as we read in Hebrews.

In our Lord then we see the bread, which speaks to us of the word made flesh and as such he is able to execute judgement in relation to us. Then in the wine brethren and sisters we have the out working of his faith in the pouring out of his life desiring to open up that way to life that mercy and compassion might be shown to us his brethren. Proving himself to be *“a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people”*.

Now as we come to partake of these emblems brethren and sisters let us faithfully endeavour to *“so speak ye, and so do, as they that are about to be judged by the law of liberty”*.

Wayne Marshall

