

## FLIGHTY OR FAITHFUL? CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER CHECKLIST PART VI

### James 3:13-18

"Who is wise and has understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't brag and deny the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. <sup>16</sup> For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace."

### INTRODUCTION

Texas Governor Pat Neff (1871-1952), a devout Christian who later served as President of Baylor University, received an invitation to speak at one of the state penitentiaries. After his talk, he told the prisoners he'd stay for a time to listen to anything they might wish to tell him and keep it in strictest confidence. One after another, inmates came with stories of how they'd been unjustly sentenced, were innocent, and wished to get out. But one inmate told him, "Governor Neff, I do not want to take much of your time. I only want to say that I really did what they convicted me of. But I have been here a number of years. I believe I have paid my debt to society, and that, if I were to be released, I would be able to live an upright life and show myself worthy of your mercy." Governor Neff granted this honest and repentant convict a full pardon!

Our focus in **James 3:13-18**, as noted repeatedly in recent weeks, is character qualities that put our saving relationship with Christ on display. The root meaning of the Greek word for "conduct" in **vs. 13** is "to turn oneself around." This links acceptable "conduct" with the "about face" of repentance. John the Baptist, Christ's forerunner, began his public ministry by proclaiming, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near" [meaning, Heaven's King has arrived to bring salvation to all who repent of disobeying Heaven's God] (**Matthew 3:1-2**). **Jesus** began His public ministry by proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news!" (**Mark 1:14-15**). In the New Testament, Greek words for "repent" and "repentance" describe "a change of mind that involves a turning away from whatever is sinful in God's eyes and a turning to God in sorrow and humility." After His resurrection, **Jesus** underscored in **Luke 24:45-47** (ESV) that God's saving grace to us through Christ is conditioned upon "repentance": "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

Christian researcher George Barna claims Americans do a great disservice to God's gracious offer to pardon us through Christ. In 2011, Barna released *Research on How God Transforms Lives Reveals a 10-Stop Journey* (now published in the book, *Maximum Faith*). His findings, based upon 15,000 telephone surveys, discovered American Christianity often reverses the Biblical model of requiring brokenness—a desire to make a clean break with our sins we now realize are disgusting to a holy God—before "a commitment to Christ as Savior." Instead, we postpone the need to be broken of sin, self, or society until *after* we encourage people to "be saved." As a result, most professed Christians in America never progress beyond stop three toward transformation: awareness of sin and its effects but not cooperating with Christ to remedy the problem.

A man woke up one morning deeply repentant after a bitter fight with his wife the night before. He eyed with shame the case of beer bottles that led to the fight. He took it outside and started smashing the *empty* bottles one by one into the wall. He smashed the first bottle saying, "You are the reason I fight with my wife." He smashed the second bottle, "You are the reason I don't love my children." He smashed the third bottle, "You are the reason I don't have a decent job." As he clutched the fourth bottle, he realized it was still sealed. His desire to save a full bottle of beer for future indulgence won out over his shallow repentance. He hesitated for only a moment before saying to this bottle, "You stand aside. I know you are not involved."

God can see right through us. He knows whether we are truly ready to turn from our sins in disgust and in fear of His displeasure. He tells us in **I Chronicles 28:9**: "[T]he Lord searches every heart and understands the intention of every thought. If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever." By God's grace, anyone who is truly repentant can receive a second chance "to live an upright life and show ourselves worthy of God's mercy," to adapt the words of the repentant convict in his appeal to Texas Governor Pat Neff. We have no right to expect such mercy and grace from God, any more than a guilty convict can demand a Governor's pardon. Yet, our gracious Heavenly Father grants us the opportunity for a forgiven and new life that we could never deserve or earn. **Ephesians 2: 1, 8-9** (NLT) explains, "Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. <sup>8</sup> God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. <sup>9</sup> Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."

We all know the Mother Goose nursery rhyme, *Humpty Dumpty*: Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall; Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; All the king's horses and all the king's men, Couldn't put Humpty together again." A variation on this rhyme pays tribute to God's grace: "Jesus Christ came to our wall, Jesus Christ died for our fall; The King of Heaven, in spite of our sin, by grace can put us together again."

The main condition God demands to receive such grace is repentance. One Texas inmate confessed his guilt to Governor Neff and the justness of the sentence he received. He professed a change of heart. He said he'd committed himself to turn from his lawless life and to turn toward being a law-abiding citizen. Suppose he'd been a pickpocket who used to pick 15 pockets a week. Once he received his pardon and walked out of the prison a free man, what would his profession of repentance have meant if he'd excused robbing two people a week by picking their pockets? Didn't picking just two pockets per week prove he was a changed man? If he'd been arrested again, he may have tried telling the courts, "But I'm not as bad as I used to be. Besides, I was pardoned. I'm automatically forgiven for any wrong things I do now." I can just hear a judge saying to him, "Oh, really? Let's ask the Governor if your pardon gives you the right to break the laws of Texas with impunity because you believe you can no longer be punished for your crimes." The Governor would have told this man he'd misled him, his repentance meant nothing, and his pardon is now revoked!

Before we have the right to appeal to the Lord for His forgiveness that will save us from the punishment we deserve for our sinful acts, whether this was when we first called out to the Lord for the saving grace of forgiveness or whether this concerns our unChristlike acts or attitudes of last night or this morning, we must demonstrate to God we are fitting candidates of His grace. We must accept God's verdict of how disgusting our acts of selfishness, pride, meanness, or unloving neglect of others are in the eyes of a God of perfect love and goodness; a God who doesn't "grade on the curve." We would not be shocked if we wound up in Hell, except for God's grace, because no matter how well we fool others, we know and God knows what we are really like. A politician awoke after an operation and found the curtains in his hospital room drawn. "Why are the curtains closed?" he asked the nurse. "Is it night time already?" "No," the nurse replied, "But there's a fire across the street, and we didn't want you to wake and think the operation was unsuccessful."

**James 3:13-18** declares we prove **Jesus'** presence in our lives by a lifestyle of demonstrated repentance. When God's Spirit convicts us of "envy" or "selfish ambition" in our attitudes or actions, or of any "earthly, unspiritual, demonic" "conduct" that exalts earthly values above Heavenly values and makes a god of satisfying our wants and pleasures, we are to humble ourselves before God in repentance, ask for His forgiveness, and cry out to Him to replace our Satanically driven character qualities with the Christlike character qualities of our Savior. Today we focus upon the Christlike qualities of living "without favoritism and hypocrisy."

## II. A CHRISTLIKE CHECKLIST (James 3:13, 17-18)

### G. WITHOUT FAVORITISM

The Greek word translated "favoritism" appears only here in the New Testament. It's the most difficult

trait to define in James' list of "conduct" aligned with Christ's character ("wisdom from above"). We'll wait until next week to explore various ways this Greek term could be understood. Instead of taking it to describe being "without favoritism" (HCSB) or "impartial" (NIV), the NASB's translation of "unwavering" is more consistent with the word's root meaning of "undivided." James warns us of the danger of "divided loyalties," as suggested by the lead title of today's message: "Faithful or Flighty?" Unless we believe that surrendering our hearts fully to **Jesus** is the only worthy response to One who suffered and died in our place to save us from the penalty and power of our ungodly actions, we will always be people of divided loyalties; torn between giving **Jesus** the unrivaled love He deserves and straying into the arms of worldly loves. A young man in the army once confided to his chaplain that he never went about with another girl if he was within 50 miles of his girlfriend back home. In other words, his loyalty to his "true love" had a limit of 50 miles. Do we place similar limits upon our loyalty to Christ? Do we allow self-interests—money, pleasure, fame—to lure us into unfaithfulness to Jesus whom we claim we love the most? If so, we'll be the "flighty" type of people upon whom neither the Lord nor other people can truly count.

## H. WITHOUT HYPOCRISY

The expression, "without hypocrisy," is from a Greek word that literally means "without pretense." We can be hypocrites in either of two ways: we can try to deceive others or even ourselves about not being as bad as we truly are, as by not admitting our faults. Or, we can try to deceive others or ourselves about being better than we truly are. We may make a show of how much we pray, give to the Lord's work, care for others in need, or walk closely with the Lord. Yet, when others are not around to applaud our efforts, we may prove to be far less mature or unselfish. The tragedy of hypocrisy is that we will never become mature, Christlike Christians unless we admit our faults or immaturities and cooperate with **Jesus** to change us.

A grand-champion lamb owned by a little girl was being auctioned at a junior stock show. When the bids reached \$5 per pound, the little girl, standing beside the lamb in the arena, began to cry. At \$10, tears were seen streaming down her face as she clasped her arms tightly around the lamb's neck. The higher the bids rose, the more she cried. Finally, a local businessman bought the lamb for more than \$1000. He announced he would donate it to this girl so she would never have to suffer its loss. The crowd applauded and cheered! Months later, a man who witnessed this auction was asked to judge some statewide essays. The essay of one girl told of the time her grand-champion lamb was auctioned. "The prices began to get so high during the bidding," she wrote, "that I started to cry from happiness. The man who bought the lamb for so much more than I ever dreamed I would get returned the lamb to me, and when I got home, Daddy barbecued the lamb--and it was really delicious." I believe this girl was a true "hypocrite"; an "actress." I think she realized the "tears streaming down her face" and her passionate hugs conveyed to the crowd that her heart was wrapped around this lamb, when her heart was really wrapped around money.

## CONCLUSION

Frederick Charrington (1850-1936) was born into the wealthy English family that owned the Charrington Brewery. At age 20, a friend challenged Fred by asking if he was truly "saved." This young brewery heir resented the question but promised to read the third chapter of John's Gospel. By God's merciful love, by the time Fred reached the end of this chapter, he'd embraced **Jesus** as his personal Savior and Lord. He began attending a non-conformist chapel that insisted, as **Jesus** told Nicodemus, "I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (**John 3:3**). As a new convert, Fred immediately began Christian service, working with slum children in a school begun by a Christian layman for the disadvantaged.

His personal fortune, derived solely from his family's brewing enterprise, exceeded a million pounds (\$66 million in today's dollars). One night while on one of his evangelistic walks in London's poorer districts, a woman stood at a hotel's swinging doors with several children at her skirts, calling to her drunken husband inside. "O Tom, do give me some money. The children haven't eaten in two days! And I've not eaten in a week! For the love of God, please come home!" Her husband came through the doors and gave

her a savage blow that knocked her to the ground. Fred rushed to her aid and was himself knocked to the ground before he could pin the man's arms behind his back. While his companions aided the wife, Fred declared, "Just then I looked up and saw my name, 'Charrington,' in huge gilt letters on the top of the public house: 'Drink Charrington Ale.' When I saw that sign, I was stricken just as surely as Paul on the Damascus Road. Here was the source of my family wealth, and it was producing untold human misery before my own eyes. Then and there I pledged to God that not another penny of that money should come to me." He confronted his father and renounced his inheritance of \$66 million dollars.

History records Frederick Charrington became one of the most well-known temperance activists in England. He devoted the rest of his life to the ministries of evangelism, freeing men and women from the curse of alcoholism, the education of the poor, and the protection of workers exploited by factories that were heedless of flagrant risks to their health. Not once in more than 50 years did he renege upon his promise to the Lord of not accepting any financial help from his family's brewery fortune. Not once did he abandon his ministries among London's low society to resume his privileged right by birth among London's high society. Shortly before his death in a London hospital on January 2, 1936, this remarkably consistent, unhypocritical man of God said, "I was born to a great inheritance worth nearly a million of money, but it was defiled. I was born again to a greater 'inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for' me" (**I Peter 1:3-4**, KJV).

"[W]here jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy" (**James 3:16-17**, NASB).