

James Chapter 4 Practical Love

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living according to the royal law of love, which is the law of the kingdom and the law of the King, and applies it to various aspects of life, including social questions, judging one another, and practical beneficence.

Scripture: James 1:27 - 2:9, James 2:12-13, James 2:15-16, James 3:17 - 4:2, James 4:11

Topics: "Practical Love", "The Royal Law of Love"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the concept of practical love as outlined in James Chapter 4, contrasting it with sentimental love. He explains that true love is selfless and sacrificial, exemplified by the royal law to love one's neighbor as oneself. Simpson highlights that this law is not only the foundation of the kingdom of God but also the guiding principle for Christian conduct, urging believers to act without partiality and to show mercy. He calls for a love that manifests in practical actions, such as helping those in need and fostering a spirit of gentleness and peace. Ultimately, Simpson encourages Christians to embody this royal law of love in their daily lives, reflecting the love of Christ in all interactions.

Transcript

"If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well."

"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2:8, 12).

We now come to practical love as set forth in this plain, matter-of-fact manual for daily life. We shall call it practical love, for there is another kind of love. No word has been so prominent in song and story all through the history of human life and literature as this old word "Love." But the best kind of love is not the most prominent in song and story. There, sitting in that home, is a beautiful girl full of sentimental love, her mother's hope, her father's darling, the idol of her social circle and of herself. She is an example of sentimental love. But there is that old mother, wrinkled and worn by a lifetime of toil for that ungrateful child. That is the love that has sacrificed, suffered and forgotten itself to minister to another's comforts and luxuries. That is practical love.

Standing in that pulpit is a minister who can speak about love in glowing terms. In front is a poor unlettered Christian, who, when they asked about the doctrines of the creed and confession, was unable to answer the questions that were necessary to make him a member of the Church of Christ. They are about to drop him, when he breaks out into a great sob and cries, "I canna' speak for Him, but I could dee for Him." Ah,

that is love more eloquent than words! It is the love that James talks about, the love that does things for Christ's sake and for our fellow man.

I. THE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE.

"If ye fulfil the royal law, . . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." Undoubtedly it is the law of love that he is thinking about when he speaks of the royal law. It is a royal law because:

1. It is the law of the kingdom. It is the one great law that He has laid down, and the Decalogue is but the amplification of two thoughts, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments [which are but one] hang all the law and the prophets." Love is therefore the law of the kingdom and the law of the King.

2. But not only so, it is also the law by which the King Himself lives and acts. It is the royal law because God makes it His own law, and God is not above the law of love. "God is Love," and everything He does is according to this divine law of love. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." This law of Christ is love. The Father's love from eternity reached out beyond Himself in blessing. And from that came this wondrous universe so full of goodness and loving kindness; every object of it proclaiming not only His wisdom and power but His thoughtful kindness and loving regard for the happiness of His creatures. He might have made the earth a dazzling white or a crimson glow and thus blinded you; but He has made it an exquisite green, adjusted to your optical organs. He might have given us food without the sense of taste and without the variety of supply. But He has given us ten thousand sources of gratification through our senses. He made earth a ministering paradise even amid the ruins of the Fall, and fitted us to enjoy it. Everything might have contributed to our pain where now it ministers to our pleasure. "The earth is full of his riches," and "Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." (Ps. 145:16.) Thus we see that love is the law of creation.

But how much more is love the law of the new creation in the gift of His Son! And when He was received back, there came the gift of the Spirit, and all the ministries of His love and grace. Then the love of Jesus Christ Himself, His example of unselfishness, His constant ministry to others, and the love of the Holy Spirit, all proclaim to us that God Himself is ruled by His own law of love. Therefore it is the royal law, the law of the kingdom, and should be the gladly accepted law of every child of that kingdom.

3. It is supreme above all other laws. "The greatest of these is love." It is royal in the sense that it stands higher than all other laws and qualities. It is the supreme beauty and excellency of all character and being, and the blending of every virtue and grace.

4. It is royal because it is the mightiest and strongest power in the universe of God. You talk of the law of gravitation, but nothing draws like love. Nothing lies behind the story of human history like love. It has inspired all the heroism of the battle field. It is the secret of all that is highest in literature and the story of mankind. It alone can inspire the martyr's sacrifice, the hardships, toils and privations of Christian service, in the mission field, the hospital, the rescue work and the whole story of the service of Christ and our fellow men. It is a kingly force, the power that moves men. God has incorporated it in the spiritual economy as the force that leads to obedience and every sacrifice and service that honors God and blesses mankind.

5. It is called "the law of liberty." It is a law that is not enforced, but is spontaneous. It is of no value if it is compelled, but you choose it and live up to it because it is your own instinctive nature. You are not compelled to serve Christ and sacrifice for Him. You can be selfish, if you will. But the law of liberty appeals to the best in you, and makes you generous and noble, and brings you the recompense for it in a higher nature and deeper satisfaction.

Yet the reward is not your motive. It is a blessed law of spontaneous love, your second nature a law of liberty, as God puts it in us by His Holy Spirit and makes it a part of our being. This is the great law of Christ's kingdom, love. Have we understood it, accepted it, adopted it by our own choice, and is it to us now a glorious privilege to be like Him Who came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many"?

II. THE APPLICATION OF THE LAW OF LOVE.

1. He applies it to the social questions of life. He shows us that where this law is lived up to it does away with respect of persons. "My brethren," he says, "have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons." There is a blessed application of the great law of divine socialism, not man's socialism, but Christ's love. "For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here, in a good place; and say to the poor, stand thou there, or sit under my footstool; are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." (Jas. 2: 1-9). These social questions have been practically the same in all ages, and he introduces an element into human life that has been at war with selfishness, exclusiveness, and caste, from the earliest times.

The caste system of India is the one barrier against all progress. It shuts away the wretched lower caste in hopeless isolation, and paralyzes every hope and ambition, consigning them to drudgery, and hopelessness. Perhaps the most sorrowful feature of the life of India, and the greatest hindrance to the progress of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is caste. It is the more aggravated form of a principle which we find in all lands, and which sometimes comes into the very Church of Jesus Christ itself. For example, we have our pew-rent system, which gives the wealthy man the choice of the more advantageous sitting, and leaves the poor man to take what is left. The principle is wrong, and we believe most unscriptural. Another form is that of uptown and downtown churches. The home church should be a mission church too, and all class distinctions forgotten there. The Duke of Wellington once sat at the communion table, while a poor man passed the cup for him to drink first. Wellington said, "No, my friend, after you. We are all one here."

There is a place for social differences, and they exist in the nature of things. God does not come with an iconoclastic hand to sweep away all differences and bring a hopeless socialism. There are differences. They grow out of successful lives, they can be maintained with sweetness, and the door can be left open for ambition to rise to the highest possibilities. But let there be no harshness. Let the doors be wide open, and the spirit of love and sympathy meet from both sides. God recognizes this, and bids us "render to all their dues." Impudence and insolence are not part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Courtesy and respect to

all classes and in all places are qualities of true Christian humility. But this is very different from exclusiveness and pride. The true church should be a mission, too. So in our family, social, and business life, let us carry out this law of love, proper respect and honor for all, and yet loving consideration, a spirit of considerateness for those in humbler places, the graciousness that in every way covers our social differences by Christ's own law of love.

2. He applies the law of love to the judging of one another harshly. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." Jas. 2:13. Again, "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge." (Jas. 4: 11). The spirit of criticism, fault finding, and censoriousness are all condemned by this law of love. Ask God for the love that "believeth all things, hopeth all things," and dares to think the best both of others and of yourself. God wants you to look on the brightest side in your own heart and life and then in others. You will find the one who is harsh and censorious gets the worst of it. Like the scorpion which after stinging others ends by stinging itself to death, that one gets the retribution of a bitter spirit in the misery it brings.

God puts us in the place of trial to give us the opportunity of rising to the spirit of Christian love, just as He placed Christ in the judgment hall in order that He might stand before us an Example of long-suffering love. He lets people hurt and wrong us that we may be more like Him. When God in His providence calls you to these trying conditions, it is that you may have your education completed and enter into the sweetness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and be merciful even as you expect Him to be merciful to you.

The unpardonable sin of the New Testament is that of unforgiveness. "He shall have judgment without mercy who hath showed no mercy."

A Christian worker said that he once became satisfied that the worm at the core of much of the work in his field was this petty spirit of faultfinding, this readiness to see wrong. He set his face against it and got his people to set their faces against it by prayer and watching. The result was wonderful in the blessing that had come to the work. The work had grown and prospered since they had put these weeds out of the garden and destroyed the worm at the roots. This curse grows unconsciously. Shall we resolve by God's grace that if we cannot speak well, we will not speak ill of one another?

"So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." How do you expect to be judged? Do you suppose God is going to retail all your sins before the throne, and you stand in shame of that revelation? "Judge nothing therefore before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, ... and then we shall every man have praise of God." In that day of final assize, your Judge is going to bring out every hidden motive that could shed a generous light upon your conduct and character. He is going to bring out the praise, and not the blame. We have not been living up to our expectations. Let us ask God not to deal with us as we have dealt with one another. Lord, help us so to act "as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

3. James applies this royal law of love to the question of practical beneficence, our kindly help to one another. "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?" (Jas. 2: 15-16.) It is doing things to relieve and help the temporal needs of our suffering fellow-men. He came to heal as well as to save, to help the multitudes and to practice His own precepts, as well as to point the way to heaven. Our acts of love and help may be His links in bringing

them to see the attraction of His love and to listen to the Gospel of His grace. One of the most beautiful kinds of service is the service lost in its own shadow. A saint was told to ask the greatest good he could claim, and as the angel waited, who brought the message, the answer came, "That I may do the largest amount of good without it ever being known," and it was granted. It was so ordered that wherever his shadow fell, somebody would be restored, comforted, or saved. Thus his shadow always brought blessing. He never saw it; the world never knew it; but God knew it. It was a life of love hidden until the great revealing day.

God wants us to be practical in blessing others. Very quaintly did an old pioneer Methodist preacher answer some friends to whom he had been preaching. "God bless you," they said, "God will surely bless you, God will reward you for this in the resurrection." But the poor preacher did not have much money in his bag, and he had a long way before him, and he thought their love was rather cheap, so he said, "I am much obliged for your good wishes for the resurrection. It will do very nicely for me, but not for my old mare, for she is not going to have a resurrection; don't forget her, if you please, before the resurrection."

4. Love will manifest itself in a gentle and peaceful spirit. "The wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." (Jas. 3:17.) The children of love are peacemakers, and "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace." (Jas. 3:18.) Among all "the fruit of the Spirit" there is none more precious than a gentle, meek and quiet disposition. "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" is indeed "of great price." Like an oasis in a desert, like a fragrant blossom on the air of spring, like a cool breeze on a sultry day, like a mother's kiss or gentle breast to a tired child, so is the spirit of gentleness in this rude world of strife and sorrow. Good temper, better still, the Christian temper, is the charm of character and the solace of life. It is but another name for practical love.

5. Practical love expresses itself in practical religion, for James has already told us that "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (Jas. 1:27.) Practical love can never stop short of the highest of all service, the spiritual help and blessing of our fellow beings. To lead the unsaved to Christ, to restore the backslider, to comfort the broken hearted, to rescue the tempted, "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," this is Christian service, this is heavenly love. Beyond your routine of daily duty and your consistent endeavor to carry your religion into common life, are you also doing something definitely for the spiritual help of your fellow creatures? Are you ministering to their souls and bearing their burdens? "I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." These are His own tests in the great final day of love and discipleship. How much often comes from such simple ministry! The visits of a clergyman to a poor dairyman's daughter led to a little story which became the instrument of God in the conversion of such illustrious lives as William Wilberforce and Thomas Chalmers.

How many lonely women and neglected children crowd the tenement houses of the block on which you live, whom a little thoughtful kindness might find out in their isolation and comfort in their loneliness!

On a stormy New Year's day a loving Christian girl made her way to a widow's home instead of to some gay social function, and, after cheering the heart of the lonely mother, gave her boy an illustrated almanac with a text for every day in the year, adding as she left him, "Mind Harry, that you learn your text every day and that you live it, too." And as the text for that first day was, "Choose this day whom ye will serve," Harry took it as his watchword for the New Year, and promised to serve the Lord. Harry had a roommate called Tom Short who worked in a sugar factory, and after a little sneering and jesting, Tom also promised to

learn the verses. Next day when Tom arrived at the shop, his next neighbor asked him what was the latest news. "Oh," said Tom, "I cannot tell you the news, but I can tell you the text." And so Tom repeated it amid a shower of profane jests and scoffs. But one man listened with a different spirit, and when he went home, he repeated to his poor dying wife each day Tom's texts. The second day the text was, "The wages of sin is death," and all that day and all that night the words rang in her startled ear, until at last she called her husband, and told him she was dying, because the wages of sin was death, and she had lived in sin and knew not how to be saved. But the next night her husband brought her a new text, and oh, how eagerly she listened! "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." And all through that night of weakness and sinking agony, again and again she repeated it, until once more she called her husband to her and told him how the past had all come back to her, the teachings of her childhood, the lessons of her Sunday school, the Gospel she once heard so often, and with it the peace of forgiveness and joy of salvation, and in that peace and joy she passed from her troubled life into the rest above. All the fruit of a little ministry of unselfish love. So let us love and serve our Master and our fellow-men.

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