

I



It was a familiar scene as the pastor shook hands with persons leaving worship. At the end of the line was a man who occasionally attended worship. As the man came to shake his pastor's hand he said, "Reverend, Reverend, what you said today in your sermon was exactly what I needed to hear. Thank you very, very much. It was so helpful to me. It revolutionized my life. Thank you, thank you."

To be honest the pastor was surprised yet pleased that his words made such a profound difference in this man's life. "I'm glad I said something that was helpful to you," the pastor said, "but I'm curious " what in particular was it?"

Without a moment's thought the man answered, "Well, you may remember, you began your sermon by saying that you wanted to talk to us about two things this morning and then in the middle you said, 'That completes this first part of what I wanted to tell you and now it's time I moved on to the second part of my sermon.' And at that moment I realized I had come to the end of the first part of my life, and it was high time that I got on to the second part. Thank you, Reverend," he said as he left the church, "thank you, very much." (1)

In a sense today is the beginning of the second part of life for each of us. For today brings fresh insights, fresh opportunities, including the greatest opportunity of all " the opportunity to make a new start with Christ.

The Book of James is probably about the most practical book in the New Testament. The author doesn't waste time with any heady theological arguments. What he does is offer some good, practical, down-to-earth advice " advice that we can use everyday. Now there's a reason why the Book of James is this way. It was written for people who had just been converted to the Christian faith. You see, because there weren't a lot of Christians back then, new members of the faith were constantly being tempted to revert back to the ways they used to live. Therefore they needed some practical advice to help them live as Christians, and stick with it.

But we also need help in living the Christian life. Even those of us who have been Christian all our lives. We live in a secular world that nods in God's direction, but does not take God seriously. So for those of us here today who wish to get on with the second part of life, our lesson for the day offers three important things to remember.

**FIRST, LET GOD DO THE LEADING, SINCE ALL GOOD THINGS COME FROM ABOVE.**

James writes, "Every generous act of giving, with every

practical gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." All too often we fall into the temptation of thinking that all the good things that happen to us are the result of our own efforts. We think we have brought good fortune on ourselves. But mature faith

realizes that all good things come from God. Of course, it may not seem that way at the time....

Many years ago there was a young woman who was determined to become a missionary to India. But just as she was preparing to leave, her mother was in an accident. So she delayed her trip, and she stayed by her mother's bedside until she died three years later. Her mother's dying request was for her to visit her sister who lived in the far west.

The young woman did as she was requested. She was still planning on going to India, as soon as she had completed her visit. But she found her sister dying from consumption, and without proper medical aid. So, as with her mother, she stayed with her sister until her she died.

After her sister's death her attention was once again turned toward India. But once again a family member's death prevented her. This time her sister's husband had died, and he had left five small children as orphans.

She knew she would never make it to India after that. She took up her sister's lonely house as her mission instead and raised her sister's children. But later God would show her why she wasn't to go to India. Because, instead of letting her go to India, God called three of the five children she had raised to go in her place. She had followed God's plan instead of her own, and a greater good was accomplished thereby. (2)

We do not always understand where the events of life are leading us, but we recognize, with the author of the hymn, that, "Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me." Remember that all good things come from God.

But we also need to remember to be QUICK TO LISTEN AND SLOW TO SPEAK. Again, this is very practical advice whether we are listening for God's voice or when we are listening to a friend.

Often when a person first becomes a Christian, they think they know everything they need to know. And when we have that kind of attitude, we try to make everyone else agree with our opinions, right or wrong. And that can make for a church that is full of people talking, but with no one listening. And nothing can ever get accomplished that way.

The noted Harvard scholar Charles T. Copeland once had a student ask him why there were no courses in conversation. Wasn't there anything to learn about how to converse?

"Of course there is," answered Copeland, "and if you'll just listen, I'll tell you what it is."

Then he just stared at the student. The resulting silence was long and awkward. Finally the exasperated student said, "Well, I'm listening!"

"You see," said Copeland, "you're learning already!"

It's like psychologist Carl Rogers once said: "The biggest block to personal communication is one person's inability to listen intelligently, understandingly, and skillfully to another person."

Another wise man once said that talking is sharing, but listening is caring.

The cost of poor listening can truly be high. There was once a \$100,000 error caused by a dispatcher who routed a fleet of trucks to the wrong state through poor listening. The dispatcher heard that the trucks were to go to Portland, but quit listening before the state was given. The result: eight trucks were sent 3,000 miles out of the way to Portland, Oregon, instead of to Portland, Maine. (3) Listening really is serious business. And that is true in every aspect of life: at work, with friends, and in our families.

Bishop Woodie White tells about one time when he was reading the newspaper while his daughter sat on the floor beside him. All of a sudden, out of the blue, she screamed at him, "Daddy, you always do that!" Well, he was flabbergasted. But her next words devastated him: "You never listen to me when I talk to you!" She had been deeply hurt by him, and he hadn't even known it. His daughter was telling him that he was ignoring her. And to ignore his precious daughter was unthinkable. (4)

Therefore James tells us to listen first and to speak second. Stephen Covey put it this way: Seek first to understand, then to be understood. So many more people would have such happier lives if they would only follow that simple rule.

So now we have two of our three rules: Let God lead since all good things come from God. Second: listen first, then speak. And here is James' final piece of advice for today: **LIVE OUT WHAT YOU BELIEVE.**

When we first become conscious that we really want to be followers of Jesus, the first thing we do is listen to the gospel message. We feel we have to absorb as much as possible. But there comes a time when we need to put into practice what we have heard. And that's what James means when he tells us to "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."

What we read, and what we hear in the gospel must be lived out.

James offers an illustration to help us with this crucial point. What would happen if every morning we looked in the mirror, saw our reflection, and then as we went off to face our day, we forgot what we looked like? It would be a mess, that's what. We wouldn't know if the ID card we were holding in our hand belonged to us or not. We'd go into important staff meetings looking like we just woke up, or we'd go to the ball courts in our best suits.

The same thing happens to the people who attend church week after week but never allow the word of God to penetrate their lives enough to lead them to action. These people listen to the scripture and nod their heads in agreement, but then fail to act according to what they see.

Our faith must lead us to action. And when we step out in faith, our actions will be blessed. "Doers who act," James writes, "will be blessed in their doing."

Bob McAlister was a man who had plans for his life. At twenty-three he was an attache to Senator Strom Thurmond. He would accompany the Senator on the floor of the Senate and when he met with the President at the White House.

After a while Bob took up a career in broadcasting. He worked twelve hours a day to make a name for himself. He married, but it soon failed because he never saw his wife. Then he set more and higher goals for himself. He met every one of them, and then some.

One sweltering hot day in July, Bob was rushing to get to work a bit early when he noticed something large blocking a part of the road ahead. He cursed, because every minute off work was a minute wasted. But when he got closer he saw that the obstacle was a man in a wheelchair. Sweat was running off him as he strained to roll his wheelchair along the pavement right into the middle of traffic. Cars were speeding past him just inches away on both sides.

Then Bob did something he had never done before in his life: He pulled the car up to the man in the wheelchair, and offered to help. It turned out that the man was going to a nearby mission to get some soup for his sick friends - a mere seven-mile round trip. So Bob put him in the car, and spent the day talking to this man and bringing food to his friends.

Now Bob McAlister had written speeches about poverty while in Washington. He had reported news stories about homeless families, and he had even given to charities. But before that hot summer day he had never seen poverty up close.

Bob still wonders how he could have been so near all those years, and still so far away. But Bob McAlister became a doer. (4) Today his life is far more satisfying since he put his faith into action.

James offers some practical advice for living as Christians today. He calls us to enter the second part of life. That part of life opens up for us when we let God do the leading since all good things come from God - when we listen more and speak less - and finally, when we let our faith lead us into action. Particularly does our life come alive when we reach out to other people and offer them Christlike love. For when we reach out to others we will be blessed in the process. True faith, says James, is "to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

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2. Contributed. Source unknown.

3. Diana Bonet, *THE BUSINESS OF LISTENING*, as quoted in *ENTREPRENEUR* 5/93.

4. Charles Colson, *THE BODY*, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), pp. 388-391.

II

I've got a pop quiz this morning for all you history buffs. What is something that was declared illegal 100 years ago, but is perfectly legal today? I'll give you a hint: it inspired the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. In what was termed the Noble Experiment, the United States government made it a crime to manufacture, transport or sell alcoholic beverages. From 1920 to 1933—a period referred to today as the Prohibition Era—all the bars and saloons and liquor stores in the nation shut down. Or did they?

Instead of ending the practice of drinking, the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment just drove it underground—literally. One example of this can be found in the city of Los Angeles, California. While law enforcement and government officials pretended to stop the flow of liquor in the city, underneath the city there were 11 miles of service tunnels that became secret passageways to hidden saloons. In fact, the mayor of Los Angeles at that time helped to supply illegal liquor to these hidden bars. (1) By 1927, seven years after passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, there were approximately 30,000 illegal saloons, or speakeasies, in Los Angeles—twice the number of legal bars that had been operating before the law was passed. (2)

It would be easy to laugh at that kind of hypocrisy—if it weren't so prevalent today. Let me give you an example. During the worst months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the mayor of a prominent city in Texas recorded a Facebook video urging residents of his town to avoid travel or large gatherings. "Stay home if you can," he declared. He sounded like a responsible leader of the people—until it came to light that he had recorded the Facebook video from his vacation spot in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. (3)

And he's only one example of numerous public officials who expected the general population to restrict their activities during the pandemic but did not live up to those same standards themselves.

We love to roll our eyes in disgust when we catch prominent people acting hypocritically. But we all have problems with moral and ethical consistency. We all fail to meet our own standards sometimes. That's not an excuse, it's a reality. Somehow our hypocrisy radar fails us when we point it at ourselves. And it's an especially difficult issue for church leaders. Realistically, if you call yourself a Christian, a Jesus-follower, then you are a leader. Other people will watch you and draw conclusions about the character of God and the authenticity of your faith by how well your words and your actions match up to God's standards. It's a tough position to be in.

A few years ago, a young man named Tyler started a controversial Instagram account called PreachersNSneakers. Why was it controversial? Because Tyler began posting pictures of prominent, hip young pastors and worship leaders leading church services while wearing designer clothes and sneakers worth hundreds or thousands of dollars. Tyler is a Christian, and he didn't want to create controversy. But he admits that he is concerned about the message being sent by these "pastor influencers" who preach the message of a poor, humble carpenter while wearing ridiculously expensive shoes.

Tyler says about the PreachersNSneakers account, "I'm a Christian and [have] been so for a long time and feel really strongly about the leaders of the church and how high of a calling

they have. I started questioning myself, 'What is OK as far as optics...as far as pastors wearing hype or designer clothing?' I don't have an answer." (4)

Our Bible passage today revolves around a question of "optics." The Pharisees and some teachers of the law noticed that Jesus and his disciples were not following the Jewish laws of ceremonial hand washing before they ate. Aha! The Pharisees thought they had caught Jesus breaking the religious rules. Surely this invalidated Jesus' authority as a religious leader! Instead of hanging his head in shame and slinking away, Jesus turned the tables on the Pharisees.

He said, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

**The great sin of the Pharisees was their hypocrisy.** They loved the Law more than they loved the Lord. They cared more about keeping religious rules than knowing and honoring God. They said all the right things, but they weren't motivated by the heart of God. They set a standard for others that they did not live up to themselves. This Bible passage is a good example of Jesus' tough love. Hypocrisy is poisonous. It slowly kills trust and destroys relationships. And it kills the character of the hypocrite who is not honest enough or humble enough to admit his failure. And the Pharisees' hypocrisy is doubly dangerous because it was driving people away from God and it was cheating the Pharisees out of an authentic relationship with God.

Pastor Ron Dunn of Irving, TX, had an unsettling experience a few years ago when he discovered that there was another man in his neighborhood also named Ron Dunn. And this other Ron Dunn was known around town for passing bad checks.

Imagine the embarrassment of Pastor Dunn and his wife when store clerks stared cynically at the name on their checks and then refused them service. Why wouldn't anyone take their checks? Pastor Dunn's wife had to tell numerous store clerks, "We are not the Ron Dunn you are looking for!"

Sadly, the Pharisees should have told people up-front, "We are not the God you are looking for! We care more about religious traditions than we do about the mind of God, the heart of God, the priorities of God."

Pastor Dunn wrote of this situation, "Now it's okay for someone else to have my name; I do not have a copyright on it. But what really disturbed me was the fact that people were judging me by what someone else with my name was doing. By his behavior he gave people the wrong impression of this Ron Dunn! I am afraid that is the reason the world has such a distorted view of Christ; it has judged Him by what others with His name have done." (5)

Ouch! Maybe we need some of Jesus' tough love this morning too. **Because the sin of the Pharisees is our sin too. We say we follow Christ, but all of us fall short of living as he lived.** Says Christ, "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human

traditions.” In other words, most of us are satisfied to live according to the standards of our society. Yet Christ offers a higher standard.

Pastor Kyle Idleman shares a sad experience he had after a preaching engagement in Houston, Texas. A man came up to Idleman after the service. He had tears in his eyes. This father was broken-hearted over his daughter and the choices she had made with her life. She had wandered far from her parents’ faith. And the father had come to a painful realization. He said, “We raised her in Church, but we didn’t raise her in Christ.” (6)

“We raised her in Church, but we didn’t raise her in Christ.” There’s a key to understanding our hypocrisy too. We can spend our whole life in church and never fall in love with God. We can listen to a lifetime of sermons, give to charities, and memorize Bible passages. And we can still miss the life-transforming joy of knowing God and sharing God’s love with others. Remember when the Pharisees asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment? Jesus didn’t point to a rule or a religious observance or a church tradition. He pointed to a relationship. He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22: 37-40).

Jesus is saying, “God isn’t pointing you toward the Law. The Law is pointing you toward God. Once you understand God and submit your life to Him, once you love God more than you love your own life, then you won’t need the Law. Instead, your goodness will be replaced by Godliness.”

When some of the great medieval cathedrals were built, like Notre Dame in Paris, most of the population of Europe was illiterate. Architects, sculptors and artists created these amazing cathedrals full of carvings and statues and stained glass windows to tell the story of God through art. They assumed that the average citizen may never read a Bible, but they could “read” the story of God through the images in the church buildings.

And that’s still the best way to spread the message of Jesus. Most people in our society will never read a Bible, or will only read it in part. We are the “living cathedrals” in our society. Others need to “read” the story of God in the way we live our lives.

**The best way to defeat the sin of hypocrisy is to move our testimony from our lips to our life.** We cannot experience the abundant life Christ promises without living with the loving heart he exhibited.

Author Brennan Manning wrote, “The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and walk out the door and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable.” (7)

Can you blame them? So how do we ensure that our lips and our lifestyle match up? How do we get an unbelieving world to believe?

Many years ago, missionary E. Stanley Jones met Mahatma Gandhi, the lawyer and social activist who led the non-violent resistance campaign that freed India from British rule. Jones asked Gandhi, "How can Christianity make a stronger impact on your country?"

Gandhi gave Jones three key insights. He said that Christians need to live more like Jesus. Second, he said that Christians must present the message of Jesus without adulteration, or cultural baggage. And finally, Gandhi said, Christians should emphasize love, the core message of the faith. (8)

Take a moment and think back over this last month. Examine your life in light of these three insights. Did you live like Jesus in your actions, your attitudes, your priorities and your motivations? Did you present the message of Jesus in its purest form? Did you emphasize love in everything you said, thought and did? This isn't a quiz. This is your life. This is your calling. This is your legacy. How do you get an unbelieving world to believe?

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was once asked for the secret to his success. The Salvation Army is known for their life-transforming ministries that meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of people all over the world.

Booth replied, "I will tell you the secret. God has all there is of me. There have been men with better brains, greater talents, and greater opportunities. But, from the day I got a vision for what Jesus could do with the poor of London, I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth there was." (9)

God can use our brains, our charisma, our energy, our skills to share His message with the world. Those are useful, *but they aren't essential*. The only essential thing God needs from us is our commitment. Our total desire to love God and serve God with everything we have will make us more effective, authentic, persuasive witnesses than any amount of "proper" religious behavior.

Will Campbell was a Baptist pastor and civil rights activist who passed away in 2013. Campbell was known for his love for the poor, and for putting his faith into action, even when it required great sacrifice. One Sunday he was preaching at Duke University Chapel. An ice storm had blanketed the area the previous night. But plenty of people showed up to hear the prominent pastor and theologian speak.

But instead of an inspiring and learned sermon, Campbell simply said, "Had an ice storm last night. Lots of trees are down. Lots of poor people in this town. Electricity is off, they got no heat. I got my pickup outside, my chain-saw and my wood ax. I'm going out to cut some firewood from those trees to help those poor people. Who's going with me?"

And then he stepped down from the pulpit and walked out the back doors of the church. And he left a bunch of mystified people sitting in the pews. Did anybody follow him down that aisle? (10) Will Campbell didn't just honor God with his lips. He honored God with his life. When it came time to preach a sermon that would honor God, he preached through his actions, not his words. He loved God with everything in him, and he loved his neighbor as he loved himself.



We are all hypocrites. Jesus knew we would be. But he loves us too much to leave us in our hypocrisy. He knew that our half-hearted, insincere faith poisons our relationship with God and drives other people away from the life-transforming truth of Jesus Christ. What's the source of our hypocrisy? Honoring God with our lips when our hearts are far away from Him. What's the cure for our hypocrisy? Loving God with all our heart, soul and mind, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. That's the only way to move our testimony from our lips to our life. How else do we get an unbelieving world to believe?

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### III

One of the truisms of life is that you can't judge a book by its cover. Things are not always what they seem. I read a delightful story, allegedly true, about a zoo in Spain that decided to conduct an emergency drill. The drill simulated how to handle it if a gorilla escaped from its enclosure. To make the drill more realistic, a zookeeper dressed up as a gorilla and took off loping through the zoo.

Unfortunately, not everyone on staff was notified about the drill. Upon seeing a "gorilla" fleeing from its cage, one of the zoo veterinarians grabbed a tranquilizer gun and shot the employee in the leg.

"Well," he said, "it looked like a gorilla was escaping!" (1)  
You can't always judge a book by its cover. Some things are not as they might appear.

There is an intriguing legend known as "The White Witch of Rosehall." It is a tale of a beautiful woman named Annie Palmer who used her unparalleled beauty to lure wealthy men to marry her. Nothing unusual about that. However, each time Annie married someone, she found a way to convince him to add her to his will and then she would poison him. She continued to poison him even as she pretended to be nursing him back to health. The men would die, leaving her their estate. As a consequence she became quite wealthy. She was known as the "white witch" because of her alluring appearance of virtue on the outside, but her thoroughly evil nature on the inside. Perhaps you have known someone like that.

In our lesson for the day, the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law had come from Jerusalem to "investigate" Jesus. On the outside these Pharisees were the epitome of respectability. On the inside, however, they were full of fear and envy, and they were growing in their hatred for Jesus. They looked for any excuse to cast aspersion on him and his followers.

On this particular day, they observed some of Jesus' disciples eating food without first washing their hands. This, of course, offended them. Understand . . . this wasn't about sanitation. There was no sign around saying employees MUST wash their hands. It wasn't about preventing germs. They knew nothing about germs in those days. Instead, this was about maintaining a religious tradition. In fact, Mark pauses for a moment and explains to his Gentile audience living outside of Palestine, the Jewish practice of ceremonial washing.

"Unclean," the Greek word is *koinais*, as Mark explained it, meant "ceremonially unwashed." It was a technical term among Jews denoting whatever was contaminated according to their religious rituals and thus was unfit to be called holy or devoted to God. Unclean could refer to practices or to people.

One of my favorite, all time TV shows was "Law and Order." I loved the New York sassy style, the cultural tensions, and of course the crucial moment when the truth

finally came out. But the phrase, Law and Order, also represented a trend in law enforcement that began in the late 1970s, in reaction to the crazy drug and crime years of the 60s and 70s. Three strikes you are out. Throw the bum in jail and throw away the key. The law is the law, make them pay.

Now that we have the largest percentage, by far, of imprisoned people compared to every other nation—including China—we hear the same ideas put forward with regard to immigration. They broke our law. They are illegal. Throw them out of the country. One candidate even wants drone strikes over the border.

Certainly law is key. I've been mugged three times and it's not a comfortable feeling, I can assure you. But is law the only thing. We have a classic passage from the book of Deuteronomy—the name in Greek means "The Second Book of Laws"—that espouses the classic viewpoint of much of Jewish thinking: keep the law and things will go well. Break the law and you will be cursed.

But can we know the law absolutely? Can we know how the law applies in every moment? Is there a law that always applies? Jesus' approach to law in the Gospel would seem like a complete scandal to the standard Jewish viewpoint. How could his disciples not be doing what the law required? "Why do your disciples not wash their hands before eating?" Jesus responds by saying that not all law is the same. Requirements of tradition are one thing; getting to the heart of things is something else

The most common ritual cleansing was the washing of one's hands before eating food. For a loyal Jew to disregard this regulation was a sin. You and I might say that these disciples were engaging in unsanitary behavior when they did not wash their hands before eating. In the Pharisees' minds, though, Jesus' disciples were indulging in sinful behavior when they did not wash their hands.

Let's pause for a moment and acknowledge that this tradition of ritual cleansing probably had a positive effect on the health of the Jews that observed it. It is fascinating, isn't it, how some of the Jewish ceremonial laws protected them from disease? This was one of those cases. But protecting their health was not why they washed their hands before eating. It was because they were keeping the tradition of their fathers. And Jesus' disciples were not observing those traditions.

. In truth they were holding fast to human traditions rather than to God's commands. But Jesus was not interested in the Pharisees' theology, but in their hypocrisy.

**It is clear that Jesus was not concerned about outward appearance but inner integrity.** "These people honor me with their lips," he said, citing Isaiah, "but their hearts are far from me."

Pastor David Yarbrough says that when he was in Bible College he met an interesting young man by the name of Shannon. What made Shannon interesting was his looks. His hair was a different color each week, his ears were loaded with earrings, and he wore big, loose grunge-style clothing. But the most interesting point of his appearance was his shorts . . . and he always wore shorts regardless of the weather. What made his shorts so odd was the way he wore them. You see, he always wore his shorts backwards. That's right--he wore his shorts backwards. As you can imagine, anyone who dressed like that at a Bible College stuck out like a sore thumb.

One day, says Yarbrough, he couldn't stand it any longer and his judgmental sarcasm got the best of him. He had to make a crack about Shannon's shorts. To his surprise Shannon was ready for his criticism. Shannon turned to him and said politely, "I'll tell you . . . just like I tell everyone else who asks me why I wear my shorts backwards. I tell them that God turned my life around so fast that my shorts couldn't keep up." Did you catch that? "God turned my life around so fast that my shorts couldn't keep up." Quite an interesting response. (2)

Have you ever been guilty of judging a person by their outward appearance? Do some of you remember thirty or forty years ago when the easiest way to give certain middle age men a near stroke was to introduce them to a young male with long hair?

Anybody remember Archie Bunker and his son-in-law whom he called "Meathead"? One of the reasons Archie despised his son-in-law was his appearance--long hair and hippie dress. Nowadays if you watch a Gaither's concert on television, a veritable bastion of southern white conservative culture, some of the singers look very much like "Meathead." How stupid we were 40 years ago when we got so upset about how young people looked.

Do you suspect that 40 years from now, people like us, church people, will realize how ridiculous our generation was to ostracize young people for such things as tattoos and piercings?

For us Christians, Jesus is the standard. How he lived for his Father, expressed the Holy Spirit, and gave himself selflessly for others--this is the law of Christ, and the law that always obtains. The letter of James, written from a Jewish-Christian perspective, says that the way we show compassion and love is the heart of our following God. "This is undefiled and pure religion, to serve the needs of the poor, the widows and orphans." That is, to care for people who have no way else to receive care.

We Catholics have something else to add to this conversation. For we believe that, even if what goes into the body does not make us unclean, still what goes into the body can make us immaculate. For we receive the body and blood of Jesus, take Christ into our very selves, not because we are worthy, but because Christ can make us worthy by forming us in his image every time we receive communion. Sure, it's more than the eating. Unless we eat the Eucharist in faith, we are hardly receiving it. But if

we are receiving it with growing faith, then the One who kept the law perfectly, Jesus Christ, progressively becomes our heart.

**Our tendency to judge people by their appearance is a symptom of our estrangement from them.** It is by getting to know people person-to-person that we are able to get beyond appearances.

In her book *The Shelter of Each Other*, Dr. Mary Pipher suggests that our obsession with appearance stems from our lack of relationships with those in our community. When people lived in smaller communities, they often had deep relationships with those around them. They knew about their neighbors' families, health conditions, religion and values, habits and needs. Because people knew each other on a deeper and broader level, they didn't need to judge one another on appearances.

But today, we are less likely to know our neighbors, our sales clerks, pharmacists, bus drivers, colleagues, and so on. When that happens we begin to judge each other by external appearances. We know nothing about the people we interact with on a daily basis beyond what they show us on the outside. In a disconnected society, we place less emphasis on internal values, like character, and more emphasis on external values, like looks. (5)

One man tells about working at a club on the weekend of the biggest motorcycle gathering of the year in his town. When the roaring machines pulled up outside, the patrons of the club turned their eyes toward the door and conversation turned into uneasy whispering. A group of the tough-looking bikers came into the club. He says one of them walked up to him and asked him where the phone was. He pointed it out, and the silence in the room let everybody overhear what the biker said into the receiver. "Hi, Mom," the biker said. "Just want to let you know I'll be home late tonight." (6)

If we could look beyond the outer appearances and see every stranger as someone's son, someone's daughter, what a difference it would make.

Everything looks great on the outside, but inside they're hurting, they're needy, they're lonely, they're afraid. Like Annie Palmer, "The White Witch of Rosehall," they need to reconcile their inner nature and to bring it into alignment with their outer nature. Maybe that's true of you and me as well. Maybe on the outside you look like you've got it altogether, but on the inside you are a mess. Maybe it's time you made a new start. You can, you know. With God's help, you can begin living out the values you truly feel on the inside.

"These people honor me with their lips," said Jesus, "but their hearts are far from me." How is your heart? Does it reflect the heart of Jesus? And be careful of judging on the basis of outward appearances. Get to know people and you may discover that the person who looks like they don't belong is actually a child of God.

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