

Sermon: Love and grace

God's character

Matthew 5:43-48

God loves the righteous and the unrighteous.

Surpassing the Pharisees

It's easy to be kind to people who aren't annoying you.

Someone has to bridge the divides.

It takes a miracle to love those who don't deserve it.

Proverbs 24:17-18

Bible Study: Obedience

Getting to know you

1. Do we in the church overlook some sins as minor or acceptable? If so, give some examples.

My examples would include gossip, pride, unforgiveness, unloving (especially to enemies).

Going deeper

2. Read 1 John 3:7-10. John warns us not to let anyone lead us astray. About what false teaching is he warning here?

He says the the righteous are those who do righteous things. I think the church was being led astray by leaders who misinterpreted and/or misused the teaching of Paul's letters that we are saved by grace. These teachers taught that all of us can do anything we want because we can be forgiven. That, at least, is true. However, it's not the whole story. Those who are surrendered to Christ will *want* to do righteous things. If we don't, something is wrong with our faith. That flawed faith will not save us.

3. We know that our works of righteousness do not buy God's approval or a ticket to heaven. What is the purpose of doing the right things according to this passage?

It is a sign to us (and to others) that we have God in us. Our behavior is a great indicator of our relationship with God. If we have persistent, willful sin in our lives, we need to change our relationship with God.

4. Should we be terrified of the statement in verse 9 if we are not perfectly obedient to God's commands?

No, John notes that we all have sin. He was inspired to write, "continues to sin," here. There is a difference between sin that we sometimes fail in and sin that we willfully and continually commit.

Even if we repent after, we don't mean it. That is the sin that should make us question the health of our relationship with Jesus. No one who is in Christ can continue to sin and not be convicted by it.

5. Read James 1:22-27. Do you live differently than you would if you had never read the Bible? If so, give an example.

It's fun to read the Bible and just think about those passages that tell us how great we are and even how other people are so sinful. It's more challenging to read it and allow it to confront our own lives.

6. What examples of righteous living does James give us here? Are these commands hard for you or easy?

He mentions keeping a tight rein on our tongue and looking after widows and orphans.

Putting it into practice

7. This week read the Bible with the expectation of being challenged. Ask God to reveal areas in which you could be acting more righteously. Look for at least one way that you could surrender more completely to God's will. Then do it.