*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

April 24 - 29

“Seeing Ourselves Clearly”

**Monday, April 24 Romans 2:1-4**

*“You who pass judgment on someone else”*

Paul is speaking to an anonymous person representing the Jewish people who were appalled by the idolatry of the Gentiles and all the ways in which they sinned against God. While rejecting the philosophy and lifestyle of non-Jews, they regarded themselves as morally and spiritually superior. Paul’s task is to point out to his Jewish friends their hypocrisy in criticizing the sins of the Gentiles while, at the same time, refusing to admit their own disobedience of God, especially in their refusal to accept Jesus Christ as God’s Son.

Paul’s fundamental point is that human beings often have the capacity to evaluate and criticize the behavior of others without recognizing that their evaluation is tainted because of their own inconsistent behavior. Paul is concerned about those people who feel that their lives are beyond reproach because they don’t sin as extremely as others. This produces a brand of righteousness based on the faulty logic that says because I don’t do what he does I’m better than him, and because I’m better than him I’m all right. This is self-righteousness of the worst kind.

*I will be quick to confess my sin, Lord, and slow to confront others about theirs. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 25 James 4:11-12**

*“What right do you have to condemn your neighbor?”*

James warns us against the sin of speaking evil against others or judging others. Then, he proceeds with a series of logical, connectional statements. We are not to speak evil of another because that is judging another, and that judging is based on the law, and there can be only one judge – God himself. The term “speak evil” can be translated as malign or disparage. It is the sinful activity of putting others down rather than the Holy Spirit empowered conduct of building others up with love.

One of the most common expressions of our sinful nature is to attempt to build ourselves up by tearing someone else down. It is important to realize that God has not commissioned us to go and to judge others. Instead, he has sent us to go and to share the Good News and to show love. In fact, there is only one who is qualified to be a judge and lawgiver, and that is God and God alone. James is reasoning that only the one who gives the law is qualified to judge according to the law.

*As you have shown mercy to me, Lord, I will show mercy to others. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 26 Matthew 18:15-20**

*“Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone”*

As sisters and brothers in Christ, we need to know how to deal with failure in our relationships with each other. We are forgiven people and our Christian community is the expression of our common commitment to Jesus, not our perfection. We don’t have to be perfect to be good. Becoming a Christian is just the beginning; we are on the way with Jesus, we are in the process of maturing as we walk in the Spirit. And a part of maturity is learning Jesus’ way of handling being sinned against.

When there is a fault between Christians, Jesus holds the one sinned against responsible to initiate action for restoration. His asking for a spirit of forgiveness stands in contrast to retaliation. This calls for deliberate action rather than a defensive attitude which would publicly belittle the one having sinned. The goal of Jesus’ three-step procedure is to win and reinstate the erring believer into fellowship with the one sinned against. Coming together through forgiveness ensures the continued presence of Jesus among us.

*Soften my heart when sinned against, Lord, that it may be willing to forgive. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

April 24 - 29

“Seeing Ourselves Clearly”

**Thursday, April 27 Galatians 6:1-5**

*“Gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path”*

  We are all vulnerable when it comes to sinning. Any of us may slip. The church should never take the stance of being a “pure” people, a people without sin. And individual believers need to be careful about spiritual overconfidence, for just when we think we have some personal sin under control we fail once again. So Paul says, be careful how you think of others’ sins. On the one hand, we are not to condemn those who sin. But, on the other hand, neither are we to overlook their sin.

Within the shared life of the people of God we are to judge each other, but this judgment is assessment in love, not condemnation. When we are involved with each other, knowing the love we share and our mutual commitment to each other’s spiritual growth, we can speak the truth in love. We can assist each other in recognizing and acknowledging faults and weaknesses. Without this kind of involvement with and mutual concern for each other we remain locked in our own self-centered worlds, and there is little chance for change and growth.

*When there is sin between us, Lord, help us to love and not condemn. Amen.*

**Friday, April 28 James 2:8-13**

*“Mercy triumphs over judgment”*

Love is the very essence of God, and his love is unconditional love. There are no strings attached. God has loved us from the beginning; even while we were sinners he loved us. There is nothing that can separate us from God’s love, and it is his love that brought Jesus into the world to save us from the consequence of our sin. While in the world, Jesus taught us the importance of living the life of love and he emphasized love for neighbor. James refers to this commandment of Jesus as “the royal law of love.”

James also refers to the law of love as the law of freedom, indicating that those who are loved are free from having to perform good deeds as judged by the law in order to be loved by God. This freedom comes not because the law is no longer valid, but because of God’s mercy which “triumphs over judgment.” Thus, for me to say to someone that they must be good before I will love them is to act judgmentally. But, to say to someone that I love them regardless of their level of goodness is to act lovingly and, thereby, I fulfill the law of love.

*I will love others freely, Lord, without first judging whether they are worthy of love. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 29 Matthew 7:1-5**

*“Stop judging others”*

Respect for others is an indication of one’s self-understanding. The awareness of our own lives and the reality of our own weaknesses should help us to be more considerate and understanding of others. An attitude of acceptance toward others does not mean that we are thereby endorsing their practice. But we can be discerning without being judgmental. The approach of love is to use personal influence to benefit another. We can affirm the worth of the other person without copying or subscribing to their life choices.

Only God is competent to judge another according to his holiness and understanding. However, verse 5 does not leave us to escape the discernment that will help another. We are to first judge ourselves and find the correction which God’s grace can achieve, then we will be able to take the speck out of the brother’s eye. The refusal to be judgmental does not mean a refusal to be helpful. But helping one’s brother at his point of need must be done with a spirit of grace and understanding.

*Give me wisdom, Lord, to be at the same time both merciful and discerning. Amen.*