

Chapter XX

REMOVING THE MASK

As James came to the end of his epistle, he sought to complete the task of removing the mask of self-righteousness from the Jews of the *diaspora*. Israel (as a whole) had worn this mask ever since they had said, *All that the Lord our God hath spoken, we will do*. Paul described them as being *ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, [but they] have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*.

Our Lord, in His sermon on the mount, and James, in his epistle, both attacked the facade the Jews had maintained through the traditions of the elders. These traditions had virtually removed all of the law's convicting power. Unfortunately, too many Bible teachers and preachers have missed the point of our Lord's messages to the Jews. They have likewise missed the point of James's epistle, because they have applied the sermon on the mount and the book of James to Christians. This is a grave error in the interpretation of the Scriptures. The context demands, with both the Lord and James, that they were using the law, lawfully, in its schoolmaster role, to

Removing the Mask

bring the Jews unto Christ that they might be justified by faith.

Throughout our studies we have seen that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil produced *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. This way permeated Judaism. Additionally, it found its way into the local churches almost immediately by means of the Judaizers. These were Jews out of the sect of the Pharisees, who professed faith in Christ, but were false prophets. Everywhere Paul preached the truth of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, they came behind him and corrupted the truth with *another gospel: which is not another*. This so-called gospel required ritual and law for salvation. This appealed to the flesh, as all false systems of worship do; nevertheless, Paul countered this false system when he wrote:

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. (Philippians 3:4-9)

Saul of Tarsus excelled his peers in Judaism with his observance of *the commandments and doctrines of men*. Nevertheless, when confronted with the righteousness of Christ and the terms of the gospel, Saul counted all of the things which were of personal gain to him as a pile of dung. He realized that none of those things could make him right before a Holy and Just God. Therefore he renounced his position in Judaism, as a Pharisee and an elder in the Jewish Sanhedrin, to place his trust in Jesus Christ. Thus Paul was found in Him, not having his own righteousness, which

Removing the Mask

is by the law, but having the righteousness which is of God by faith. This is what James wanted his Jewish brethren to do. Therefore he wrote:

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16-18)

The Greek word for confess in this text is *homologeo*. As we have already seen in an earlier chapter, it means to be in agreement with another. Therefore James's admonition to his Jewish brethren was for them to agree with God and with one another about their faults. By faults, James did not mean the Jews should confess their personal sins to one another. The confession of their personal sins would serve no valid purpose. James meant the Jews should be in agreement with one another and with God about their defection from the faith. What they were practicing was not *the faith, once delivered unto the saints*.

The word translated *faults* is the Greek word *parapipto*. It means *to fall beside, or to fall along the way*. It means the Jews had misappropriated the faith that had been committed to their trust. First, the Jews had corrupted the law with the commandments and doctrines of men so that it had lost its schoolmaster role. Second, they had corrupted the truth of the gospel, which had been committed to their trust in the shadows and types of the sacrificial system. Since the law had lost its schoolmaster role, the sacrificial system could not point the Jews to faith in Christ, but became so much useless form and ritual.

Therefore James's use of the word, *parapipto*, rests in the central theme of his epistle. It is at the core of James's argument in the second chapter, where he compared his faith to the Jews'

Removing the Mask

vain faith. It is central to the Jews' need for the wisdom which comes from above. It is central to the Jews' guilt before the whole law. It is central to their spiritual adultery, which is described in the fourth chapter of James's epistle.

If the Jews had not been custodians of the truth, James never would have referred to them as adulterers and adulteresses. In our world, only a wife or a husband can commit adultery. Sexual intercourse between unmarried individuals, neither of whom is married, is fornication. Therefore the spiritual counterpart of adultery is false worship by someone who has been associated with the truth. For example, throughout the Old Testament, Israel is described as God's unfaithful wife. Thus spiritual adultery is committed by those who have had a historical relationship with the truth. An individual believer cannot depart from the truth, but a nation or a church can.

James's appeal to the Jews to confess their faults one to another was to remove the mask of hypocrisy behind which they were hiding. As long as they continued to wear the mask of hypocrisy and self-righteousness, they could not come to salvation. James called for the Jews to do what Saul of Tarsus had done: count the things they had counted gain to be dung. Then their trust could be in the righteousness of God, which is by faith and not in the works of their own hands.

It was imperative that they remove the mask and stand condemned by the law. Salvation is not for people who deem themselves righteous. Salvation is for sinners. Therefore our Lord said, *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*. Even though James had made an appeal to the Jews to call for the elders of the church if they saw themselves, individually, in

Removing the Mask

need of a Savior, James' s primary appeal was national. The Jews' covenant relationship with God called for a national repentance whenever there was a national defection from the truth.

Consequently James admonished his Jewish brethren to *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed*. This is a call for a corporate confession, prayer and healing. It is akin to Daniel' s prayer in the ninth chapter of his prophecy.

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; we have sinned, and we have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries which thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee.

To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him: neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. (Daniel 9:3-13, emphasis mine)

No greater commentary could be written, nor better example given, than Daniel' s prayer of confession for himself, his city and his people. Daniel' s prayer embodies everything James has asked his Jewish brethren to do. Daniel' s prayer and James' s request are centered in Israel' s covenant relationship with God, which required (with any national failure) the nation of Israel to

Removing the Mask

return unto the Lord, and He would return unto them.

If the Jews would acknowledge James' s admonition to confess their defection from the faith and to pray for one another, then the possibility of a spiritual restoration, or healing, was promised. This was in keeping with the terms of the Palestinian covenant. Therefore James cited an example of a previous defection and restoration, when he wrote:

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James 5:16b-18)

Prayer changes things, especially prayer that is centered in the truth of the Word of God. God's promises are, *Yea and Amen*. He cannot lie. He always fulfills His Word. Therefore no matter what we are like personally, if we pray according to God's Word and in the name of Jesus, we can expect God to answer according to His Word.

In the days of Elijah there was a national defection from the truth. Ahab and Jezebel were king and queen over Israel. They were idolaters. In fact, they had an entourage of eight hundred and fifty false prophets, who were subsidized by the king and queen. These prophets of the groves and of Baal sat regularly at the king's table. Consequently Elijah prayed that the Lord would shut up the heavens and withhold the rains until there was a national repentance on the part of the Jews. The Scripture tells us, *Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are*. In the Greek text *like passions* means he was an ordinary man with ordinary feelings and passions. What James told his Jewish brethren was, God did not answer Elijah's prayer to close the heavens because Elijah was of any extraordinary character, or holiness. God answered his prayer because he prayed on the basis of the Word of God.

Removing the Mask

Under the terms of the Palestinian covenant, one of the blessings for Israel, if they observed the terms of the covenant, was the provision of the early and latter rains in their seasons. If Israel failed to keep the terms of the covenant, one of the curses upon Israel was the withholding of the rains. At the time of Elijah's prayer, Israel was in grave violation of the Palestinian covenant. They were steeped in idolatry. Therefore Elijah prayed God to withhold the rains in accordance with the terms of the covenant. Elijah believed, like Abraham, *That what God promised, He was able also to perform.* Therefore God closed the heavens because of His promise in the Palestinian covenant.

Three and one-half years later, Elijah challenged Ahab to bring his false prophets to Mount Carmel. On that mountain there would be a contest. This contest was to show whether Baal was God or whether Jehovah was God. After the eight hundred and fifty false prophets were defeated, Jehovah was proven to be God. Elijah called for the execution of the false prophets and for a revival in Israel. The prophets were killed, and Israel repented of her idolatry.

Then Elijah prayed again. This time he prayed for the restoration of the rains. This prayer was also in accordance with God's promises in the Palestinian covenant. Israel met the terms of the covenant. Therefore Elijah believed God would restore the rains in accordance with His Word. The lesson for the Jews to learn from all of this was that a viable faith is one based upon the promises of God in His Word. This lesson is equally important for us. Consequently their trust should be in the promises of God and not in their own self-righteousness. Thus James made one final appeal:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death,

Removing the Mask

and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20)

Throughout his letter James identified himself with the Jews by the use of the term, *Brethren*. James was critical of them and he knew it. But he was not maliciously critical. James's criticism, like his final appeal, was to direct the Jews to the truth in Jesus Christ. James criticized his brethren to show them that they could not be justified before God by their traditions, no matter how sincere they were in the observance of them.

The Jews had erred from the truth. Therefore all of their form and ritual was vain. What they needed was a viable faith, not an empty, useless one based upon the doctrines of men. James encouraged those Jews who knew the truth to present the claims of the truth to those who did not know it. James instructed them that if they *converted a sinner from the error of his way*, they would save a soul from death.

James was not talking about physical death. He was talking about the second death. He was talking about the death the apostle John spoke of in the book of Revelation. He spoke of the death that would eternally separate the unredeemed sinner from God.

Then James directed his brethren to faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. With faith in Christ, the judgment that was due the Jews was transferred to Jesus Christ. Therefore the one whose faith is in Christ has his sins forgiven and forgotten. His sins will never be remembered against him anymore. Therefore the prophet Jeremiah promised the eternal forgiveness of sin, based upon the shed blood of a suitable sacrifice. The writer of the book of Hebrews identified the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy with Jesus Christ. Therefore:

... every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man [Jesus Christ], after he had offered one

Removing the Mask

sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. (Hebrews 10:11-18, emphasis mine)

James completed his appeal to his Jewish brethren. His appeal to them was not one of overt criticism for the sake of criticism, but rather it was an appeal for them to examine themselves in the light of the Word of God. James did not question them with regard to motive or diligence in the observance of their *faith*, but he did question whether their faith was a viable one.

The prophet Hosea had written centuries earlier, *My people [the Jews] are destroyed for lack of knowledge*. The former Rabbi and member of the Jewish Sanhedrin counsel, Saul of Tarsus who was also called Paul, said of those same Jewish people, *I bear them witness, they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*.

A lack of knowledge of what God has truly promised can produce an infinite tragedy. Such a tragedy was committed by Israel at the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. John wrote of our Lord, *He came unto his own [nation], and his own [people] received him not* (John 1:11). Rather than recognizing that all that our Lord did in His ministry among them was in fulfillment of countless prophecies of the Old Testament, they cried for His crucifixion because *He made himself equal with God*. If they had known their own Scriptures, they would have known that He was indeed God, manifested in human form by means of the virgin birth. They would have known that the *God-Man (El Gibowrh: the Mighty God, the mighty man)* was the *Seed* promised to Adam, to

Removing the Mask

Abraham, to David and to the nation of Israel: the one through whom all of the families of the earth would be blessed.

Nearly two thousand years have elapsed and the tragedy continues, for his own still receive him not. His life, death, burial and resurrection have all been explained away by them. And the nation of Israel continues to long for the coming of their Messiah, rejecting the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed their Messiah. Perhaps, if they could be brought to the realization of their grave error, as James attempted to do, many souls would be saved from hell and a multitude of sins would be covered. We rest in the hope of the promise of God:

The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. (Isaiah 10:21-22)

We know that God has promised the salvation of the nation of Israel in the last days. A remnant truly will be saved; however, for them to be saved, they must come by faith in the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. They must change their minds about Jesus of Nazareth. They must come to believe that He is the Christ, their Messiah. If they will humble themselves in the sight of the Lord, He will lift them up. This promise is true not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles.