

1. Redeeming Those From Every Culture Has Always Been God’s Plan

- a. *Soli Deo Gloria*
- b. His purpose in Christ (visiting) was to take a people for Himself
 - i. The “third race” – neither Jew or Gentile
- c. Even though it needed to be explained, it does not mean that it’s “new”, but rather the *fulfillment* of something promised long ago
 - i. “the words of the prophets agree”
 1. Plural “prophets”
 2. He uses Amos as a part which stands for the whole
 - ii. Amos 9:11-12
 1. See also Isaiah 43:7; 49:6
 - iii. The redemption of people from all nations was always God’s plan!
 1. The inclusion of the Gentiles is not Plan B
 2. Some have contended that when the Jewish people rejected Jesus as the Messiah that God changed the game to include the Gentiles
 - a. This is ignorance of the whole Scriptures, i.e. “the prophets”
 - b. They “agree together” that God had always promised to “call the Gentiles by My name”
 - iv. It is imperative to note that Peter’s vision was not a definitive decree, no vision is, rather it illustrates what God had already promised IN HIS WRITTEN WORD
 1. Sola Scriptura
- d. God has one people, not two
 - i. The “tent of David”
 1. Rebuilt
 - a. Because it was “having fallen”
 2. Rebuilt
 - a. “it’s things were torn down”
 3. Strengthen it
 - a. Something will be altered to give it greater strength: the True David, Jesus!
 - ii. Jesus is the Rebuilt, Restored, and Strengthened Tent of David
 1. All who are “in Him” are the people of God
 2. All who are “in Him” are CLEAN
 - iii. Jesus is the reason that the nations seek the Lord
 1. “The rest of Mankind” are not those who are OK outside of Christ, but rather those who are outside the knowledge of God revealed in the OT
 2. “All the nations” is equated with “the rest”
 3. They seek the Lord because of the restoration of David’s tent, i.e. Jesus
 - iv. All who belong to the Lord in Christ Jesus are His people
 1. “upon whom My name has been called, upon them”
 2. This phrase indicates not that the Gentiles called upon His name, but that God’s Name was called upon them!
 3. It is a phrase of belonging, i.e. to have someone’s name called upon someone was to claim ownership of those people by that name
 - a. Those from “among the nations” in “David’s tent” (JESUS) God calls “mine”!
 - v. If God calls those from the nations “mine”, then there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile – there is only one people of God in Christ Jesus
 1. “Says the Lord, who made these things known from long ago”
 2. It has always been the plan

2. To the Conscientious, Don't Make Things Difficult for People to Come to Christ Unnecessarily
 - a. If people are turning to God through Christ Jesus, don't make it about cultural conformity.
 - i. We have a tendency to evangelize a culture rather than the gospel
 - ii. Hudson Taylor is an excellent example of how to do this well
 1. Taylor adopted Chinese dress and hairstyle (queue), ate Chinese food with Chinese implements, learned numerous Chinese dialects, stayed in Chinese housing and obeyed the rules of the house as such
 - a. This gained him disdain from other culturally Western Christians, which he simply ignored for the sake of the gospel, who wanted the Chinese to adhere to their own Law, the law of European culture.
 - b. He refused to "annoy" the Chinese, or to burden them with unnecessary things which had nothing to do with the gospel, and while distinguishing the gospel clearly from Confucianism and Buddhism, cultural accommodations which were not gospel-related were expected to bend:

"We wish to see Christian [Chinese] – true Christians, but withal true Chinese in every sense of the word. We wish to see churches and Christian Chinese presided over by pastors and officers of their own countrymen, worshiping the true God in the land of their fathers, in the costume of their fathers, in their own tongue wherein they were born, and in edifices of a thoroughly Chinese style of architecture.

If we really desire to see the Chinese such as we have described, let us as far as possible set before them a correct example: let us in everything un sinful become Chinese, that by all things we may save some. Let us adopt their costume, acquire their language, study to imitate their habits, and approximate to their diet as far as health and constitution will allow. Let us live in their houses, making no unnecessary alterations in external appearance, and only so far modifying internal arrangements as attention to health and efficiency for work absolutely require." (Hudson Taylor, from a 7-volume work by A.J. Broomhall)
 - b. This command is a clear refutation of the Judaizers' claim that one must follow the Mosaic Law and become culturally Jewish in order to truly be saved, or to truly be God's people
 - i. Thus, James clearly denies the original premise of the false teachers in Antioch and clearly agrees, together with Paul & Barnabas & Peter, that all people, both Jew and Gentile, moral and immoral, are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone and are thus cleansed
 - ii. To the glory of God alone as the sole worker of all these things, as He has said from old
3. To the Free: You Are Bound by the Law of Love for One Another
 - a. What is, then, the relationship of the Christian to "good works?"
 - i. Remember, this issue at stake in this council is how a person is made clean before God, and good works do not make a person clean
 1. Rather, a cleansed person does works which are consistent with such cleansing, not merely external works, but works from a heart cleansed by faith
 - ii. We are to do good works, not by mere external coercion but because we are now motivated by love: for God principally, because of His great grace towards us, and for others materially, because all men are equal in their need

"This [faith] knowledge of and confidence in God's grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performed in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do

good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything out of love and praise to God who has shown him this grace. Thus, it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.” – Martin Luther

- iii. This “law of love” is the necessary extension of true faith, which is a confident dependence upon God for all things coming from a heart deeply humbled by God’s mercy
 1. The Law may not be necessary for salvation, but faith is, and faith’s nature is humility
 2. This means that we entrust what is right, good, true, and virtuous to what God has explicitly and universally said in His Word and love Him by such entrusting obedience
 3. What distinguished the Jewish people in wilderness (kosher diet, clothing, hairstyle) is not what distinguishes Christ
 - a. Rather, it is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ epitomized in the humility of servanthood for the sake of others
- iv. This “law of love” also means that what causes others to flourish *as God has revealed to be flourishing* will dictate how we behave towards others
 1. The truth makes people flourish as it is declared in dependence upon God’s Spirit and the motivation of their good
 - a. “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:25)
 - b. “Admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with them all.” (1 Thess 5:14)
 - c. “We who are strong ought to bear up the weaknesses of those without strength and not just seek to please ourselves” (Rom 15:1)
 2. Sometimes what causes us to flourish stings for the moment
 - a. “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every ‘brother’ who leads an unruly life and not according to the ways which you received from us.” (2 Thess 3:6)
 3. Yet in all things love seeks to edify, to build up, to encourage, the strengthen, a brother
 - a. “yet so not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thess 3:15)
- b. This “law of love” is the reason that James tells the Gentiles to “stay away” from particularly pagan events and associations
 - i. First, it would be weird for the apostles to say that nobody is saved by the law, then add law as a requirement for the Gentiles
 1. Therefore, what James is NOT doing is adding a law by which the Gentiles are justified, or stating an addendum to the previous clarified gospel
 2. Nor is he, then, adding a *universal* comprehensive list of what constitutes true holiness.
 3. Nor is he equating the severity of eating rare steak with incestuous relationships
 4. Nor is he saying that you are then free to sin however you want, except in the following ways, as if lying and murder are now on the table
 - ii. What he IS doing is calling the Gentiles not to use their freedom self-centeredly, but rather to consider the weakness of those who hear the law of Moses every week in the synagogues and try and follow it
 1. In other words, he is telling them to “stay away” from things which would be *appalling* to the Jews because of their connection with idolatry, so as not to create an unnecessary offense to the gospel of Christ Jesus
 - a. In the same way that Hudson Taylor recognized that the Chinese viewed Christianity as a “foreign religion” because it was culturally Western

2. Love for our brothers compels us to limit our freedom, not by any necessity except the necessity of love for others
- c. They were to “stay away” from the things associated with pagan temple worship
 - i. The four things listed are all things associated with pagan worship in the area of Antioch
 1. Three are food related, one is sexually related
 - a. Why is sexual immorality, or “porneia” mentioned with food?
 - i. Because of its association in Antioch, or Daphne its suburb, with idol worship in the “Grove of Apollo”
 - ii. It is not that sexual sins are *merely* contextualized, though they are here, nor that eating food is the same as sexuality
 1. All food has been given to man, but not all sexual expression has been given to man
 2. In fact, the first thing listed by James really gives us the contextualization of idolatry
 - a. “pollutions of the idols”
 - i. “sexual immorality”
 - ii. “the strangled thing”
 - iii. “the blood”
 - ii. Thus, these four things are contextualized and not universalized as things which pertain to the most offensive thing to the Jewish people: idolatry
 1. He explains the reason for the “stay away from” command immediately:
 - a. “Moses is preached in every city, in the synagogues”
 - b. “from ancient times”
 - i. Why does he include this weird addendum?
 - ii. Old habits are hard to break – the Law has deep roots, so be gracious towards those who find it hard to understand how deep God’s grace goes
 2. Thus, it was these particular types of “pollutions of idolatry” which the Gentiles were to avoid having any association with, in order not to put up an obstacle to the gospel among the Jews in their cities
 - a. It was about avoiding the impression to the Jews that following Christ Jesus was another form of pagan idolatry
 - iii. This is why James chooses to use the verb “to stay away”, or possibly translated, “to avoid contact with”
 1. It is about being assumed to be included in paganism by visiting Apollo’s grove, even if not to participate in idol worship through feasting at the idols’ temples, or to copulate with the priestesses
 2. They were to avoid the mere impression that they are participants in the idol feasts
 3. It may be possible to summarize it for our understanding as, **“Don’t participate in the things which moralists associate with the worship of idols.”**
 - d. The Christian is not to “stand on his rights” all the time, but to seek the glory of Christ and the edification of others
 - i. The Christian is preeminently called to “Love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves.”
 1. So, does my freedom edify or destroy my brother?
 2. Love cares more about the welfare of others than it does about its freedom and rights.
 - ii. Paul will instruct the Gentiles often about it, most clearly to the Corinthians, but summarized very succinctly to the Galatians (to which he writes much concerning the events of Acts 15)

1. “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (5:13)
 2. Peter writes in his letter, “act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.”
- iii. 1 Corinthians 8-9
1. (8) Knowledge of our Freedom and Love for Our Brothers are not rivals
 - a. We know that idols are empty nothings in which there is no power
 - b. Yet, some brothers’ conscience are not gossypally robust enough to keep them from feeling defiled, or made unclean, from things associated with idolatry
 - i. In a sense, it is a “false guilt” or “false shame”
 - ii. Paul calls them “weaker brothers”
 - c. Love makes the “stronger brother”, the one who knows his gospel freedom and that food, even if associated with idols, does not defile him, consider his weaker brother first, rather than just marching on with his freedom eating
 - i. It is the lack of concern for the weaker brother that is the problem, not that the meat was strangled or used in pagan worship
 - ii. This may make a weaker brother sin against his own conscience, that is to do something believing it to be sinful, which hardens the heart towards true holiness
 1. This is what it means to “place a stumbling block” in front of a brother:
 2. To encourage him to act against his conscience and thus feel false guilt and shame
 2. (9) Love Lays Down its Rights for the Sake of its Brother
 - a. Love is not weakness, nor a deficiency of a right
 - b. Love lays down its rights to creature comforts and freedoms
 - c. Love lays down its rights to restitution
 - i. Paul and Barnabas had a right to remuneration, financial support, from the churches to whom they ministered
 - ii. Yet, they rejected it (laid it down), not because they were free to receive it, but because some were assuming that their motives were like the pagan priests, i.e. financial
 - iii. Therefore, they “stayed away” from being financially supported by the Corinthians
 - d. Love lays down its rights for the sake of the gospel
 - i. “we endure anything rather than make something an obstacle to the gospel”
 - e. Love’s reward is the people rescue by Christ through the gospel
 - i. “I have made myself a servant to all, that I might profit many.” (v19)
 1. “that I might gain Jews” (v20)
 2. “those under the law” (v20)
 3. “those outside the law” (v21)
 4. “the weak” (v22)
 - ii. “...that I might rescue some” (v22)

4. Grace to You and to You

- a. To the Jews who conscientiously followed the clean laws, the command is to extend grace to the Gentiles: “Don’t annoy the Gentiles by placing them under your conscience, for they are free in Christ from our traditions.”
- b. To the Gentiles, who were free in Christ not to follow the clean laws as necessary to salvation, the command is to extend grace to the Jews: “Consider your brothers! Don’t use your freedoms as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love lay down your rights and give no cause for Jews to link Christ with idols.”
- c. For us, then, we ought to follow the same two principles, which are the principles with Christ, in the incarnation, set as our example:
 - i. In the incarnation, Jesus didn’t ‘annoy’ us by making anything necessary but Himself, “If the Son sets you free, you are free, indeed”.
 1. Let us not, then, make our traditions necessary for all to follow, but grant grace to one another, the freedom to follow Christ according to conscience, under the Law of Love
 - ii. In the incarnation, Jesus laid down His rights so that we might gain His freedom, “though He existed in the form of God, He did not consider equality with God something to be seized, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a slave...”
 1. Let us not, then, make our freedoms and rights something to be seized, but humble ourselves and lay down our rights for the sake of others, that they might gain in His reward
- d. In all things, let us see Jesus, His holiness and His grace, that we might rest in Him and strive to love like Him, in the power of the Holy Spirit whom He has given us for such purpose.