

# **"The Unity of the Royal Law"**

## **James 2:10-13**

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For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. (Jas 2:10-13)

James had opened his book by calling us to endure temptations and trials cheerfully because of the good purpose that God has for them. God will test and try our faith in order to perfect us and work patience and endurance in us. The conditions of life itself might very well be causes of trials for us that we overcome by faith: the poor man rejoices that in faith he triumphs over his poverty and sees himself rich indeed in Christ; the rich man rejoices that in faith he triumphs over his wealth and has not been destroyed by the things of the world but is humbled in Christ. The man who endures trials will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those that love him.

There are many things in life that test us as far as our love for God in Jesus Christ is concerned. But although it is God's will that we be tested and tried, it is to be clearly understood that God is not the cause of evil and sin, for these things arise in ourselves and come from the wicked desires. We must not make a mistake about these things: God is the source of everything good and beautiful, and has begotten us by the word of God unto newness of life that we might be a kind of offering of the first fruits of the field, an offering to God.

Because of this, in the midst of testing and trials we must put away wrath, be slow to speak, and be quick to hear, for it is the engrafted word which is able to save our souls. But this quickness to hear is not a philosophical hearing, only for speculation and curiosity, but a practical and useful hearing that hears and obeys.

At the end of chapter one James gives three examples of a true hearer of the word: he bridles his tongue, he cares for the weak and poor, he keeps himself from the lusts of the world. 1:26,27. Religion is not a once-a-week kind of thing but a working lifestyle arising out of the love of God which is implanted or engrafted by the word of God.

I. James, therefore, is calling the believer to reject certain distinctions and to make others in place of them. The word of God is called a "law of liberty" and is compared to the

mirror in which you see your face. When you look in a mirror you must make decisions about yourself. You are called to say to yourself, "This is good; or this is not good." You approve or disapprove. You like the way you look, or you do not like the way you look. You fix your hair; you wash or powder your face; you brush your teeth; you straighten your tie; you brush your shoulders.

A. But some distinctions are contrary to the love of God. It is sinful and against the law of liberty to make distinctions on the basis of the appearances of things. Judgment is not to be made with respect of persons, as we saw last week. The poor is not to win his case at court because he is poor; the rich is not to win because he is rich. The poor might be rich in faith; and the rich very poor in faith. This partiality is condemned by God as he says in 2:5.

B. Now he comes to another kind of partiality that is contrary to the perfect law of liberty. James 2:10-13 speaks of partiality with respect to the law, where some commandments are elevated above others and the unity of the law is destroyed.

C. What James is saying here in vs. 2:10-13 is the same thing that Jesus said in Matt. 5:17-20 "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 5:17-20 AV)

II. This partiality is condemned before the eyes of God.

A. The partiality illustrated: The law must be fulfilled in the minutest detail. You and I do not get to pick and choose what we will fulfill and what we will not fulfill. Remember the illustration that James gives at the beginning of this chapter? The favoring of the rich over the poor? Such small thing, you say. Saying to the man with good clothes, "Sit here by me," and the person with poor clothes "Sit on the floor over there." Doriani in his work on James says that every one of the Ten Commandments is broken by that action. I have used some of his material in what follows:

1. The seating of the rich/poor in James 2

- a) It breaks the first commandment: for it ignores that Pr 22:2 The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.
- b) It breaks the second commandment for covetousness is idolatry, and favoring the rich covets the wealth of the rich.
- c) It breaks the third commandment, for it brings shame upon the

name of Christ.

d) It breaks the fourth commandment, for the peace of the sabbath is disrupted and true worship defiled.

e) It breaks the fifth commandment, for we are required to give honor to whom honor is due, and every man is to be honored as the image of God.

f) It breaks the sixth commandment, for we are required to value the life of every man; every life is from God and is to be respected and honored.

g) It breaks the seventh commandment, for in turning after covetousness we are unfaithful to our spouse, the Lord God.

h) It breaks the eighth commandment, for we rob a man of honor and respect that he deserves.

i) It breaks the ninth commandment, for we bear false witness of the Gospel.

j) It breaks the tenth commandment, for we covet that which is another's.

2. We may use another illustration: a spouse that is unfaithful and rebellious in marriage. I am going to use the pronouns he and she indiscriminately.

a) The first commandment is broken because it takes away the glory of God who has commanded us to live in marriage according to His commandments. His Godhead is attacked when we do not obey Him.

b) The second commandment is broken because the very worship of God is defiled; for God intended marriage to be an example of the relationship between Christ and His church. But the person thinks that she is wiser than God and does not have to live in subjection to the rule of Christ.

c) The third commandment is broken because the name of God is defiled and His glory is mocked. The person thinks that he is wiser than God and that what he thinks is his happiness is more important than the integrity of the truth of God.

d) The fourth commandment: the peace of the home is destroyed; for God would have us live in peace. The church's Sabbath is defiled, for disruption in the home affects the peace of the church.

e) The fifth commandment: you teach your children to dishonor their father or their mother.

f) The sixth commandment: a war against the very life of the husband or wife; in their health, their finances, their joy of life.

g) The seventh commandment: you are unfaithful to your vow and give your affections to another.

h) The eighth: you steal from you spouse that which is hers. She has made many decisions based on her reliance on your integrity

and love. You rob him of this.

i) The ninth: You bear false witness. I have never known a marriage that came to ruin that a great deal of lying was involved. You misrepresent the sins of your spouse; you minimize your own sins; you mischaracterize your unfaithfulness; he is just a friend; she is just a colleague. etc. Lies enough to fill a government warehouse.

j) You covet that which is another's. Often the breaking of one home involves the breaking of others. Hardness of hearts indeed.

3. Other illustrations: the rebellious child; lawless citizen.

B. This partiality is condemned

1. Vs. 10. Transgression of any commandment is an offense against the love of God and comes from self-love and reliance on your own wisdom.

2. Even in human law, obedience to one law will not excuse you from transgression of another.

III. Considerations and applications:

A. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Vs. 12, 13

1. Remember that those who apply the law without mercy, will be judged without mercy. James is giving us the rule, but warning us that we are also under the law, and to keep that in mind when we judge our brother.

2. Remember when you are offended by what somebody says, that you have said a lot of things you shouldn't have said.

3. Remember when your servant curses you, that you have also cursed your master, proverbs say.

4. Remember when your child is sassy and disobedient that you sassed your mother or father and were disobedient.

B. Inward moral truth triumphs over ceremonies: Jesus said not to strain at gnats and swallow camels. Weightier matters of the law. This is no contradiction of what James is saying. Ceremonies are like story problems in math books. They illustrate reality, but are not reality themselves. We practice so that we don't mess up in the real world.

1. The Lord's Supper is not the end in itself; but teaches us that our meat and drink in this world is Christ and we must feed every day upon Him.

2. Baptism is not the end in itself, but is the sign and seal that God gives me His spirit as a mark of ownership—that I have been baptized into Christ, and do not belong to myself, but to my faithful savior Jesus Christ.

3. Sabbath Day worship is not the end in itself, but teaches me that every day I am to rest in Christ and begin in this life the everlasting Sabbath. But I have an idea that if you cannot take a day off to worship the Lord and learn His word, the world is too much with you and you are agitated by many things.

C. I am not to usurp the place of God and elevate my wisdom above the wisdom of God. I am to see what is the end and purpose of the law: I am to love my neighbor as myself. James only deals with the second table of the law, because he is interested in the demonstration of faith, the way we show faith before men.

1. Do not boast of your obedience to the law until you have kept it all perfectly, for that is what is required. James makes that perfectly clear. Those who expect to be justified before God on the basis of their obedience must present to him a perfect and complete obedience, for those who offend in one offend in all, for the law is one, for God is one.

2. Transgressions are not equal in their effect toward men. Hence, the punishment is to fit the crime. There are small crimes and great crimes.

3. Before the world, in the eyes of men, partial obedience is accepted in many things. You can eat part of your supper. You can do part of a job. You can drive part way to town. But some things, even on this earth, cannot be partly done. You cannot be partly pregnant. You cannot be almost healthy: you may have an excellent heart, good lungs, healthy kidneys, and a wonderful smile. But if you have a melanoma growing on the back of your neck, your very life is in danger. Before God, every transgression of the law is a cancer on your soul, a danger to your spiritual life, and danger to others. This is the message of James; that sin is not to be taken lightly or treated as if it were unimportant..

D. James therefore, in this passage, would teach us that justification before God cannot come except in terms of a perfect righteousness. God's perfect righteousness is satisfied in Jesus Christ, who kept all of the law perfectly; he was a lamb without spot and blemish, and his sacrifice was therefore sufficient to satisfy for all my sins.

1. Faith which is real, if faith in Jesus Christ, not in the law. It is not saving faith which says, If I do everything good enough, God will be satisfied with the rest and forgive me, and accept me. No, that is faith in your own works to do what is good enough. James tells us what "good enough" is. It is keeping the whole law.

2. Faith is real if it is in Jesus Christ. It recognizes God's requirement, and confesses sins and inability, and trusts not in what is "good enough" but what God accepts: the righteousness of Christ.

3. As Paul put it: 2Co 5:21 For he hath made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

a) Jesus was not made morally sinful. But he was legally a sinner, though actually not a transgressor.

b) In justification, we are not made morally righteous. We are legally made righteous, although actually transgressors.

c) This is not a legal fiction, just as Christ being made sin, is not fiction; the sins were laid upon Him and He suffered for them. So, his righteousness is laid upon us, and we are rewarded for what we did not do; just as He suffered for what He did not do.

d) James is going to speak of justification soon, but he is not going to say that we are justified because we are made morally good. It is too late for that, because we lie under the curse of sin and death.

Amen and Amen.

God bless you.