

*But If Ye Have Respect to Persons*  
*James 2:8-13*

**James 2:8-13** reads, “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. 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 shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”

**James 2:8-13** presents the conclusion to the lengthy paragraph that began with **verse 1**. As we have noted, this paragraph directly confronts those who are showing sinful partiality against the poor and needy in favor of the rich and prestigious. **James 2:8-13** concludes the paragraph by providing Biblical admonition and instruction concerning the relationship between the law of God and the practice of showing partiality. First, in **verse 8** there is a commendation for loving behavior toward our neighbor – “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.” Second, in **verse 9** there is a condemnation for practicing partiality in our relationships – “But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.” Third, in **verses 10-11** there is the conviction of God’s law against practicing partiality – “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.” Fourth, in **verse 12** there is the charge to obey God’s law of love – “So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” Fifth and finally, in **verse 13** there is the consequence for not obeying God’s law of love – “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”

I. The Commendation for Loving Behavior toward Our Neighbor.

As this paragraph moves to its conclusion, it first provides a commendation for those who behave toward others in accord with God’s royal law of love. Indeed, this is the commendation, “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.” Fulfilling our Lord God’s royal law of love in our relations with and behavior toward others is well doing in our Lord’s sight. This is the behavior that the Lord our God approves. Yea, this is the behavior that the Lord our God will bless. (**James 1:25**) In **Leviticus 19:18** the instruction is recorded in the Old Testament law of God, “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.” In **Matthew 22:37-40** our Lord Jesus Christ taught concerning the two greatest commandments of God’s law. There we read, “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Thus we come to understand that the command to love our neighbor as our selves is the foundation for every other command of God’s law concerning our relationships with others. Even so, from **Romans 13:8** we learn that when we walk in

true, godly love toward another, then we will effectively perform and fulfill all of the manward duties in God's law toward that individual. Indeed, **Romans 13:10** provides the explanation, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Yea, the law of true, godly love is the foundational principle of God's law in our relations with others. Thus God's law of love prohibits us from showing partiality toward others. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour;" therefore, true, godly love will not show partiality against his neighbor. Yea, "love worketh no ill to his neighbour;" therefore, true, godly love will not disregard the poor and needy in their need, but will rather help them in their need. So then, on the one hand, if we fulfill God's law of love toward others, we do well and walk righteously in our Lord's sight.

## II. The Condemnation for Practicing Partiality in Our Relationships.

Yet on the other hand, if we practice partiality in our relationships with others, we commit sin and walk unrighteously in our Lord's sight. Even so, **James 2:9** declares, "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." The two contrasting choices in this matter are hereby made plain. To behave with godly love toward another is right. To practice selfish partiality against another is sin. There is no compromise between these two sides. Practicing selfish partiality is not godly love in any manner. On the other hand, godly love does not practice selfish partiality in any manner. God's law of love instructs us to love our neighbor as our selves. Practicing partiality is a direct transgression of that law. Therefore, when we practice partiality and demonstrate prejudice against some in favor of others due to external considerations such as social status, financial wealth, physical appeal, public popularity, racial distinction, etc., God's law of love condemns us as transgressors of the law. Indeed, God's law of love condemns us as law-breakers. God's law of love does not compromise with us on this matter. Rather, God's law of love outright condemns us. Yea, God's law of love itself brings forth the evidence of our transgression and pronounces us to be guilty as charged. We have transgressed God's law. We have committed sin, not only against the other individual, but against the Lord our God Himself. Practicing partiality is not a minor matter of spiritual insignificance. It is not simply a matter of social discourtesy. When we practice partiality, it is sinful unrighteousness. It is a willful practice of disobedience against God's law; and the Lord our God is greatly displeased.

## III. The Conviction of God's Law against Practicing Partiality.

Yet some may continue to defend themselves in this practice with the argument that this is such a little matter, that it is such a little breach of God's law. Thus, beginning with the explanatory conjunction "for," **James 2:10-11** provides further explanation and evidence that the practice of partiality certainly does bring us under the condemning conviction of God's law. Therein the truth is given, "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." It is not necessary for us to break the law in every point, or even in the majority of points, in order to be defined as a law-breaker. It is only necessary to break the law at one point in order to be defined as a law-breaker. The law of God is a single unit of authority. It is all given by the same Lord God, and it is all founded upon His singular

authority. The same Lord God who commanded us not to commit adultery is the same Lord God who commanded us not to commit murder. Yea, the same Lord God who commanded us not to commit adultery or murder is the same Lord God who commanded us to walk in godly love toward our neighbor and not to practice partiality against our neighbor. So then, if we break God's law at any single point, we stand in direct disobedience against the authority of the Law-giver, the Lord our God Himself. Thus if we break God's law at any single point, no matter what that point may be, we stand guilty under the condemning conviction of God's whole law as an authoritative unit. In any such case, the law of righteousness has been broken; and we are the unrighteous law-breakers. Even so, if an individual does not commit the sin of adultery, but does commit the sin of murder, that individual stands guilty as a law-breaker, as a transgressor of the law. In like manner, if an individual obeys God's law in every other point, yet commits the sin of selfish partiality, that individual also stands guilty as a law-breaker, as a transgressor of God's law. Indeed, that individual is also convicted by God's law as a disobedient "criminal" against the law. Yea, even if an individual obeys God's law of love toward all others except one, but just practices partiality against that one, that individual still stands guilty before the Lord our God as a transgressor of the law. Indeed, to practice partiality against another is just as much an act of disobedience against our Lord God's authority as is any other act of sinful disobedience.

#### IV. The Charge to Obey God's Law of Love.

Now, having presented the commendation in **verse 8** to walk in love toward our neighbors, and having presented the admonition in **verses 9-11** that practicing partiality is transgressing God's law, **James 2:12** proceeds with an instruction to govern our lives according to this commendation and this admonition. Yea, **James 2:12** presents the authoritative charge and corrective, saying, "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty." Herein we are given the solemn charge and commandment to govern all of our speech and all of our actions in accord with God's law of love toward others. Purposefully and faithfully we are to walk in godly love toward those around us and to avoid any practice of sinful, selfish partiality in any aspect of our speech or actions. This is our Lord's requirement upon our lives. We must so speak purposefully and faithfully. We must so do purposefully and faithfully. Yea, we must be motivated to so speak and so do by the constant recognition that we shall stand in judgment before our Lord for how we have spoken and for what we have done. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (**2 Corinthians 5:10**) All of us as believers are those "that shall be judged by law of liberty." Through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are enabled to walk according to the principle of godly love and are set free to walk in the way of righteousness and true holiness. Therefore, on judgment day we shall be judged by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ according to that very "law of liberty." We shall be judged according to how faithfully we walked in the power of the Holy Spirit by the principle of godly love. Now, as we have learned from **James 2:4**, when we practice partiality against the poor and needy in favor of the rich and prestigious, we make ourselves into judges who possess evil thoughts and attitudes. Even so, we must ever remember that we ourselves shall also be judged for our false manner of judgment against others. Thus we should be motivated to correct our ways and to walk rather in godly love toward others.

## V. The Consequence for Not Obeying God's Law of Love.

So then, on judgment day what will be the consequence if we do not obey God's law of love toward others? With the final declaration of the paragraph, **James 1:13** gives answer, saying, "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." Those who walk in godly love toward others are moved by that love to demonstrate mercy unto others. In godly love they do not practice partiality against the poor and needy. Rather, in godly love they are merciful and kind unto the poor and needy to help them in their need. Thus **James 1:13** provides a final warning. Those who will not walk in godly love toward others by demonstrating merciful help unto them shall receive no mercy from the Lord at His judgment seat. On judgment day we shall reap what we have sown. If we have sown no mercy, we shall reap no mercy. For any of us to receive reward at our Lord's judgment, we must receive mercy; for none of us truly lives in a manner that merits our Lord's reward. Our Lord requires perfect holiness, and none of us lives according to that required standard. Yet through His abundant mercy, our Lord has promised to reward us in accord with our faithfulness unto Him. Indeed, **James 1:12** gives the promise, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Such reward is founded wholly upon our Lord's mercy. Thus for us to experience "judgment without mercy" on judgment day means that we receive only our Lord's disapproval and none of our Lord's reward. On the other hand, the truth of God's Word is also that "mercy rejoiceth against judgment." If we sow mercy through our loving, merciful behavior toward others now, we shall reap mercy from our Lord on judgment day. Even so, **Matthew 5:7** proclaims, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." Furthermore, through our Lord's mercy we shall receive our Lord's reward; and thereby mercy will triumph in the face of judgment. So then, let us walk in love and mercy toward our neighbors, toward those around us, in order that we might receive our Lord's mercy and reward on that day. Indeed, if we will walk in love and mercy toward our neighbors, toward those around us, then we can look forward to the day of our Lord's judgment with a triumphant confidence. Even so, **1 John 4:16-17** declares, "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world."