

James 2:1-13  
Leviticus 19:1-18  
Psalm 146

“Faith and Love”

February 11, 2018

Leviticus 19 starts with an important command:

“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”

We often think of God’s holiness as that which *separates him from us* –  
and that is true – at least at first!

But God’s holiness is also that which drives him to bring us *near* himself.

After all, he wants us to be near him –

and so, in order for that to happen,

*we* must be holy – because we are the people of a holy God.

And then Leviticus 19 works through a few of the things that express this holiness:

honoring your parents,

keeping the Sabbath,

not worshiping idols,

the way that you offer peace offerings –

how you harvest your land –

indeed, verses 9-17 focus particularly on matters of justice and mercy.

Over and over and over we hear the refrain: “I am the LORD.”

Why should you be this kind of people?

I am the LORD.

And all of this is summed up in the final clauses of verse 18 –

“you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 146 – a song that shows how God himself

is one who does justice for the poor and upholds the widow and the fatherless.

Sing Psalm 146

Read James 2:1-13

We need to start with who Jesus is!

James is talking about what it means to hold the faith  
in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

And James says three things about Jesus:

First, he is Lord.

We saw this in 1:1 – “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Lord is the way that the LXX translated Yahweh –

so James is saying that Jesus is Yahweh.

Second, Jesus is Christ – he is the Messiah.

Jesus is the anointed Son of David – he is the promised King

who restores the throne of David forever.

And third, Jesus is the Lord of glory.

There is a way in which “Lord of glory” sums up who Jesus is both as God and as man.

John Calvin says this well:

“It was also imperative that he who was to become our Redeemer be true God and true man.

It was his task to swallow up death.

Who but Life could do this?

It was his task to conquer sin.

Who but very Righteousness could do this?

It was his task to rout the powers of world and air.

Who but a power higher than world and air could do this?

Now where does life or righteousness, or lordship and authority of heaven lie but with God alone?

Therefore our most merciful God, when he willed that we be redeemed, made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son . . . .

Since neither as God alone could he feel death, nor as man alone could he overcome it, he coupled human nature with the divine

that to atone for sin he might submit the weakness of the one to death;

and that, wrestling with death by the power of his other nature,

he might win victory for us." (John Calvin, *Institutes* II.xii.2-3)

But what does it mean to believe in this Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory?

### **1. Faith and Favoritism: How Do You Treat the Poor and the Rich? (v1-7)**

#### **a. The Point: Favoritism Is Inconsistent with Faith in the Lord of Glory (v1)**

*My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*

Well, what is faith?

What does genuine faith look like?

The key to understanding James (and the NT use of “faith” more generally)

is to remember that in Greek – like in Hebrew –

the idea of faith is not just a passive, intellectual concept.

This is also true in English!

We talk about “keeping faith” – or “breaking faith” –

when we talk about matters of *trust*.

Because true faith – genuine faith – is a *resting* on the Lord Jesus

But James says that partiality – favoritism – is inconsistent with holding faith in Jesus.

What is partiality?

Partiality means judging things on the surface –

judging because of appearances – or how things may look.

In other words, “partiality” is very much about “prejudice” –

pre-judging based on outward appearances.

And the reason why this is so wrong  
is because God himself shows *no* partiality.

We heard about this in Leviticus 19.

Moses had said that we should not show partiality because of who God is.

As Peter said to the first Gentile convert, Cornelius, in Acts 10

“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,  
but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what right  
is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34-35)

God shows no partiality.

And we are called to imitate him.

At first that may seem impossible (and in one sense, it is impossible!) –  
because God knows the hearts of all –

and we simply cannot understand what is in the hearts of others!

But listen again to what Peter said to Cornelius,

“God shows no partiality, but in every nation  
anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

My favorite example of this is Ahab – the most wicked king of Israel ever!

There is no doubt that Ahab was evil at heart.

1 Kings 21:25 says “There was none who sold himself  
to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD  
like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited.”

But two verses later, we are told

that when Ahab heard the word of the LORD against him –  
that his whole house would be utterly destroyed –

“he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted  
and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly.” (21:27)

And God says to Elijah,

“Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me?

Because he has humbled himself before me,

I will not bring the disaster in his days;

but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster upon his house.” (21:29)

God shows *no partiality*.

He is no respecter of persons.

He is just and fair and does what is *right*.

Even the most wicked king ever gets a reprieve because he did what was right  
(for once!).

#### **b. Example: Two Men Come to Church (v2-4)**

<sup>2</sup> For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man  
in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine  
clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand

*over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,”<sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

So let's look at James' example of this:

two men come to church –

one who is well-dressed and one in shabby clothing.

But no, that doesn't quite capture the contrast here!

You need to understand that in the Greco-Roman world  
clothing meant status.

Certain sorts of clothing could *only be worn* by certain people.

So when James describes this man as

“a gold-fingered man in shining raiment”

we are to see one of the elite –

one of the highest ranking people in the city –

If the mayor comes to church – if Senator Donnelly comes to church –  
how would we respond?

And then there is the man in shabby clothing.

Again, “shabby” hardly captures the idea here!

“Filthy” might be a better translation –

and in the ancient world, the image would include some unpleasant odors!

So, here we have Senator Donnelly and the most filthy vagrant in St. Joe County  
showing up on the same Sunday!

What do we do?

James says that the church must *not* show partiality.

The world would show honor to the Senator –

but would make sure that the poor man “stays in his place.”

But Jesus – the Lord of glory – came to bring salvation to the poor.

So if you treat the Senator and the vagrant differently,  
then “have you not made distinctions among yourselves  
and become judges with evil thoughts?” (v4)

Notice that James is not just talking about outsiders – visitors –  
he is also talking about how we treat one another!

After all, the way we treat these visitors will simply be a reflection of the way we think!

If we honor the rich and seek to “keep the poor in their place,”

then we are guilty of making distinctions –

“Judges with evil thoughts”

could perhaps be better translated “judges rendering perverse verdicts.”

While James is talking about the rich and the poor –

his words apply to all sorts of social distinctions.

The church needs to be a place where we do not show partiality –

where we do not judge based on outward appearance.  
Why do we have “white churches” and “black churches” in America?  
Because blacks were not welcome in white churches.  
Well, that’s not quite true.

They were welcome, so long as they “stayed in their place.”  
I read one 19<sup>th</sup> century article that objected to having black elders for white churches,  
because that would mean that white families  
would have to allow a black man to enter their front door.  
Some presbyteries did ordain black pastors –  
but they generally expected them to minister in black churches,  
and they were only expected to speak on issues related to “their race.”

That, too, is making distinctions among yourselves –  
and becoming judges rendering perverse verdicts.

We need to take these words to heart!  
Because in verses 5-7 James exhorts us to consider the pattern of the kingdom of God.

**c. Exhortation: Consider the Pattern of the Kingdom (v5-7)**

*<sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?*

The kingdom of God refers to the restoration of God’s righteous rule –  
when God will overthrow all wickedness,  
and when the meek will inherit the earth.

You should hear an echo of the beatitudes here:  
“blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).  
In Matthew Jesus adds, “the poor in spirit” –  
but in Luke, Jesus simply says “you who are poor.”

It is important to note that James does *not* say that poverty is the way to salvation.  
Look at verse 5 – what is it that *James* says brings you into the kingdom?  
Faith.

Rather, James says that God generally chooses those who are poor in the world  
to be *rich in faith* and *heirs of the kingdom*.

If you think about it, Jesus language of “poor in spirit”  
finds its parallel in James’ words, “rich in faith.”  
Because those who are rich in faith are heirs of the kingdom.

The “heirs of the kingdom” are those who will reign with Christ.  
The heirs of the kingdom are those who will share in *his* righteous reign.

If your goal in life is to be wealthy,  
then you are not likely to find faith in the Lord Jesus Christ very interesting.

Because Jesus says that such desires are inconsistent with a whole-hearted love for God.

You cannot love both God and money.

And God is no respecter of persons.

If a poor man sets his heart on wealth – that’s also inconsistent with love for God.

But Jesus said that he came to preach the good news *to the poor*.

And James recognizes that this will be a temptation for the church:

*<sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man.*

Do you realize how bad this is?

Proverbs 17:5 says, “Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker.”

Proverbs 14:31 says, “Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker,  
but he who is generous to the needy honors him.”

So when James says that *you have dishonored the poor man*

he is saying, “you have insulted God!”

All human beings are made in the image of God.

If you dishonor the image of God, you are dishonoring *God himself!*

And so suddenly we think back to the poor man who visited here a while back –  
and we realize that we did not treat him as well as we treated others...

So why do we honor the rich?

*Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

Here we see something about the rich:

they are the ones with power –

they are those who can use the law courts to have their way with others.

These are the “elite” –

those whose wealth and power render them invulnerable (they think)  
from the ordinary course of life.

And they use that power to enhance their own wealth – at the expense of others.

Those who show favoritism to the rich

are siding with the people who oppose Christ and seek to destroy his flock!

Ah, but then why not evangelize the rich?!

Oh, yes, by all means – evangelize the rich!

But make sure that you tell them  
that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,  
than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God! (Mt 19:24)

We think that if the rich become Christians,  
then we can be spared all the trouble they cause!  
But, in fact, what happened when the rich became Christians?!  
Yes, the conversion of Constantine was helpful in one sense –  
the Roman government ceased to persecute Christians...  
But the resulting flood of wealthy people into the Christian church  
meant that the church became full of people who didn't *really* believe in Jesus –  
who were merely using the church for their own social advancement!

Today, we all pretend to be rich!  
And oh, we all have all the trappings of wealth –  
but most of us live on the edge.  
If you are doing *well*, you may have an emergency fund  
that could cover expenses for a few months –  
but most of us couldn't survive the loss of our income for long.

Point one dealt with love for God.  
Since we are “heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who *love him.*” (v5)  
If you love God, then you will love *all* those who are made in his image –  
without favoritism.

In verses 8-13, James goes on to apply his point about favoritism in a second way:

## **2. Love and Favoritism: How Do You Speak? How Do You Act? (v8-13)**

### **a. The Point: Love Your Neighbor (v8)**

Verses 1-7 have already rooted love for neighbor in our love for God.  
Now he fleshes this out more fully.  
And in the same way, James makes his point, uses an example,  
and then exhorts us to greater faithfulness.

And James makes his basic point in a way that no one could possibly contradict:  
<sup>8</sup> *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.*

How do you disagree with that?!  
I think everyone agrees!  
Anyone who loves his neighbor as himself is *doing well!*

But notice how James says it.  
He calls it “the royal law” – the law of the kingdom.  
Jesus once said that the whole of the Law and the Prophets –

in other words, the whole of the Scriptures – could be summed up in this:  
“Love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength,  
this is the first and the great commandment.  
And a second is like it – you shall love your neighbor as yourself.  
On these two commands depend all the law and the prophets.” (Matt 22)

So when James calls it the “royal law” – the law of the kingdom –  
he is simply agreeing with Jesus!  
(And we already saw the importance of love for God in verse 5 – and in 1:12).

It’s not that the rest of the law is irrelevant –  
it is rather that love of God and neighbor is the summary of the whole law,  
so we must interpret the rest of the law in the light of this.  
When you are studying a passage of scripture,  
you should ask yourself, “how does this passage show me  
how to love God and neighbor?”

And further, James does not merely say “obey the royal law” –  
he says *fulfill* – (teleo) to complete or perfect it.  
James has already used this root several times –  
“let steadfastness do its *perfect* work” (1:4)  
“and sin when it is “fully” grown brings forth death” (1:15)  
“every good and *perfect* gift is from above” (1:16)  
“the one who looks into the *perfect* law” (1:25).  
So now, it is not merely the *law* that is perfect.  
But the one who *lives out* the law!

In other words, if you bring to completion the perfect law, you are doing well.  
Given the severity of James’ words to his hearers,  
there may well be a hint of irony here:  
“if you are *really* fulfilling the royal law... you are doing well” –

But, of course, the problem is that they are *not*:

#### **b. Example: Favoritism Is Sin (v9-11)**

<sup>9</sup> *But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

James has already demonstrated this in verses 4-5.  
Any way in which we judge people based on outward appearance is a sin.  
(This is why it is proper to call *racism* a sin)  
And all it takes is *one transgression* to make you a law-breaker:

<sup>10</sup> *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.* <sup>11</sup> *For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery*



*but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*

Do you really believe this?

One little sin is all it takes to make you guilty of all of it!?

Well, it all depends:

is Jesus right?

When Jesus said that *all the law and the prophets* depend on these two commands, he was saying that the Ten Commandments – and all other parts of the law – are simply ways of expressing love for God and neighbor.

Why is murder wrong?

Because it seeks to destroy the image of God –  
and therefore is a violation of love for God and neighbor.

Why is partiality wrong?

Because it dishonors one who is made in God's image –  
and therefore is a violation of love for God and neighbor.

So if you keep all the commandments – except one –  
if you only stumble in *one place* –  
then you are guilty of the whole law.

And notice how James says this:

“for He who said ‘do not commit adultery’ also said ‘do not murder.’”

We are not just talking about a string of arbitrary commands.

We are talking about the self-revelation of a holy God  
who wants us to be in relationship with *him*.

The reason why Jesus said that all the law and the prophets depend on  
love for God and neighbor  
is because *love* is the fulfillment of the law!

I want you to remember this!

God's standard is perfect obedience –  
by which he means *perfect love*.

Now, we have to be careful – because *we* do not to define what love is!  
God has shown us in his Word what love is!

God *never* says that it's okay to commit some sins!

Sometimes we talk as though God is only really concerned with the “big ones” –  
don't murder – don't commit adultery –  
but if you just tell a little white lie, it's no big deal!

Now it's true that *some sins, in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations  
are more heinous in the sight of God than others* (SC) –

but *every sin deserves God's wrath and curse,  
both in this life, and in that which is to come!* (SC)

God's standard is perfection.

Our problem is that we fail!

And James knows this!

James will go on to say in 3:2, "We all stumble in many ways" –

but James does not say that in order to *excuse* our sin!

He says it to challenge us to *repent* and turn to the Lord!

Indeed, here in verses 12-13, James recognizes our *need* for mercy –

and thus our need for *showing* mercy to others:

**c. Exhortation: Show Mercy! (v12-13)**

<sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James has used several terms now for the law:

"the perfect law, the law of liberty" (1:25)

"the royal law" (2:8) –

and now we are back to "the law of liberty."

It is the perfect law – because it covers everything,

and it shows us the way that we should live and walk!

It is the royal law – the law of the kingdom – because it expresses the will of King Jesus!

And it is the law of liberty because it is the law that brings freedom!

James wants us to understand that the law is *not* a bad thing.

The law is not holding us captive.

Sure, Paul will use that imagery in Galatians 3 –

but even in Galatians he will go on to say (6:2),

"bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Indeed, in Galatians 5:14, Paul will also say that the whole law is fulfilled in one word:

"you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The law had a temporary function from Moses to Christ

to focus all the sins of humanity on Israel –

so that Jesus could come as the true Israel, to second Adam –

and thus bring freedom to humanity!

Your words and your deeds need to reflect the mercy and justice of the kingdom.

To put it simply, how do you want to be judged?

As we have often seen in the scriptures,

God uses a form of poetic justice.

As you have done to others, God will do to you!

If you have shown partiality – if you have dealt unfairly with others –

then with the measure that you used, God will deal with you.

And James concludes that “mercy triumphs over judgment.”

In other words, you are one day going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

And you will be judged under the perfect law of liberty.

If you have shown mercy to others,

then mercy will triumph over judgment in your case.

If you have *not* shown mercy to others,

then mercy will *not* triumph over judgment in your case!

This is the same thing that Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer –

“forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” –

If we do not forgive others, then we should not expect God to forgive us.