

James

Law of Liberty, Judgment, Mercy

October 02, 2011

I. Introduction

A. **James 2:1-13** . . . My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. [2] For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, [3] and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," [4] have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? [5] Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? [6] But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? [7] Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? [8] If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. [9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. [10] For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. [11] For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. [12] So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. [13] For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

B. Prayer

II. There Is To Be No Impartiality, Prejudice, Discrimination In The Church

A. Last Sunday we ended with verse 8 of James 2. And to remind you what we were talking about, let me summarize it this way:

1. Judging the worth of any Christian by their outward appearance or popularity or position or riches or charisma, and using that judgment to determine how we will treat him, is not only wrong, it reveals a heart of evil reasoning and a life built on ungodly principles. Such thinking and reasonings, and the resulting discrimination is to have no place in us or in the church.
2. If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

B. **James 2:9-11** . . . [9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. [10] For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. [11] For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

1. The main point of **verses 8-9** is this: If we are doing what God tells us to do in our relations with others (loving them as we love ourselves), then we are doing well. If we are not doing what God tells us to do in our relations to others, then we are sinning. Showing partiality to any in the church is sin – in that it is both an act of pride and an act of breaking the royal law of love.
2. The main point of **verses 9-11** is this: You may think you are living a good Christian life because, generally speaking, you are keeping most of God's commandments – or at least most of the ones you know. However, if you knowingly and willfully break just one of them, it is as if you are breaking all of them. Why?
 - a. Because each individual law from God comes with two parts. The first part is the principle on which the law is built. The second part is the details or specifics of the law.
 - (1) For example, "You shall not commit adultery," or "You shall not kill" are very specific in their declaration and application.
 - (2) Yet both laws are built on the same principle, which is: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." For indeed, no one who loves his neighbor as himself is going to murder his neighbor. And in the same way, no one who loves his neighbor is going to commit adultery with his neighbor's spouse. Both these acts are outside the boundaries of love.
 - (3) The point here is that every law that deals with human relationships is built on this same principle of love – that is, loving others as we love ourselves – which is why God says in **Romans 13:10**, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."
 - b. In other words, though there are numerous laws with specific applications, there is only one principle upon which all these laws are built – and that principle is love, or doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. Therefore, when we break just one of God's laws by choosing not to love those around us as we want to be loved, it is the same as breaking all of them.

3. Now back to our text here in **James 2:9-11**. Partiality breaks the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Therefore, partiality, prejudice, discrimination, racism, and the like is not just missing the mark or a mistake or a failure on our part. It is sin! And as John points out, all sin is lawlessness, and lawlessness is rebellion against the authority – who in the case of the law by which we are to live is God, himself.

- a. And as I have already said, this sin includes the evil of pride – which is come from arrogance on our part and is highly offensive to God. And this pride consists of thinking so highly of ourselves that we feel justified in thinking less of others.
- b. This sin includes choosing not to love others as we love ourselves, which is a selfish double-standard made more obvious by our expressed expectations and even demands to be treated as we think we ought to be treated.
- c. This sin also brings greater condemnation on us. How you ask? In that we judge others for not loving us the way we want to be loved, while at the same time carelessly overlooking, or choosing not to, or even refusing to love others in this same way. And yet we know God has said that we will be judged in the same way we judge others.
- d. And this sin is unmerciful – which means by being partial, by discriminating and being prejudiced, we are acting unmercifully toward those who are experiencing our prejudice. This is self-destructive, because God will show mercy to us according to the way we show mercy to others. In other words, when we fail to show mercy to others, we are telling God to withhold His mercy from us.

C. **James 2:12** . . . So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

1. There are three important points in this statement.
 - a. **First**, a day of judgment is coming for everyone, and that includes God's children as well. We all must stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account for how we have lived in this life.
 - b. **Second**, one of the primary basis for this final judgment is the law of liberty – which is “love your neighbor as yourself.” This means the standard of how well we wanted to be treated in this life, will be used by God to determine how well we treated others.

- c. **Third**, knowing that a day of judgment is coming, and knowing that our treatment of others will be judged according to how we wanted to be treated, be wise rather than foolish: live now as those who loves others as they love themselves.
- 2. The Easy and Hard of the law of liberty
 - a. The law of liberty is relatively easy to obey in that there is no list of rules or specific applications of those rules that we must remember to do or not do when dealing with others. All we need do is keep in mind how we would want to be treated in a specific situation and act accordingly. Of course this assumes that, generally speaking, we want what God wants for us so that our treatment of others is generally in keeping with the whole of God's word and His righteousness.
 - b. It seems to me there is a hard part to living according to the law of liberty. Let me give you five reasons:
 - (1) **We have to think:** The law of liberty is a principle, not a specific "do this or don't do that".
 - (a) This means it is up to us to figure out and determine how best to apply that principle given the situation, the contributing circumstances, and the person or people involved.
 - (b) Therefore, we must think deeply and seriously, and even give time to contemplation if we are going to love everyone in the same way we love ourselves – and especially if we are to love those who are hard to love, or those who treat us as if we are their enemy.
 - (2) **We must believe we are safe in God's hands:** Loving others as you love yourself means looking out for and even making personal sacrifices in order to secure their overall well-being – which includes such things as their safety, health, security, provision in the face of need, support in the face of injustice, happiness, rest, encouragement, companionship, and help. To give like this to others, we must believe someone greater than ourselves is looking out for our well-being. And that someone greater is God. Without faith in Him to be our provider and protector, we will return to selfishness in looking out for our well-being and happiness first and foremost.
 - (3) **We have to die to self (selfishness):** If self is still the most important person to us, we will be selfish first, and give what

is left over to others. I think you can agree that this is NOT loving others as we love ourselves.

(a) Loving others as we love ourselves requires putting them on the same level as us. We may do this for a select few adults. And we most likely will do this for our children and grand-children. But the circle of loving others as we love ourselves is not this small. The circle of love includes any person we encounter who has need of what we have – be it time, energy, goods, services, money, or something else.

(b) And it is in this larger circle of love – that is, loving those outside our family or those who are difficult to love – that we discover the challenge of dying to self and selfishness.

(c) And I will add here that even in our closest relationships, that is, our relationships with those who are near and dear to us, we can find it hard to die to selfishness and love that other person as we want to be loved.

(d) My point is simply this: it is hard to die to self when it comes to loving others as we love ourselves.

(4) **We have to nurture godly qualities:** To live according to the law of love, we must have a heart ruled by compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, long-suffering, and forgiveness. This requires nurturing such qualities, which is no small task in itself. Surely God freely gives us all the help and strength needed to pursue and nurture these qualities, but if we are to acquire these qualities, we must do our part – and that is where the hard work comes in.

(5) **We have to remain vigilant:** Exalting self above others and returning to selfish ways is always tempting – especially when we are tired or feeling a bit sorry for ourselves or feeling unappreciated or feeling taken advantage of. Vigilance is hard work, for there is no vacation from vigilance when the enemy is always right outside the door.

3. **James 2:12 . . .** So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

D. **James 2:13 . . .** For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

1. According to popular teaching in the church today, God has no conditions beyond the condition of trusting in Jesus for salvation from

the penalty of our sin. And even this condition is being challenged as excessive or unrealistic in the face of the currently popular teaching on God's love for all mankind. However, we find a different story in God's word – and it is to God's word that we ought to turn for our understanding of God and God's dealings with us.

2. Here in **verse 13**, God is laying down a condition for the judgment of God against us: Show mercy and you will receive mercy. Fail to show mercy and you will not be shown mercy. Now it is important to note that there is a curse and a blessing with this condition.
 - a. Failure to show mercy to others (an aspect of not loving them as we want to be loved) will result in losing out on God's mercy as He judges us – both in this life and at the final judgment.
 - b. But on the other side, if we love others as we want to be loved, which by the very nature of doing so will result in showing them mercy, we can count on God showing us mercy in His dealings with us in this life and at the final judgment.
3. To affirm the truth of this condition as stated here in James, here are three other scriptures that say essentially the same thing.
 - a. **Matthew 5:7** . . . Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
 - b. **Proverbs 11:17** . . . The merciful man does himself good, but the cruel man does himself harm.
 - c. **Proverbs 21:13** . . . He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.
4. And to affirm the reality of certain conditions set by God in relation to His dealings with us, let me take you to the scriptures again.
 - a. **Luke 6:37** . . . Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. **Matthew 7:2** . . . For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.
 - b. **Matthew 6:14-15** . . . For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [15] But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.
 - (1) **Matthew 18:32-35** . . . Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. [33] 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' [34] And his lord, moved with anger, handed him

over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. [35] My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

- (2) **Mark 11:25-26** . . . Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. [26] [But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.]

- c. **Luke 6:38** . . . Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.
5. God's point here is simple: If we do not love others as we love ourselves, we are sinning and will be judged accordingly. And bear in mind that our failure to love as we love ourselves includes a failure to show mercy – which will cost us dearly in this life and at the final judgment. But we can rectify that by loving everyone we meet as we want to be loved, which by the very nature of loving them this way will include showing them mercy. And if we love this way, we can count on receiving mercy from God each day and once again at His final judgment.

III. Conclusion