

THE LAW OF LIBERTY

James 2:10-13

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INTRODUCTION: The beauty of James' practical moral approach to faith is that it cuts through all the religious words and rhetoric. We can fool each other so easily, simply by learning to quote a few Bible verses and slip in some evangelical clichés. We can learn to give a proper Christian testimony and deliver it with apparent conviction, but that does not mean our faith is real.

James is saying that real faith is not indicated only by avoiding the big no-no's like murder and adultery, but by how we treat people, especially the needy.

The challenge in this passage is first personal, and then corporate. We must by all means apply James' tests to ourselves, but must never apply them to others, for no one can know another's heart. **Personally**, how is my heart in the matter of favoritism?

The application for any church which is made up of educated, upwardly mobile people is, are we strong corporately in caring for our community as we think of the poor, the disabled, the disenfranchised, and the broken as believers who intentionally submit to God's word.

I. THE CONTEXT OF THIS PASSAGE. 10-11

A. ITS POSITION. 10

James sees the law as a seamless garment which, when ripped in one place, tears the whole garment.

Early Jewish writings, and later writings such as the Talmud, said, "*If he do all, but omit one, he is guilty of all severally.*"

James is reminding us that this law is a part of the entire law which stands as a unified whole. Partiality, murder, and adultery are seen to be a part of the whole law. To fail to treat our neighbor as ourself is to be guilty of disregarding the law of God. James is not saying that all sins are the same in magnitude and result, but he is making the point that breaking one of the commandments puts the offender in the class of transgressors.

Main Position – although God's law has many facets, it is essentially one, being the expression of the character and will of God Himself. To violate the law at any one point is not to violate one commandment only; it is to violate the will of God and to contradict the character of God.

NOTE: By beginning verses 10-11 with the word "**for,**" James indicates that he is going to explain how an act of favoritism makes a person a lawbreaker. (9)

It is apparent that James wishes to make a very special point when he speaks of someone who **“keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point.”** James 3:2, **“For we all stumble in many things...”**

“Stumble” – word may describe an insignificant offense or error; it was also used as a synonym for the verb, “to sin,” but with no indication of the degree of seriousness.

“one point” – an attention getter!

A weak point exists in all of our efforts.

Heb. 12:1, “sin which so easily ensnares us”

- ◆ Solomon – it was women
- ◆ Moses – it was temper
- ◆ Demas – it was love of this world
- ◆ Ananias & Sapphira – it was keeping up appearances
- ◆ Judas – it was love of money
- ◆ Pilate – it was love of power
- ◆ Achan – it was covetousness
- ◆ Paul – it was an evil desire; lust

Romans 7:7-12, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.”

In this context, think of the **“rich young ruler,”** Matthew 19:16-22, he sensed that something was lacking in his life. Yet, note **v.20.**

“sell all, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Certain sins do not tempt us at all. But we all have at least one area where we are vulnerable.

B. ITS PRINCIPLE. 11

James is not saying that one sin is as bad as another. He is not saying that it would be just as bad for us to be disrespectful to someone as it would be for us to kill someone. He is not talking about the degree of guilt, but is simply saying that there is real guilt if we violate the law at any point. Not every link in the chain has to be broken for a chain to be broken.

There are a thousand doors to rebellion, many of them secret. For every person whose violations of the laws of God are made public, there are thousands of us who transgress secretly. Perhaps we fall to jealousy, pride, self-righteousness, or lust. However we disobey God, we are sinners.

Yet, James call God's law the "**law of liberty**" (12), because it frees us to enjoy the greatest fulfillment we could possible know.

It is a law that we obey, not because of fear of punishment or because we are coerced into it, but because God plants His love in our lives. This love causes us to want to obey the law.

1 Thessalonians 4:9, "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another"

II. THE CONDUCT OF THESE PEOPLE. 12

A. IN LIGHT OF THE EXHORTATION. 12a.

AN APPEAL

"so speak and so do" – *so* is emphatic and also serves to distribute the emphasis equally between the two verbs. I have heard it said, "*What gets done is what gets inspected.*" James reminds us of the coming inspection.

James knows that good works cannot produce redemption, but genuine redemption produces obedient and holy living that will be characterized by good works. Living faith will be demonstrated by a holy life.

This text reminds us of **James 1:26-27**, what we say needs to be accompanied by corresponding actions.

B. IN LIGHT OF THE ADMONITION. 12b

AN AWARENESS

"as those who will be judged by the law of liberty"

Remember, a reviewing not for *condemnation*
Rom. 8:1, but *inspection*

2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Romans 14:12, "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."

Romans 14:10b, “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

Another translation of **1 Cor 3:11-15**

“True, some believers’ works will be seen as gold, silver, costly stones, but others will suffer immense shame for their wood, hay, or straw. Truly, our work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

This passage really *challenges* me: I will definitely, by all means, survive this judgment, however, what my life has built may not survive.

“our work will be shown for what it is”

This calls for *Spiritual Meditation*

“by the law of liberty” – encouraging; question here, “*Isn’t the law a restriction of freedom?*” Not for the sincere believer.

In the freedom of the law of love, the child of God flourishes. Therefore, the Christian lives not in fear of the law but in joy of God’s truth. As long as he stays within the boundaries of the law of God, he enjoys complete freedom. But the moment he crosses one of those boundaries, he becomes a slave to sin and loses his freedom.

John 8:32, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:34, “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.’”

III. THE COMPASSION AND ITS PRINCIPLE. 13

If our lives have been characterized by overbearing condemnation of others, if we have condemned others because of their failures, it will be evident that we have not received the mercy of God. If we have received mercy, we will be merciful to others.

Matthew 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

The miracle of being saved is a radically changed outlook, a dramatic shift in attitude toward others. Mercy should characterize the believer’s life. If there is no mercy or compassion expressed in one’s life toward another, there is a strong possibility that this person has no vertical connection with God.

Partiality and favoritism can be overcome when mercy is expressed.

Mercy conquers judgment. This is what happened at the cross.

1 John 4:17, “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.”

Your compassion (mercy) will testify to your saving faith. The mercy a man has shown others as fruit of a life touched by God’s saving mercy will triumph over judgment.

CONCLUDING ILLUSTRATION

Matthew 18:21-35, “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

‘But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ‘So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.’”

Unmerciful Servant

Owed \$20 million dollars - compassionately released him

Someone owed him \$2 thousand dollars - no compassion, threw him in jail

QUESTION: How can we not show compassion when we have received so-o-o much?

CONCLUDING SUMMATION:

We can fulfill the law of love only when we:

- 1. Acknowledge that we have broken God's law**
- 2. Discover that only the life of love can fulfill that law**
- 3. Believe that only Christ can supply that love**
- 4. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit's power day-by-day so that God's love can dwell within us and flow from us to touch the lives of others**