

“The Royal Law of Liberty”

June 10, 2012

Text: James 2:8-13

Today’s text will remind us of those challenging words in

Lev 19:18=> *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Jesus recited this verse as the 2nd of the 2 great commands which, taken together, are the sum/substance of God’s whole Law.

The first, He said, was=> *“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH”* (Mk 12:30).

Whereas the 1st commandment requires us to love God more than we love ourselves—with all our heart/soul/mind/strength; The 2nd commandment only calls us to love others as much as we love ourselves.

But that is still a formidable challenge.

A lady answered her doorbell to find a man w/ a sad expression, standing on her front porch.

He said, “I’m sorry to disturb you, but I’m collecting money for an unfortunate family in the neighborhood.

“The husband is out of work, the kids are hungry, the utilities will soon be cut off, and worse, they’re going to be kicked out of their apartment if they don’t pay the rent by this afternoon.”

“I’ll be happy to help,” the lady said, “but who are you?”

He answered, “I’m the landlord.”

By contrast, real Xns have a capacity for selfless love that you see when they walk in the Spirit, rather than the flesh.

God has poured out His own love into our hearts (Rom 5:5), made us partakers of His own divine/loving nature (II Pet 1:4), and written His law of love w/i us, making it part of our character (Jer 31:33).

But loving one's neighbor as oneself can still be a challenge.

Think about it=>

It's not enough for us simply not to hate our neighbor.

If I claim=> "I don't say unkind things to him, or about him," that's good, but it doesn't fulfill the command.

The Lord tells me, I'm to love him.

I'm not even obeying God's command to love, if I do good deeds for him in a heartless way=> "Here's a can of beans. I brought it because we Xns are supposed to do that sort of thing. Why don't you get a job & buy your own beans?" Or, "Here's 50 cents, now leave me alone."

If we gave our neighbor nothing, but spoke to him kindly, he would prob. have appreciated it more.

It might even be best for us to withhold financial help, in certain cases knowing e.g. that II Thes 3 says=>

"If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (3:10).

But we can tell him that, in a gentle/respectful way.

Someone: I've tried to love my neighbor, but he's an odd sort of person, and we have nothing in common. I don't think he

even wants anything to do with me, & I'm not about to beg him for the "privilege" of helping him.

X has commanded us to love our avowed enemy.

If that's the standard, we can surely learn to love an odd neighbor.

Jesus gave us a simple rule of thumb=> "*Just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way*" (Lk 6:31).

It's like my mom used to say=> "Everybody's strange but me and thee. And sometimes I even have questions about thee."

In today's text, James will refer to love as "*the royal law*."

He will point out to his readers that the lack of such love is at the root of the sinful favoritism that existed in their churches.

As we've seen over the last 2 weeks, they were treating the rich w/ great respect, but treating the poor w/ great disdain.

They may have viewed that as mere impoliteness, & not actually sinful.

But using a sequence of logical statements, James is going to relate it to God's royal law of love, and show his readers that from God's p.o.v. their favoritism is just as much a sin, as if they had committed adultery.

In our text, James will demonstrate the sinfulness of favoritism thru evaluation/explanation/exhortation...

*** The Evaluation**

James will evaluate the conduct of 2 groups among his readers=>
those not guilty of favoritism, and those who were guilty.
He will commend the 1st group for their loving behavior.
But most of this text will be directed at the 2nd group,
showing them how serious a sin their favoritism
actually is.

1st, the Positive Evaluation

[James 2:8]=> *“If, however, you are fulfilling the **royal law**, according to the Scripture, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,’ you are doing well.”*

James goes right to the heart of the issue of favoritism.

It’s a sin because it violates God’s command to love.

Favoritism selectively treats certain people in a very
unloving way—and that makes it wrong.

It says to them, “You’re not part of our group, so you’re not
important.”

Some of James’ readers might have asked, “Where in the Bible
does it actually say that favoritism is a sin?”

James’ answer: Favoritism violates God’s command in Lev
19:18=> *“You shall **love** your **neighbor** as yourself.”*

James tells those among his readers who are not indulging in
such favoritism, that they are *“doing well”* (*kalos*—
beautifully).

They not only love others as they love themselves, but also
as God loves, & wants all believers to love.

James refers to what he calls *“the royal law.”*

Usually, when the Bible speaks of “the Law,” it’s a reference to the Mosaic Law, including the 10 Commandments, a/w/a all of God’s other commands in the Pentateuch. This ethical code is God’s moral will for man, and it’s also a moral description of God’s own character.

But what God really wants from man is love for Himself/others. The Law simply describes some of the outward behaviors that are typical/expected of those who truly love. It describes what *agape*-love looks like, in terms of moral conduct.

So the Apostle Paul wrote=> “*The whole **Law is fulfilled** in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’*” (Gal 5:14).

I.e., the motive that should keep man from killing, stealing-from, or lying-to his neighbor, should be love.

The “*royal law*” of love is the positive side of the Mosaic Law.

* The Mosaic Law said, “*You shall not murder,*” but the royal law says, “You shall love others, seeking their wellbeing.”

Murder isn’t even a consideration; it doesn’t even come to mind.

* The Mosaic Law said, “*You shall not steal,*” but the royal law is positive—lovingly desiring to give good things for others, and seeking nothing for itself.

There’s a certain majesty about the “*royal law*” of love, because it emanates from God, the royal King.

Like the Mosaic Law, it is based on His majestic character.

But the emphasis on love makes the royal law a more
accurate/complete portrayal of God's character.

It reflects His nature, because God is love (1 Jn 4:8).

Its natural tendency is to love its neighbors, which includes
everyone w/ whom it comes in contact, just as God
does.

Because the 1st group of believers, whom James is commending,
were living according to the "*royal law*," there was no
favoritism in their response to either the rich or the poor.
Selfish favoritism manifests outwardly an inward lack of
love for others, but these Xns did love others—
rich/poor alike regardless of their status in life.

Those close to them experienced indiscriminate love.

**Regeneration makes a Xn as capable of loving others, as he is
of loving himself.**

He has become born again through faith in Jesus X.

Old attitudes/habits have passed away;

New/godly things have come/replaced them.

At the time of his regeneration, God has written His Law on that
person's heart (Jer 31:33).

In addition, the H.S. has indwelt-him and empowered-him
to obey/fulfill God's Law, out of his love for God,
& his love for the righteousness of God, and his
desire to be righteous like God.

Jesus, the most loving man whoever existed, lived according to God's "royal law," as an example for us to follow.

His love for others compelled Him to come into this world, live in poverty, and die for the welfare of others, demonstrating that unloving selfishness has no place in God's economy.

He told the Apostles "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another*" (Jn 13:34).

That's the standard by which we are to measure our love=>
X's love for us.

Then just a few minutes later He said it again=> "*This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you*" (Jn 15:12).

We are to love others the same way X loves us.

He loved us sacrificially, doing something extremely beneficial/helpful for us=> dying to save us from our sins.

We are to follow His example, in our dealings w/ others.

This attitude is to control the behavior of every believer.

Love is the outstanding proof of God's work in our hearts.

Jesus said=> "*By this all men will know that you **are** My disciples, if you have love for one another*"
(Jn 13:35).

Selfishness comes naturally to those of the world;

But not for a child of God, born from above.

He's become a partaker of God's nature & is indwelt by the Spirit, so it should be natural for him to love others.

2nd, the Negative Evaluation

[Verse 9]=> “*But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*”

The word “if,” both in this verse and the previous one, can be translated “since”—they refer to an actual occurrence/condition.

The folks in vs 8 were actually fulfilling the “*royal law*”;
These folks in verse 9 were indeed showing partiality.

James is saying, “If you show partiality, and you do....”

James evaluates those in the 2nd group of readers as sinners, convicted by the law for having shown favoritism toward the rich, at the expense of the poor.

* Not only were they “sinning” (missing the mark);

*They had even become deliberate “*transgressors*” of the law, who willfully/knowingly violated its moral standards.

They knew intuitively that their unkind treatment of the poor was wrong, but they did it anyway.

When this group read James’ words, their reaction would prob.

have been something like this=> “We may have been a little rude, but isn’t he exaggerating by calling what we did an actual ‘*sin*,’ let alone an intentional ‘*transgression*’?”

In the next few verses, James isn’t going to back down even an inch, from that severe evaluation.

Instead, he will explain why their favoritism is no mere peccadillo, but a serious crime against God and God's Law.

So we have seen James' evaluations of the 2 groups, and his conclusions in each case.

* **The Explanation** (of why their favoritism is so truly sinful)

[Verse 10]=> "***For*** [here's why] *whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*"

The Jewish Xns to whom James wrote thought of themselves as "the people of the Law."

So it must have been a crushing blow for them to hear they were guilty of having violated the entire Law.

The culprits in this case hadn't simply committed a minor infraction, but were guilty of violating the entire Law of God Himself.

God's Law is a unified whole, so that violating any one part of it, is violating the whole thing.

Some have compared it to shattering a whole pane of glass or a windshield, by striking 1 time it at just one point.

The Law expresses God's will, so any infraction against it is an act of disobedience of the Law's Creator—God Himself.

That, in fact, is the very essence of sin.

The divine standard for obedience is perfection, and that allows for no disobedience whatsoever.

Gal 3=> "***CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK***"

OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM” (Gal 3:10).

Although Paul wrote that, he was quoting Deut 27:26.

In Lev 19, God says=> “*You shall thus observe **all** My statutes, and **all** My ordinances, and do them: I am the LORD*” (Lev 19:37).

If you were to ask people, “Are you a sinner?” they might answer, “Not really. I’ve never done anything that’s really terrible, and I’ve done a lot of very good things, that offset my few bad deeds.”

In James’ view, that’s just rationalization, one of man’s endless attempts to minimize his own sense of guilt.

If a person has defied God’s will in any way at all, ever in his entire life, he is guilty of violating God’s whole Law.

He has proven beyond doubt that he is a sinner, and even worse (if possible) a willful transgressor.

His sin has demonstrated a rebellious attitude towards God.

“*Has become guilty*” has a verb tense that means the law-breaker became guilty when he sinned, & his guilt still remains.

His feelings of guilt may subside with time, but the guilt itself never will.

James creates an impossible/hypothetical case, to make his point clear.

He says, “Suppose someone were to keep the whole law.”

In reality that has never happened, & could never happen.

In chapter 3 James says=> *“We all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man”* (3:2).

James knows, as we do, there are no perfect men, which is why we all stumble.

But, he says, “Just imagine it, for the sake of the argument.”

Now James adds, “Suppose hypothetically, this sinless man stumbles in just one point of the law, one time in his life.”

What’s the result? He becomes guilty of violating the whole law, his guilt comes crashing down on his head, and it hangs over him from then on, forever.

To someone who says, “That’s not fair!” here’s James’ explanation=>

[Verse 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.”*

It doesn’t take 2 transgressions of the Law to make us a transgressor.

Just 1.

The most important word in this whole sentence is “He.”

That word puts the focus where it belongs—on God Himself.

The law is a unity because it all comes from Him and the glory of His perfectly righteous/holy character.

The Law is God’s way of showing us what He is like—
holy/sinless/glorious.

We come short of that glory (i.e., we sin) because we're not like that.

So it doesn't matter whether a person's sin is coveting, or adultery, or murder, or not keeping 1 day in the week holy, or the lovelessness of favoritism—each/every 1 of these sins offends God—the Model-for, and Writer-of, the Law.

It's foolish to think a person can be exonerated from committing one sin, by his not committing another;

“Your Honor, it's true that I stole that man's wallet, but at least I didn't mug him, so why don't we just drop the whole case?”

That's the way a lot of people think today, and that's the way some Jewish rabbis thought in James' day.

Although some of them taught that disobeying one command of the Law made a person guilty of them all, others reversed it, saying that fulfillment of one command, especially of certain key commandments, was as good as obedience to them all.

E.g. this was one of the rabbinical sayings=> “The Sabbath [keeping the Sabbath] weighs against all the precepts: if they keep it, they were reckoned as having done all.”

Any such attempt at legal tradeoffs w/i the Law is futile/foolish.

That would make the Law gracious, and there is absolutely no grace whatever in the Law.

It is an unbending/inflexible/demanding standard,
suited only to God, certain not to sinful men.

Man is obligated to keep the whole Law, w/o exception.

That's why Paul wrote=> "*As many as are of the works of the Law* [those trying to earn their salvation by obeying the Law] *are under a **curse**; for it is written 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM'*" (Gal 3:10).

The Law is a pass/fail system, so 1 violation at any point curses a person as a sinner, & demands that he be punished.

There is no room at all for grace/mercy in the Law.

This would be a frightening prospect, were it not for the gospel.

As believers, we live in the assurance that, even though we have violated the Law & offended God many times over, He has graciously forgiven our sins, because His Son Jesus X has paid the penalty for them all.

So Gal 3:13 goes on to say=> "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.*"

The gospel teaches us to cry out to Jesus, asking for the forgiveness of sin, which only He has a right to give, and is ready/willing to do so.

By our faith in Him as our Savior, we are saved from sin, and the punishment we deserve for having sinned.

So Rom 3 says=> "*A man is **justified by faith**, apart from works of the Law*" (3:28).

If you have never placed your own faith in Jesus like that, you are literally playing w/ the fire of Hell, because the Law won't negotiate w/ you, or listen to your rationalizations about having obeyed at least its most important commandments. I hope the H.S. will enable you to declare yourself a full-fledged sinner, and cast yourself by faith on the mercy of Jesus' court.

James must have felt the same urgency about this, that I do.

In verse 10 he spoke in general terms about "*whoever.*"

Here in verse 11 he says, "*you* [singular—you as an individual] *have become a transgressor of the law.*"

As you stand before God, all by yourself, to have your whole life judged, there's nothing general/theoretical about it.

Your life is at stake for all eternity.

*** The Exhortation**

Because favoritism is such a grievous/deadly sin, James closes by exhorting us to consider the seriousness of divine judgment, and therefore to completely forsake it favoritism, banning it from our lives, if we are believers.

And if we're not, allowing our favoritism to persuade us that we are sinners in need of God's grace, and asking Jesus to graciously forgive us of our sins.

James speaks of 2 different judgments here—the Judgment Seat of X (for Xns) in vs 12, & the “Great White Throne” in verse 13.

[Verses 12-13]=> *“So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty [at X’s Judgment Seat]. / For judgment [Great White Throne] will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”*

James tells his readers to “speak/act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty” (i.e., the gospel).

Who will be judged by the “law of liberty”?

Believers.

The gospel is called the “*law of liberty*” because it liberates us from the Law’s condemnation, fear of death/hell, & the bondage of sin (to which we were once enslaved).

It enables us to serve our Lord freely/wholeheartedly in the power of the H.S., out of our love for Him.

James’ actual wording appeals to us as those who are certainly about to be judged, and implies that this impending judgment should motivate us to act/speak as Xns should, here/now.

If our words/deeds are guided by love toward God and our neighbors, then the Lord will deal with us according to the “*law of liberty*” (the gospel) not according to Moses’ merciless Law.

Believers’ works will be judged at the Judgment Seat of X.

This is not the “Great White Throne,” at which the unsaved will be judged/condemned by the Law for their sin, and cast into hell.

There is no condemnation at all, for those who are in X.
So the Great White Throne judgment has nothing to do with believers.

Verse 12 is talking about X’s Judgment Seat for Xns, which will determine (according to

II Cor 5) each believer’s eternal rewards, “*according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (5:10).

Favoritism, & every other sin, will be judged to be “bad.”

Not that this “bad” hasn’t been atoned for by X’s death, if we are believers.

But bad nonetheless.

I Cor 3 says that our life’s work “*is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work,*” whether it’s like gold/silver/precious-stones, or like worthless wood/hay/straw (3:12-13), good for nothing but the fire.

Verse 15 adds=> “*If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.*”

As Xns, our works will be judged on the basis of the “*law of liberty*” to determine whether/not they give evidence of God-given love, which is pleasing to the Lord, and which will prove that we have placed our faith in Jesus X.

The reason we want to be among those judged by the “*law of liberty*,” is that the alternative is merciless judgment.

This is the “Great White Throne” Judgment for non-believers.

Their judgment too will be based on their works, which will demonstrate that they have shown no mercy and know nothing of God’s *agape* love.

Jesus said=> “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. / Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Mt 5:7-8).

The merciful ones He meant, were those who are pure in heart, because they’ve been cleansed by His blood. They are born-again believers.

They were regenerated/transformed by the H.S. when they called out to Jesus by faith, and their transformation has made itself obvious by their loving deeds of mercy.

The Spirit has given them compassion/love for others, so they truly desire to show mercy to those in need.

In their case, God’s mercy will triumph over judgment, so that even His own divine justice will demand that they receive mercy, because their sins are forgiven.

In X, they are safe from judgment, & can expect God to deal w/ them mercifully, so they don’t need to fear judgment at all.

By contrast, the lives of the unsaved will demonstrate an obvious lack of such mercy, & their judgment will be merciless.

They will be judged by the Law, & they will get no mercy,
no grace.

They will be like the servant in Mt 18 who owed his master
10,000 talents, but was mercifully forgiven his debt.

He then went out & demanded the 100 denarii owed him by
another servant, choking him, & demanding
immediate repayment.

The master again summoned the 1st servant & said, “*You
wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you
entreated me. / Should you not also have had **mercy**
on your fellow slave, even as I had **mercy** on you?*”
(18:32f).

The point is this=> If you come before X’s Judgment Seat &
have lived a life of merciful deeds towards others, Jesus
will be merciful to you, because your mercy/compassion
will testify to the fact that you have become born again by
placing your faith in X.

In your case, mercy will have triumphed over judgment.

Meanwhile, if you haven’t personally believed in Jesus, I would
urge you to do so w/o delay, because He has given you fair
warning, that judgment will be merciless for those whose
merciless lives prove that they have not appropriated God’s
mercy by believing in Jesus X, & receiving God’s gracious
forgiveness of their sins.

“The Royal Law of Liberty”

June 10, 2012

Text: James 2:8-13

1. Real Christians have a capacity for selfless [10 love] that you see when they walk in the Spirit rather than the flesh.

Lev 19:18; Mk 12:30; Rom 5:5; II Pet 1:4; Jer 31:33; II Thes 3:10; Lk 6:31

2. In today's text James will point out that the lack of such love is at the root of [14 sinful] favoritism.

In our text James will demonstrate the sinfulness of favoritism, through evaluation, explanation, and exhortation...

*** The Evaluation**

The Positive Evaluation

[James 2:8]

3. James goes right to the heart of the issue of favoritism; it is a sin because it violates God's command to [10 love].

Lev 19:18

4. God wants from man love for Himself and for others; the Law simply describes some of the outward behaviors that are typical and expected of those who truly [10 love].

Gal 5:14; I Jn 4:8

5. Regeneration makes a Christian as capable of loving others as he is of loving [16 himself].

Jer 31:33; Jn 13:34; 15:12

6. Love is the outstanding proof of [12 God's] work in our hearts.

Jn 13:35

The Negative Evaluation

[Verse 9]

7. James evaluates those in the second group of readers as sinners, convicted by the Law for having shown favoritism toward the [10 rich] at the expense of the poor.

*** The Explanation**

[Verse 10]

8. God's Law is a unified whole, so that violating any part of it is violating the [12 whole] thing.

Gal 3:10; Deut 27:26; Lev 19:37; Jms 3:2

[Verse 11]

9. The word "*He*" puts the focus where it belongs—on God; the Law is a unity because it all comes from Him and the glory of [8 His] perfectly righteous and holy character.

Gal 3:10

10. Believers live in the assurance that, even though we have violated the Law and offended God many times over, He has graciously forgiven our sins because His Son Jesus Christ has paid the [16 penalty] for them all.

Gal 3:13; Rom 3:28

*** The Exhortation**

11. Because favoritism is such a deadly sin, James closes by exhorting us to consider the seriousness of [14 divine] judgment.

[Verses 12-13]

12. Believers' works will be judged at the Judgment [10 Seat] of Christ.

II Cor 5:10; I Cor 3:12-13, 15

13. The reason we want to be among those judged by the "*law of liberty*," is that the alternative is [22 merciless] judgment.

Mt 5:7-8; 18:32-33

14. If you come before Christ's Judgment Seat, a life of merciful deeds towards others will testify to the fact that you have become born again by [12 faith] in Christ.