

The Evil of Favoritism in the Church, Part 3

Scripture: James 2:8-13

Code: 59-14

Let's open our Bibles then together to James chapter 2. And we'll continue our look at the first 13 verses of this wonderful chapter along with the theme of "The Evil of Favoritism in the Church...The Evil of Favoritism in the Church."

My dictionary defines "favoritism" in this way: quote: "Preferential attitude and treatment of a person or group over another having equal claims and rights," end quote. Preferential treatment, preferential attitude toward a person or group over another having equal claims and rights. In other words, unjustified partiality, treating one person better than another person because for some reason or another you prefer them. There is no inherent, no intrinsic and no needful reason for such treatment. People with equal needs are to be treated with equality. And yet we all fall into the problem of favoritism because of a person's looks, because of their clothes, because of their profession, possessions, life style, education, money, position, fame, whatever it is, we are tended...we have a tendency to treat people differently based upon those considerations. We would perhaps be more generous to a person who appeals to us from that perspective, perhaps more kind, more forgiving, more loving and that is by dictionary definition and also more importantly by God's definition favoritism and favoritism is a sin. James 2:9 says, "If you have partiality or respect of persons or favoritism, you commit sin." That is a sin in no uncertain terms.

It is foreign to the nature of God. You remember that in Deuteronomy 10:17 it says, "For the Lord your God is the God of Gods and Lord of Lords, the great, the mighty and the awesome God who does not show partiality." The perfection of God in His nature is manifest in the fact that He's absolutely impartial. God treats everyone equal based on their need and their spiritual relationship to Him. He is not impressed with how they dress, He's not impressed with how much money they have, what positions they hold, what marks in the world they have set, what fame they might have obtained. He is not impressed with anything to do with their profession or their economic status, the home or car. He is not impressed with that at all. That is a non-issue with God. He treats all equally based on need and spiritual relationship to Him.

Consequently, that is the way believers are to act toward other people. And so James is instructing us regarding loving people equally with no regard for their status, regarding only their spiritual relationship to God and their need. In fact, this is another in the list of tests of genuine saving faith. True believers respond properly to trials, to temptation and to the Word of God. All three of those were in chapter 1. Now in chapter 2 he says, "True believers respond properly to one another without

favoritism." The pattern of our lives as it's stated in Philippians 2:2 is to have the same love. That is to love everyone the same, with no regard for who they are in terms of worldly circumstances. Because we bear the Lord's name, because we are to exhibit His attributes, it is essential that we exist within the church in relationships with one another to have no favoritism, no partiality. We are to have a love which does not discriminate but it acts in mercy to anyone in need, no matter what their social status, no matter what may be those things which in the world's eyes might put them to a lower level than someone else. And that is a mark of saving faith.

To translate it into the terms of 1 John it is nothing more than brotherly love. Loving someone is sharing with them in regard to their need without regard to their social status. This marks true believers. John put it, "If you say you love God and you don't love one another, then you're not telling the truth." True redemption brings about love without favoritism. Sure there are times when we're sinful and we fail to do that. But nonetheless, that is the pursuit of the life of a true believer to treat all equally in the basis of need and spiritual relationship.

And this was an issue, obviously, among the people to whom James wrote. And he is telling them, in effect, "Do a little inventory on your life. If you want to know where you stand with God, how do you respond to trials? How do you respond to temptation? How do you respond to the Word? And how do you respond to opportunities to show mercy and kindness and love toward others without regard for who they are?"

Now in having a proper understanding of this matter of favoritism, and I'm just reviewing briefly here, James begins with, number one, the principle. Do you remember it in verse 1? "My brethren," literally he says, "do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." That's an excellent translation in the New American Standard. You cannot in the one hand hold on to the Christian faith and in the other hand hold on to partiality and favoritism. The two are mutually exclusive. Being partial to people because of their social status, because of their economics or their looks or whatever is inconsistent with the Christian faith which brings everyone to the same level. We are all sinners before God, we are all in need of mercy and grace. We are all forgiven. We are all indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. We are all brought into the same body of Christ. We are all prepared to live eternally with God in heaven. There is real equality in the body of Christ and there must be equal treatment as well. God is impartial. Christ is impartial. The Spirit is impartial. And we are consistently with the trinity to be impartial as well.

Then he goes from the principle to the example. Do you remember it in verses 2 to 4? If there comes into the assembly a man with gold rings, literally a gold-fingered man, that is he has probably a plurality of gold rings on his hand, and he's in fine clothing, there comes also in a poor man in wretched clothing. And if you show favoritism to the one wearing the fine clothing and say, "Sit here in a good place." And you say to the poor man, "Stand over there or sit under my footstool," are you not then partial in yourselves or among yourselves and have become judges with evil motives?

In other words, where you can see the partiality fleshing out is in the way you treat a rich man as over against a poor man in the assembly of the church. Such action shows the sin of favoritism, shows an arbitrary judgment based on nothing more than a man's appearance rather than having sensitivity to his need. That is precisely anti-Christian behavior. It was not wrong to say to the rich man, "Here, take this fine seat in a good place." It was wrong to say to the poor man, "Sit down on the floor or get out of the way." It would have been right to say to both men, "Take this seat in a fine place" and to give deference to both of them rather than preferring one over the other. That demonstrates a lack of Christian love which may be an indicator of the absence of a transformed life. And so it becomes a test of genuine saving faith.

From the example then last time we noted that James moved to the inconsistency. And he wants us to understand how inconsistent this is in verses 5 to 7 and so he says, "Listen, my beloved brethren, here's reason number one why this is inconsistent that treats the rich better than the poor, has not God chosen...that is chosen for salvation...has not God chosen for salvation the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him?" When it comes to populating the Kingdom, when it comes to choosing men and women to love Him, when it comes to promising eternal life, predominantly those people God has chosen are among the common people of the world. And we remember, don't we, 1 Corinthians 1 where Paul says, "Not many noble and not many mighty." Not many great folks. God has chosen the common in a way to demonstrate His grace and to show that God is not partial. Not many mighty, not many noble, not many great ones populate the Kingdom...mostly just plain common folks. And if God has chosen the poor, how can you choose against them? If God in demonstrating a heart of compassion and impartiality, if God in showing He has no favorites has chosen the ones the world does not choose, how can we who name His name do less than that?

I believe that one who walks with the Lord, James is saying, will be one who will demonstrate the heart of God, the heart of Christ, and we saw last time how Christ reached out to the poor. How God reached out to the poor. We remembered Zacchaeus in Luke 19:8 who when converted to Christ immediately wanted to give to the poor and wanted to take all of the resources he had wrongfully taken and give back four times to those who had been defrauded because when the life of God is planted in the soul of a man, he immediately is struck with the fact that he wants to show the compassion of God to those who are on the lower end of things.

So, rather than being favoritistic in the church, we should demonstrate the very opposite. It is God who has chosen the poor, for the most part, to populate His Kingdom. Verse 6, he says, "But you have looked down on the poor." You have thought little of the poor, is what the word means. You have treated the poor with indifference and disdain. How unlike God you are. How foreign this is to the true regenerate heart. It could be that you're not even a believer if you do that. It could be that you're a very disobedient believer.

Then in verse 6 he further says, "Secondly, why would you want to exalt rich people, do not rich men oppress you and draw you before the judgment seats?" That is, don't they take you into civil courts and defraud you? Isn't it true for the most part that the rich get rich at the expense of the poor? That's pretty much been the story of things throughout the history of the world. And not only to civil courts but verse 7, "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called?" They also haul you, as it were, into religious courts and persecute you for your faith. Why would you want to disdain the poor whom God has chosen to salvation in great numbers? And why would you want to give deference to the rich who are the ones who have for all the years of human life oppressed the poor, both civilly and religiously?

So, James affirms a principle, gives an example of the principle and then follows with a discussion of the inconsistency of such behavior. Then he directly begins to discuss the fourth point, that's the one we want to come to tonight, the violation. In what sense is this a violation of God's law? That's the issue here. Partiality, favoritism, respect of persons violates not only God's attributes, it is not only inconsistent with the Christian faith, not only inconsistent with what God has done in choosing the poor and with what the rich do in persecuting the righteous, but it is just plain sin by every definition. In and of itself it is sin.

Notice verse 8, this is very rich teaching here, it is very far-reaching, it goes way beyond the issue of just favoritism as we shall see...very very rich. "If you fulfill, he says, if however...and it's a first-class condition which means it could be translated since, first-class conditions in the Greek have the idea of reality or fact, so he's saying here's a fact...since you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, or when you do that by loving your neighbor as yourself, you do well." When you do that, and he's saying it is a fact that some of you do, this indicates to me that we have here not just non-Christians masquerading as Christians but true believers having lapses of disobedience.

And all of us from time to time have showed favor to people, even though that's not what we want to do in our heart and even though that's not the constant pattern of our life. Perhaps in this assembly to whom James writes, the same thing is true. So he says there are some of you, it is a fact that some of you are fulfilling the royal law, loving your neighbor as yourself, and you're doing well. Some of you are doing that. Some of you are obedient. And that's a commendation. There's no just a reprimand here, there's also a commendation.

Now he says, looking into verse 8, "Since you are fulfilling the royal law." A better translation in my judgment is the sovereign law. The idea here is that this law is a sovereign law. It is royal in the sense that it is binding. When a king makes a law, that settles the issue. There's not a court of appeal at that point. It is a sovereign law. It is, to put it in another term, a supreme law. To say it another way, a binding law. And he says in the present tense, "If you are in the process of continual fulfillment of the sovereign law," he then says, notice this, "according to the Scripture," and then he

quotes the Scripture, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, you do well."

So, the sovereign law according to the Scripture is this law: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Now where was that given as law? Leviticus 19 and verse 18. God said here is a law, a binding law, a sovereign law, in that sense a royal law made by the King of Kings, it binds you and here it is...love your neighbor as yourself. It goes along, doesn't it, with Deuteronomy 6. Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5 says the first law is to love the Lord your God with...what?...all your heart, soul, mind and strength. You take Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5, you take Leviticus 19:18, you combine them together and you have the sum of all the law and the prophets. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus pulled those together, didn't He, in Matthew's gospel and said this is the sum of all the law, on these two things hang all the law and the prophets.

Now James calls this the sovereign law. It is a law made by God and if this law is obeyed there will be no partiality. Why? If you love your neighbor as you love yourself, you'll wind up loving everybody the way you love yourself. And since you love yourself so much, and you do, I mean, it's as simple as whose mouth do you put food in, whose face do you wash, whose hair do you comb, whose body do you dress, whose looks are you concerned about when you leave the house, whose career occupies your mind, who are you trying to make comfortable, who are you trying to make happy? It's you and when you learn to occupy yourself with everyone else in the same way you are occupied with yourself, you will have no problem with partiality because no matter whether a person is poor or rich, educated or uneducated, ignorant or intelligent, no matter whether a person looks good or doesn't look good, whether they're high on the social scale or low, if you treat them all the same way you treat yourself, you will treat them all equally. And so all of the laws of human relationships, in a sense, can be summed up in this one law, the royal sovereign supreme law made by God, love your neighbor as yourself.

Now we're not talking here about some ridiculous psychological self-image kind of love. We're not talking about that kind of thing that pampers ego or that says to myself, "I'm a wonderful person, I deserve it," and plays all kinds of games like that. We're talking about love in a biblical sense which is always related to meeting needs. It is not discussed emotionally, it is always in relation to needs. And when the Bible says, "love your neighbor as yourself," it simply means based on your neighbor's need, meet that need the same way you are in such great occupation to meet your own needs. That's the issue here. It's need oriented.

So love your neighbor as yourself is not supposedly some kind of emotional affection which you are supposedly to have for yourself, which frankly I find repulsive. I have never struggled with the self-image problem. I don't even understand what that means because I look at myself and say you're a wretched sinner, you ought to go to hell, by God's grace you're going to heaven and the discussion is over. And I really don't spend a lot of time playing psychological games with myself. If I did that I don't think I could ever understand what the Word of God means. But I do understand this, that I take

care of me and God says take care of other people just the same way you take care of you.

And that's what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. To the same degree, with the same intensity, to the same benefit, with the same protection, the same concern for health and care and spiritual well being and growth in grace and holiness and Christlikeness and all those things, you are to be concerned with others as much as you are with yourself. And if that law's obeyed, there will be no partiality, James says. So, when you are continually fulfilling the supreme law given in the Scripture to love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. You're not showing any partiality.

You say, "By the way, who is my neighbor?" Go back and read Luke chapter 10 verses 30 to 37 and the same question was asked, "Who is my neighbor?" And Jesus told a story about a man on a road beaten by robbers, and you remember the good Samaritan passed by and took care of him and met his needs and bound up his wounds, and took him to an inn and fed him and left money for him to be cared with. A neighbor is anybody laying in my path with a need. And the point our Lord is making is when you come across a person with a need, take care of him the way you take care of yourself. Bind up his wounds the way you'd bind up your own. Pick him up and carry him to a comfortable place as you would do for yourself. Feed him. Pay for all of his needs just as you would care for yourself. That is the kind of love the Lord is talking about.

And by the way, that is the kind of love that fulfills the whole law. In fact, you can take the second half of the Ten Commandments, in a sense, and just set them all aside and just live by this one law, if you're faithful to this one law.

"What do you mean by that?" Well, I don't need a law that says do not murder if I treat everyone the way I treat myself. I'm not about to kill myself. I don't need a law that says don't cheat and lie and commit adultery and so forth and so on. I'm not going to defraud myself so I'm not going to defraud you. I'm not going to steal from myself so I'm not going to steal from you. I'm not going to make things difficult for my relationships so I don't want to do that to yours either.

The point is, if we understand this law, it becomes a supreme law of all human relationships. The first of those great laws the Lord mentioned in Matthew 22 and also in Mark 12, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind," that takes care of the first half of the Ten Commandments which have to do with God. If I love Him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, I'm not going to have a graven image. I'm not going to make an idol. I'm not going to take His name in vain. I'm not going to violate the worship experience with Him. So, those two things sum everything up.

The issue again, I say, is not emotional love. It is service in time of need. And it is simply the thing that marks believers. We are known by our love. We are known by our love.

So, James says if you do that, if you demonstrate equality of love to one another, meeting needs no matter who the people are, then you show that you are fulfilling the great royal supreme sovereign law of God and you are doing well. The word "well" means excellently. You're doing excellently. This is God's will. This is consistent with His glory. This is consistent with His Son, with His Word, with bearing His name, with believing in Him, you are doing excellently. A Christian does excellently when he fulfills the law of love.

And you know, you ought to be careful. You remember what it says in Hebrews 13, some people fulfilling the law of love didn't realize it but they entertained angels unawares, right? You need to be careful. You never know who you're dealing with. We can underestimate someone, really underestimate someone.

I remember when I was a kid we lived in the city of Downey. And one man owned almost all the town. His name was Mr. Stamps. And he always dressed like he bought his clothes in the bargain box at Goodwill. And he just looked awful, but he was an extremely wealthy man.

One day he was walking on the golf course which he owned and he was picked up by the police for vagrancy and put in jail because he was turned in by some people who were in his employ who had no idea who he was. Not wrong to walk on a golf course, they just assumed that because he dressed so shabbily he must have been out of place. He didn't fit their quote/unquote "country-club mentality." And they would up fired from the job.

Now that's not the only reason to be careful what you do, it just sticks in my mind as one good reason. You may not know who you're dealing with.

Well done...may I suggest to you that well done will be spoken to us by the Lord not on the basis of our singing, as well as we may sing, not on the basis of our giving, as generous as we may be, not on the basis of our preaching, our praying, our attendance to church, our teaching a class, but maybe that well done will be ascribed to us on the basis of how we treated each other without partiality, without favoritism. And it's wonderful to know that in the congregation to which James wrote there were people who were doing this and doing well.

But...verse 9, now we turn the tables...but...and again we have a first-class condition so this is a statement of fact indicating there were some other people doing just the opposite..."But when you have respect of persons, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." Some of you, he says, are not fulfilling the sovereign, supreme law of love. You on the other hand have respect of persons. This, by the way, is a verb form of the noun in verse 1. This is the only New Testament usage of the verb. It's a present active indicative, it's not an occasional slip, this is a continual practice. You who continually practice favoritism are working sin. This is blatant, this is frank, this is stark in terms of its accusation. You who are in the continual practice of favoritism are

working sin. You habitually practicing are violating God's law. The word "sin" is anomia, it means to be without law, to be without law. You are functioning in disregard and violation of the law of God. Therefore he says you are convicted of the law as transgressors. The law says don't do it, you did it, so the law is your conviction. The evidence brings conclusive conviction that you are guilty.

On the one hand, when you love everybody the same you show no partiality and no favoritism, you fulfill the Word of God, you fulfill the supreme law of God and you do well.

On the other hand, when there's a habitual favoritism and partiality, you violate the law. The law forbids it. If you do it, you break that law.

And by the way, the Mosaic law does forbid that. Deuteronomy 1:17, Deuteronomy 16:19, we looked up all those verses on previous weeks. The law of God forbids partiality. And James is saying if you do it, you transgress the law, you break the law. You are a transgressor. That's a willful stepping across the boundary, to transgress.

Now you'll notice the two words in here for sin, in verse 9, you commit sin and you are a transgressor. Sin has a negative connotation. That word means to come short of the mark, hamartia, to miss the mark. Transgressor means to go beyond the limits. That's a positive word. The negative word says you've come short. The positive word says you've gone too far. Both define sin. Sin is a coming short of the perfect standard and it is going beyond the law of God. So James says you're a transgressor of the law.

Now that's a characterization, by the way. Did you get that? He doesn't say you broke the law, he says you are a..what?...transgressor. That's a characterization. If you show partiality, you are characteristically a violator of God's law. You are characteristically a sin committer, a sinner and a transgressor.

Now somebody at this point is going to say, "Wow, this is a little heavy for such a small thing. I mean, everybody's a little partial. How can James get so worked up about this? The common sin of prejudice, selfishness, partiality is just a part of human nature, just a sort of small thing." No it's not. It so violates the law of God as to make you characteristically a transgressor. It's a big sin.

To confirm the severity of the sin and the devastating nature of it and the largeness of it and how it violates God's law, follow James' reasoning. And this is very profound. Verse 10.

Here's why it's such a serious issue. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law," okay? "And yet offend in one area, he is...what?...he is what?...guilty of all." How many laws do you have to break to be a lawbreaker? One. How many laws do you have to break to be a transgressor? One. How many sins do you have to commit to be characterized as a sinner? One.

The unity of God's law is that it all hangs together. We have an obligation to all of God's law. To break the law at one point is to be a lawbreaker. Because what you're doing is defying the authority of God. You're defying the Word of God. You're denying full love and devotion to God and you're saying I will not love You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength in that area. I will not submit to You in that area. I will not obey You in that area. I will violate that area. So you are a lawbreaker. Though you only break one small part of the law, you are characterized as a sinner and a transgressor for you have demonstrated a heart of violence toward the law of God.

Matthew 5:19, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of heaven." If you just break one you are a violator.

Some of the rabbis used to say, and I'm quoting, "Whoever obeys only one law, good is appointed unto him." What a lie. Whosoever obeys only one law, good is appointed to him? William Barclay says, "The Jew was very apt to regard the law as a series of detached injunctions. To keep one of those injunctions was to gain credit. To break one was to incur debt. Therefore a man could add up the ones he kept and subtract the ones he broke and as it were emerge with a credit or debit balance."

That is typical of any works/righteousness system. You stack up the good stuff and you stack up the bad stuff and you hope the bad stuff subtracted from the good stuff leaves a little on the topside and you're okay. I went to visit a dear lady today after the service this morning...97 years of age. And I sat down beside her and I said to her, "Ma'am," I said, "if you were to die and enter the presence of God and He were to say to you, 'What right do you have to enter heaven?' What would you say?" She thought for a moment and she said, "Well, I've tried to do good all my life. I've tried to do my best." And I said, "What about sin. Have you committed sin?" "Oh yes. But I've tried to do my best. And I can just hope that He would see that my best was enough." That is very very typical.

By the way, before we were done she acknowledged that she was a sinner and acknowledged that salvation came through the shed blood of Christ in His death on the cross. And that the only hope for salvation was not in anything she did but in only what Christ has done for her. And she embraced the reality of that faith for which I thank God.

But there are so many people who are under the illusion that there's some kind of credit/debit balance being kept and if they come out on the top end everything's okay. That's not the way it is. Lawbreaking is not like bowling. You didn't know that, did you? You can't just hit a few pins and leave the rest standing. That's the idea. Lawbreaking is like hitting a window with a hammer, you may only hit it in one spot but it will shatter the whole thing. And that's how it is when you violate God's law. When you hit it at one point, you shatter the whole thing. It's one piece. It's not ten pins

lined up. And no one can justify himself by saying, "Hey, I only knocked down two, eight are standing." Or, "I only committed little sins like prejudice, partiality, indifference to the poor, I certainly didn't commit the biggies." Listen, you hit the law of God with a hammer and you smash the whole thing. So don't kid yourself that you're some kind of righteous person because your sins are minor. Any violation of God's law plunges you instantly into hell, condemnation.

See it there in verse 10. "Even if one keeps the whole law and offends in one area, he has literally shattered the whole thing though he stumbles only in one point." And I agree that not all sins are equally ugly. Not all sins are equally horrible. Not all sins are equally heinous. Not all sins are equally damaging. But they all shatter the unity of God's law and they turn us into violators, rebels and transgressors. You see, the law of God is the transcript of the divine mind. It's the transcript of the will of sovereign God. And the essential thing that God is after in His law is the attitude of submission to Him. And any violation strikes a blow at God and says I will not submit. It demonstrates non submission, it demonstrates a refusal to love God at that point and because of that it shatters the whole law. And anyone who runs around selecting a few laws to obey like the Jews did and a few laws to disobey and hoping they can balance the thing at the end is only fooling themselves. The true heart of obedience really acknowledges, "God, I want to keep all Your law." And when you break that law you see yourself as a transgressor and you come to the Savior for cleansing and forgiveness.

So, the purpose of James here is to emphasize the sinfulness of this sin. It may seem a small thing to you. I've met people in the south who are very prejudice against black people. I'll tell you something else, I have met people in the south who are very prejudice against white people. I have met people who are prejudice against almost every kind of race of people. I meet people who have obviously demonstrated favoritism and what James is saying is most people think that's just culture and heritage and stuff like that. And what he's saying is it is sin of massive proportions that smashes the law of God and turns you into a transgressor. It's very serious. That's his point. God's will is not segmented. Any sin breaks the whole thing. The lawgiver is one and the law is one and one sin totally devastates.

James gives an illustration, verse 11. Here's an illustration. "For he that said," somebody comes along, "He who said," refers to God, "He said, do not commit adultery and He also said do not kill." God said both those things. They're in reverse order in the Hebrew Bible. The first one is "do not kill," the second one is "do not commit adultery," in Exodus 20. But in the Septuagint version which is the Greek translation, they're switched back and James quotes them from the Septuagint version which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. They are number six and seven or number seven and six, depending which of the two you're looking at. But he chooses two severe sins that required a death penalty. The things these two sins have in common is they required death.

So, he picks out the two most severe social sins related to human life and existence because they have the death penalty attached to them. So he says, "Let's say these two things, adultery and murder," God has set down the law, don't do either one of them. Okay? So if you commit no adultery, he said, verse 11, yet if you kill, you have become a...what?...transgressor of what?...of the law. That's the point, you've shattered the whole thing. By the way, he uses "thou" there, if you or thou commit and if thou kill, thou art three times to personalize this illustration. Break one point in God's law, one point of His morality, one point in His love in a love relationship to Him and you have totally shattered the whole thing.

Now what is curious to me is the fact that James uses these two illustrations. The illustration of murder and the illustration of adultery seem pretty far beyond the idea of favoritism. But I think James puts favoritism in very serious company to make his point. He wants us to understand that it is the sin of favoritism at its root that can lead to an attitude of hate which is the attitude behind what? Murder...murder. And so, he wants to rank it with very serious sins.

Now the Jews of James day didn't do this. I want you to grab this. I think this will be helpful in your thinking in understanding the whole picture of the New Testament and the relationship the Jews had to the law. The rabbis made a very fundamental error and they instructed the Jews along this line and so James' readers, who are Jewish having been converted to Christ but with a lot of their residual Jewish teaching, the rabbis made a serious fundamental error in regard to the law in that they tried to get around the law of God...now follow this thought...by making grace a part of the law. Maybe you never thought about it that way but that's exactly what they did. They put grace into the law.

In other words, they said yes, we know God said that but you don't have to really do all of that. Yes, we know there are an awful lot of laws and we can't keep them all, at least they admitted that, and so we understand that God is gracious and God doesn't expect us to keep it all. They put grace in the law.

Let me tell you something. There is no grace in the law. There is none. God does not have one wit of tolerance for anyone violating the law that allows such a violation to go unpunished. Did you get that? God has no grace in the law. That is why to a person who does not know the grace of Christ there is no grace, none in terms of ultimate judgment. But they took the law and they threw in grace and they said, "Well God knows you can't keep it all so God will understand and He will overlook things," and then they came down to the point where, as I mentioned earlier, some of the rabbis actually taught that if you just kept one law you'd be okay because God would just sort of look over the rest. In effect they were saying sin is not really sin. Sin and good works kind of balance out because God overlooks things. And on the one hand His demands, and on the other side His grace and His kindness and He'll forgive the little ones you broke. And all of this was an escape from the reality that they couldn't keep the law. So they read grace into the law and therefore they had no need for a Savior. You see that? What do they need a Savior for? If there's already grace in the law,

they don't need a Savior. That's the point.

So a law system, a work's righteousness system with a gracious built in function needs no Savior because God's overlooking stuff anyhow. Therefore when Christ came and confronted them with how they violated the law, for example in the Sermon on the Mount, and was trying to drive them to the realization that they needed a Savior, they wouldn't buy it. They wouldn't buy it because there was room in their understanding of law for God had just passed by things and not even considered them. That's wrong. The law has no grace. The law shows you you're a sinner and when you break it you are a transgressor and you are doomed for condemnation and judgment and eternal hell unless you come to the Savior who dispenses grace. But there's no grace in the law.

So, James here is reinforcing the nature of God's law as a condemner of sinners without grace. And so he says you may think you're some small-time, some sort of small peanut-type sinner, just committing a few little things here and there, I want you to know you have shattered the law of God and if you're saying to yourself, "Well, but it's the little stuff and certainly God's gracious and He'll pass over that, there's got to be a little grace in law," and James says there is no grace in law. You are a violator of God's law by favoritism alone and therefore you are condemned for you have shattered the whole thing though you may have struck the glass only at one point. You are guilty. You are worthy of judgment.

So, he's really got them in a difficult position. If you show favoritism, verse 1 says you're absolutely inconsistent with the Christian faith. If you show favoritism, he says, you are...you are inconsistent with the very things that God has done in choosing the poor of the world whom you looked down on to be the populous of His Kingdom. You are inconsistent with the fact that the poor...that the rich have always been the oppressors of the poor. And why would you identify with them? And if you are partial, you have violated the Scripture because you have violated the supreme sovereign law which says to love your neighbor as yourself. And if you have shown partiality, you have struck a blow that shattered the entire law of God and you are a condemned as a transgressor. And there's no grace in that law. There's only grace outside that law in Jesus Christ.

So what he is saying to those people is this is a very serious sin. And because of its seriousness he closes with the fifth point, the appeal. Verse 12, this is a call to take account of the danger of divine judgment. It tells me that in this congregation there were true believers who were fulfilling the supreme law, the sovereign law, the royal law. And then there were some phony Christians who were continually showing favoritism, continually violating that law of God being transgressors and sinners. And so he comes to point a finger directly at these transgressors and says, "So speak you and so do...in other words, continually...be speaking and be doing as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

In other words, you better speak and you better act as people who are headed for a future judgment. And that judgment will be based upon the law of God. The law of liberty is just a term to describe the law of God. You'll be judged by God's Word. That's a title for Scripture. It's back in chapter 1 verse 25 also when we talked about it in some detail, the perfect law of liberty. The old law, the Old Testament, the old covenant was seen as a law of bondage but the New Testament Word, the gospel, the Scripture that has been given concerning salvation is a law of freedom. Why is it a law of liberty or a law of freedom? Because it frees us from sin's slavery. It brings us to eternal freedom and glory. It frees us from the curse of death and the curse of hell. It gives us the truth so it frees us from the search for truth. It calls us to serve God freely out of love. It calls us to obey God freely by inward constraint not by outward restraint. So it is in every sense a law of freedom, a law of liberation.

So he says you will be judged by God's law. You will face a judgment on the basis of whether you have kept or violated God's law. Boy, pretty strong language. He said the same thing in Romans, do you remember that? Chapter 2 verses 6 to 10. "He will render to every man according to his deeds, to people who by patient continuance and well doing seek for glory, honor and immortality, He gives eternal life to them who are contentious, do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness He gives indignation and wrath." Later on he says, "Glory, honor and peace to every man that does good because there's no respect of persons with God." He's not going to be partial. The day is going to come when you're going to be judged on your works.

You say, "I thought I was judged by my faith in Christ." Yes, but your faith in Christ is manifest through your...your works. So the final judgments will look at your life. If God looks at your life and sees that you handled trials in a godly way, that you handled temptation in a godly way, that you responded to the Word and that you didn't demonstrate favoritism as a pattern of life, those are the works that evidence the truth of your faith, right? You will be judged by that. God's going to look at the record of your life because every believer, Ephesians 2:10, says is created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has already in the past ordained that we should walk in them. So the pattern of your life is good works that God is producing in you, that's the evidence of your salvation. Redemption always brings about obedient living. Now obviously we have our times of disobedience but the pattern is good works. Living faith will be revealed then in living love. It will be revealed in godly behavior. And as a general pattern we will not be partial in showing favoritism. The new covenant, it says in Jeremiah 31:31 to 34, writes God's law on the...what?...on the heart. Obedience is liberated living, free from sin's bondage and doing what God wants us to do freely because we love to do it from the heart.

So everybody's going to be judged in the future, so he says, "Speak and do as one who will be judged by God's Word." Keep that in mind in all you say and keep it in mind in all you do that ultimately you're going to be judged on the basis of that. And then he ends up with a strong warning, "For he shall have judgment without mercy." There is no mercy in the law and there is no grace in the

law. He will have judgment without mercy who has shown no...what?...mercy. You show me a person who shows no mercy, who has no compassion, who shows favoritism and partiality and disregard for people with need and I'll show you a person who will have no mercy in judgment. Why? Because they're not a converted person. They're not a redeemed person.

By the way, the phrase "judgment without mercy" must mean eternal hell, has to mean that. Judgment without mercy, strict, full unrelieved judgment, every sin getting its just punishment to the full. And he says those of you will have judgment without mercy who have not shown mercy. It is a characteristic of the unsaved, not to be merciful. The gospel comes to transform the heart to make us like God and God is merciful and God is compassionate and God is impartial. And believers who are true believers will be like that. That's again the test of living saving faith. No specific moment of judgment is here described but the idea is the future ultimate eternal judgment that comes ahead when the Lord Jesus comes back as judge. And if there are no deeds of mercy as a part of life, it is evident that the life of God is not in that soul. It's just like the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall...what?...obtain mercy." Where mercy is given, mercy is distributed. So you look at a person and if they are impartial, they have not favoritism, they're merciful to people in need whoever they are, they love others as they would love themselves and I'll show you a person in whose life God has poured mercy and love.

So he closes by saying in verse 13, "And mercy rejoices," or literally, "mercy triumphs over judgment." What does he mean? If your life is characterized by mercy, you will triumph over judgment. You will escape judgment because one who is merciful proves he has a transformed life. That's the point.

Dr. James Rosscup(?), one of my professors in seminary and the professor of many of the men who have gone through Talbot wrote this, "When a man lives without mercy to others in God's world, he simply shows off the fact that he himself has never responded a right to the immeasurable mercy of God. The mercy a man has shown others as fruit of a life touched by God's saving mercy will triumph over judgment. His own sins worthy of judgment are removed by God's working in his life, dissolves all the charges strict justice might bring against him. Thus his showing of mercy is not a matter of heaping up personal merit to deserve salvation by his own good works. The mercy he shows is itself a work of God for which he can take no credit."

So if you as a characteristic of life are merciful without partiality, meeting people at the point of their need no matter who they are, you give evidence of having received such mercy and of being transformed by the power of God and thus ready for the day of judgment and you will triumph in that day by the demonstration of new life that comes through the attitude and the action of mercy toward others.

So James brings us to the climax of a great argument. Partiality is inconsistent with the Christian faith because the Christian faith is consistent with the nature of God and God is impartial. Partiality is

inconsistent with the purpose and the plan of God in choosing the poor of this world to be rich. Partiality is inconsistent with loving your neighbor as yourself. Partiality strictly speaking is a sin that shatters totally the entire law of God and makes a person a transgressor and partiality if it were the only sin you ever committed would be enough to condemn you to hell forever. And if you come before the judgment of God and looking at your life He sees that you have shown no mercy, then He will show you no mercy because that would be evidence that you are not possessing the life of God, you are not saved.

On the other hand, if He looks at your life and sees the pattern of mercy toward others and impartiality toward those in need, then you will triumph over judgment by virtue of the life of God in your soul and the salvation found in Jesus Christ. That's his message.

So, it says two things to us as we close. Number one, examine your life. Every one of these is a test that James has given to see the validity of our faith. Number one, examine your life. Is your life characterized by impartiality? Are you concerned to be gracious and kind and thoughtful and loving and provide equally for those who are poor and who do not come up the ladder, as it were, socially as you are for anyone else? That's the first issue.

The second one is as a Christian this is an exhortation to us to be certain that we are living out these principles in the church of Christ and that we are showing love for one another. If that's the pattern of your life it's evidence of your faith in Christ, it's evidence of His work in your heart. It's evidence that the life of God is in your soul and ministering. But when you see those times when you violate that, that's time to confess to seek His face, to seek forgiveness and to be restored to the place that God would have you be restored to.

If on the other hand you look at your own heart and you see the absence of a continual pattern of love toward one another, then you ought to do a little bit of a deeper look and see if you really know Christ at all. That's what James is saying. And he calls us to that examination. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we've covered so much tonight and yet we've just really said one thing, that is that You do not want us to be partial to anyone for any external reason, to show preferential attitude or treatment to someone over another person who has equal rights and equal needs. Help us to be like You are, Lord, loving everyone the same, ministering to everyone according to their need no matter who they are, showing mercy to unworthy people as you showed mercy to us. Father, may there be no one that leaves this place tonight who doesn't know the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation He brings. May no one think for a moment that their credit/debit balance puts them on the high side and secures for them salvation because they've done more good than bad. O God, may that soul that's hoping in good works be struck to the core and realize that they have shattered the law of God top to bottom, side to side and they stand as transgressors in need of a Savior.

And for those of us who are Christians, Lord, refresh our commitment again to love in the way that You loved us who were so unworthy when You were infinitely worthy. We thank You for the example and may we love the way that You loved with no regard for external issues but only for the sake of the need of the heart may we reach out in love. Make us to be like Christ, the world accused Him of being the friend of sinners, may it accuse us of the very same. We pray for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we love. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).