



James 2:10-13 The Law of Liberty!

June 28, 2015

Text: James 2:10-13

- The immediate context of these verses is James' preaching against the sin of partiality.
- If you recall...
 1. The command to show no partiality was rooted in true faith in Jesus. (Jam 2:1)
 2. In the Jerusalem church, there seemed to be caste/class distinctions. William MacDonald writes on this verse: "Snobbery and caste distinctions are utterly inconsistent with true Christianity. Servility to human greatness has no place in the presence of the Lord of Glory."
 3. How relevant is this command at present, June 2015, with our entire nation struggling with this sin!
 4. James writes in verses 8-9 of this chapter, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors."
 5. To commit this sin (partiality) is a transgression of the **Law**. The Scripture James' references is:
 - a. *Lev 19:18 ESV* You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.
 - b. Don't miss this. James, writing a NEW TESTAMENT epistle, commands his flock to observe the "royal law" as written in Leviticus...loving your neighbor as yourself.
 - c. Jesus did the same when asked what the greatest commandment was:
 - d. *Mat 22:36-40 ESV* "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (37) And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (38) This is the great and first commandment. (39) And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (40) On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
- I make these points because in today's antinomian (or anti-Law) Christianity, ANY mention of the word "Law" sends saints into a tizzy. ☺ YET, here is James essentially saying that to commit the sin of partiality transgresses the Moral Law! More on this below...
- Now, does keeping the Law save us? NO!!!! (Eph 2:8; Gal 2:16, 3:10)
- But James isn't talking about salvation; he is exhorting **holiness** amongst the saints!
- This "royal law" is royal because it belongs to the King! It describes a heart transformed by the King Himself, one that doesn't put itself above another, one that loves selflessly and deeply.
- Indeed, "...the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." (Rom 7:12)

The Law of Liberty

Jas 2:10-13 ESV For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. (11) For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (12) **So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.** (13) For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (emphasis mine)

A Few Observations:

1. First, it looks as if by referencing the Ten Commandments in verse 11 (7th and 6th respectively), James is acknowledging man's utter inability to perfectly keep the Moral Law. (v10)
2. Why? Because to break one is to break them all. "The Law is like a chain of ten links. Break on link and the chain is broken." –William MacDonald
3. We know this is true. Sin is defined as "lawlessness" or transgression of the law in 1 John 3:4.

- a. This is why we are all sinners: *“Rom 3:23 ESV for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”*
 - b. Thank God we, *“...are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...!”* (Rom 3:24) Hallelujah!
4. Verse 12, however, has a bit of controversy. There are two camps:
- a. One interpretive camp says the *Law of Liberty* is the Ten Commandments based on the context.
 - b. The other camp says the *Law of Liberty* is the Law of Christ, which is the command to love one another:
 - *Joh 13:34 ESV A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*
 - *1Jn 4:21 ESV And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*
 - c. **Since both the Ten Commandments and the Law of Christ are about love, may I suggest that both are correct? ☺**
5. Here is what I mean:
- a. First, the believer is not under the law, but **grace**. (Eph 2:8; Rom 6:14)
 - b. However, the Law’s moral principles are repeated in the New Testament and are forever binding. Adultery is still wrong, as is murder, stealing, lying, idolatry, dishonoring parents, etc.
 - c. The difference is that believers don’t strive to keep the Moral Law for **justification**; we are justified by grace and can therefore love one another biblically!
 - d. Christ has paid our penalty; the Moral Law for us is no longer about condemnation, or is the “ministry of death.” (2 Cor 3:7)
 - e. In other words, the Law of Christ is to love one another; the Law of God (the Ten Commandments) gives us a basic, holy framework on how to do that.
 - f. And it is God’s grace in Christ, His granting us freedom from sin, otherwise known as **Liberty**, which enables us to walk in holiness!
 - g. Friends, much of the fighting we do over grace vs. law or Old Testament versus New Testament is unnecessary. Take biblical truths as is:
 1. The Old has been superseded by the New...
 2. Yet the moral standards remain!
 3. We are saved by grace alone...
 4. But are still called to walk in righteousness!
 5. When we fail we are not condemned...
 6. Yet we are still exhorted to “do” and not just “hear!”
 7. We are commanded to love God and one another...
 8. But that love must be tethered to Scripture; it must be “lawful.”
6. Remember the words of Christ on this subject:
- a. *Mat 5:17-19 ESV “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (18) For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (19) Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*
 - b. Incredibly, in the rest of Mathew 5, Christ goes on to amplify the standards of Moral Laws! Murder is raised to anger, adultery of the body is raised to adultery of the eyes, divorce for any reason is raised to the grounds of sexual immorality, oaths are raised to simply letting your yes be yes and your no be no, and an eye for an eye is raised to seeking peace.

7. Note the contradictory terms in verse 12, given on purpose by James: *law* and *liberty*. We wouldn't often put those two together! But they are both true at the same time, brought together in Christ that the redeemed might be practically **holy**...that the forgiven might forgive...that the unrighteous might walk in righteousness...that the free (in soul/spirit) might live in freedom from sin!
 - a. *Joh 8:34-36 ESV* Jesus answered them, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. (35) The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. (36) So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*"
 - b. We are not "outside the Law of God;" yet are under the "Law of Christ." Both true at the same time! (1 Cor 9:21)
 - c. Also note, our liberty is still "lawful." ☺
8. Here is the power of verse 12:
 - a. The Law given by Moses commanded, but imparted no power and condemned if there was a failure.
 - b. **Jesus commands, gives power, and forgives when there is a failure!**
 - c. We, as believers under grace, have been given the Holy Spirit! He pours out love in our hearts, and daily conforms us to the image of Christ! (Rom 5:5, 8:26-29)
 - d. Therefore we love "according to the law" not to try to earn salvation or out of fear of condemnation, **but because that is our loving response to our loving God!**
9. **Simply put, the Law of Liberty is Love. In Christ, we are now free from the bondage of sin to love God and each other according to God's own standards.**
10. Therefore, in context, showing partiality violates the Law of Liberty. (Jam 2:1-5) For the rich Christians to oppress the poor Christians violates the Law of Liberty. (Jam 2:6-7) To not care for widows and orphans violates the Law of Liberty. (Jam 1:27) To hear the Word and not do violates the Law of Liberty. (Jam 1:19-27) To surrender to temptation violates the Law of Liberty! (Jam 1:12-15)
11. And we will be judged by the Law of Liberty...how we loved. Believers will be rewarded or suffer loss at Christ's Judgment Seat (2 Cor 5:9-10). It's not a matter of salvation for the believer, but rather reward.
12. Maybe Paul said it best:

Rom 13:8-10 ESV Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (9) For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.
13. Finally, verse 13 compares "one who has shown no mercy" to one who has.
 - a. In other words, one who shows partiality or doesn't help orphans or who oppresses the poor has "shown no mercy." Since God's judgment is without mercy to the unsaved who do these things, **far be it for a Christian to act in a similar manner!**
 - b. For the Christian, "mercy triumphs over judgment" in **Christ!** We should therefore conduct our daily lives accordingly, loving deeply and daily keeping "the Law of Liberty" in our speech and actions. ☺

May we all do just that, daily, in Jesus' name.

Amen.