

James 2:8-13 Fulfill the Royal Law

The sin which James is addressing in this passage is the sin of discrimination. Some are showing favor to the rich over the poor in order to gain some kind of advantage. So, James gives some reasons why this sin is wrong. Last week, we saw that favoritism is wrong because God himself does not discriminate. This week, we come to another reason discrimination is a sin. It is a sin because it breaks the law of God, which James equates to the law of love. Look at v. 8: **“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.”** To discriminate breaks the law of love, for it does not show love to our neighbor. And when we do not love our neighbor, we break the law of God. And, as we will see, we break the command of Christ who says in John 13:34-35: **“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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** With this in mind, I would like to explore James use of the word “law” and what he means by “fulfill” the royal law. In order to do this, I want to divide the sermon into two parts: 1) James the Jew; and 2) James the Christian. Under the first part, I would like to focus on the Law of Moses as we consider James’ use of the word “law.” In the 2nd part, I will focus on the Law of Christ. Let’s begin with the Law of Moses.

1. The Law of Moses. I have 4 truths short truths from the text about James’ understanding of the Law of Moses.

i. It is the perfect law. As a Jewish man, James standard of living came from the Law of God, the Torah, recorded in the first five books of the Bible (Genesis to Deuteronomy). In v. 8 he says, **“If you really fulfill the royal law according to Scripture . . .”** His particular understanding of law would have come from the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses was part of God’s Covenant with Moses and Israel. It was given by God to Moses and his people at Mt. Sinai after their exodus from Egypt. And then in v. 11 he mentions two particular commands from the Law of Moses. He says, **“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.”** Later in 4:11 he speaks of the law again saying, **“Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law . . .”** Now look at 1:25 as he considers this law. **“But the one who looks into the perfect law . . .”** To James, this was the standard and it was perfect and in and of itself, complete.

James would have been familiar with the words of King David who says in Psalm 19: **“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”** When we come to the NT Paul says the same thing in Rom. 7:12: **“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”**

ii. It is the law of the Kingdom. Look at 2:8: “**If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture . . .**” The word “royal” means belonging to the king. And this accords with v. 5 of this text which says, “**Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom . . .**” This truth is pretty simple. Since God is the King, his laws are royal. God’s rules are the rules of the kingdom. Kids, if your Father and mother give you a set of rules, and then your friends give you another set of rules, which must you follow? You will follow your parents, whom God has given to you as your authority. Concerning Israel, God gave his laws to his people. And he was their king. In this way, the Law of Moses was a ROYAL law.

iii. It is the law of liberty. James uses this phrase twice. Look at v. 25 again: “**But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty . . .**” Also look at 2:12: “**So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty . . .**” As regarding the law of Moses, Psalm 19 is clear. It is perfect, sure, right, pure, true, and righteous altogether. Yet, James calls it the “law of liberty.” I searched the OT and didn’t find one reference to the Law of Moses as being one of “liberty” or “freedom” or “liberating.” However, it is still the law of liberty. How? William Hendriksen says, “*within the boundaries of the law of God man is free, for there he lives in the environment God designated for him.*” But the greatest problem of sinful mankind is that, after Adam, none of us has kept the law of God. This brings us to our last point on the Law of Moses.

iv. It is the standard for the judgment of God. Look at v. 10: “**For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.**” James’ use of the word guilty causes me to think of a courtroom. If I steal someone’s car, or I cheat on my taxes, or I tear up someone’s property, I have broken the standard, the law, and must stand before a judge to be sentenced. In the same kind of way, God is the judge. His laws in the OT, particularly given in the Law of Moses are the standard. And those who break his laws must stand before him and give an account. And, if only one part of the law is broken, even if all the rest of it is obeyed, the person is still considered to be a lawbreaker. The Apostle Paul makes this case in Rom. 1-3 for both Jew and Gentile. He upholds the law of God as God’s perfect standard for all mankind. And he also says to break God’s law is sin. To this, I must ask, “*Which Israelite has ever kept the entire Law?*” And for that matter, which Gentile has ever kept this law, which Paul says, “*is written on their hearts*” (Rom. 2:15). Which of you are without sin? Whether it is written on our hearts as Gentiles, or clearly given to Israel through Moses, all of us are guilty! “**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**”

Now, with these things before us, I would like to turn our attention to James the Christian. And our focus will be the Law of Christ, which James considers to be the “royal law.”

2. The law of Christ. James was a Jewish man. But, after Jesus resurrection from the dead, he was converted and became a Christian. In fact, he became the pastor and leader of the Church in Jerusalem. And in 1:1 of this letter, he says, “**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ . . .**” And in 2:1, as a fellow believer in Christ he instructs his readers to “**show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.**” (2:1). As a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, all of a sudden, his understanding of the Law of Moses and its purpose changed. With the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, he came to

understand that the Law of Moses had come to an end as a covenant of law, only to find its fulfillment in Jesus.

As Christians we are under a new covenant. Concerning the Lord's supper, Jesus says, "***this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.***" As we look back, we see the purpose of the Law was to find its fulfillment in Christ. In fact, all of the OT finds its fulfillment in Christ. Do you remember the two men on the Road to Emmaus? As followers of Christ, they had been in Jerusalem and had seen him die. And they were headed home, under great disappointment and despair as they thought HE was the one to redeem Israel. And then Jesus appears and walks with them (though he is hidden from them). Luke tells us that Jesus says to them, "**Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses . . . and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.**" And later that evening Jesus revealed himself to them. And then they hurried back to Jerusalem and found the disciples, where Jesus appeared again. And he says to them: "**These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled**" (Luke 24).

So, now, James the Christian has a new understanding of the Law of Moses and the Scriptures. He sees that they are fulfilled in the Person of Jesus. The Apostle John says the same thing In 1:14 he says, "**And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth . . . For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**" (John 1:14-17). Now look back at James 2:8. He says, "**If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture . . .**" James language changes in regard to the Law of Moses from "keeping" the law to "fulfilling" the law. (Paul and the other NT writers do the same thing.) Why? Because Jesus fulfilled the law. He did something a sinner could never do. We will come back to this in a moment.

But notice how James says one fulfills the law. Look again at v. 8: "**If you really fulfill the royal law according to Scripture, You shall . . . do what? Love your neighbor as yourself.**" This was one purpose of the Law of Moses . . . that we know what it looks like to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. And when we do that, we fulfill the law. So, when it comes to the sin of discrimination in this text, we do not see it specifically written in the 10 commandments "**You shall not discriminate.**" But, when we show favoritism we break the law by not loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. And in this way, we are law breakers. But James takes this truth further, to its fulfillment.

Look with me to John 13:34: "**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.**" This is the "royal law" of James. And we see, it is the law of Christ. We could also call it the law of love. Here, I must ask, "What is new about such a command?" God has already said in the Law of Moses, "**love me . . . love one another**" (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5). This is not new. John says that that this command is not new "in and of itself." Turn to 1 John 2:7. He says, "**Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard.**" Now look at v. 8: "**At the same time, it is a**

new commandment that I am writing to you . . . And here is what makes it new. Keep reading . . . **which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.**” You see, Jesus gave this command to his disciples the night before he was crucified. The key is the death of the Son of God! In the OT we see the great loving kindness of God in all his ways. We see people saved. We see people delivered from war, from poverty, from sickness. We see God’s faithfulness never to leave his people or forsake them. We see his special care upon the prophets and the kings and the priests. We see his loving hand EVERYWHERE! But, none of these things compare with the love of God in sending the Son. Not even close! Even in the Law of Moses, which was gracious, could God take away sin. Nor could the Law of Moses remove his righteous wrath upon sinners . . . **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . .”** (John 3:16). No act of love compares in motive or in action than the love of God . . . and the same goes for the love of the Son who laid down his life! This is why it is new! The Law of Moses could only go so far in teaching love. **“Law was given through Moses; grace and truth through Jesus Christ!”** This is the law of Christ, the law of love.

Let’s think back through our truths from the Law of Moses.

The Law is perfect: Jesus is called the “Word of God.” He is the perfect, sinless, lamb of God who laid down his life. When we look into the perfect law, we must look to Christ who fulfilled every part of God’s law.

The law is the law of the kingdom. Today, Jesus is the king. Upon his resurrection of the dead, he has been given the name above all names. He is king of kings and Lord of Lords! And he calls us to follow him. We are his subjects. And allegiance shifts to him. Though Jesus speaks of the Law of Moses and “law” in general, his main topic of teaching is the Kingdom of God. This is a clear shift from the OT to the NT. It isn’t as if the Kingdom does not exist in the OT. It is simply not referred to as such. But, in the NT, Jesus speaks of the subjects of the Kingdom. So, it shouldn’t surprise us that James calls it the Royal Law.

The law is the law of liberty. Only in Christ do we find freedom. **“If the Son has set you free, you will be free indeed”** (John 8:36). Is. 61:1: **“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound . . .”** This is where we see this law particularly fulfilled in Christ. It is in reference to judgment. You see, when we look at the law, we do not find freedom. We may see it as one looks across the horizon at a beautiful sunset, knowing we can’t actually get to the sun. And if we continue to look into the sun for very long, our eyesight would be damaged. And if we were to actually travel to the sun, we would perish from it’s heat. The law is like this. When we look in the law, we get “burned” to the point of death. (elaborate) **“For the wages of sin is death”** (Rom. 6:23). But Paul says, **“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death”** (Rom. 8:2).

The Law is the standard for the judgment of God. The law is the standard. But, only ONE MAN has met this standard. And he didn’t merely live according to the law. He also became a curse for us as he laid down his life in our place. And He is the standard for which we are to be judged.

This is what the writer of Hebrews says: **“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?”** I think this is what James was getting at in v. 12 saying, **“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.”**

Let me end with some closing applications.

Application: First and foremost look to Christ! The only reason we can fulfill the “Royal Law” according to James is because Christ has fulfilled it for us. And now, by the Spirit, we are united to him by faith. This means that in Christ, what God commands, he gives the ability to carry out.

Application: Remember our mission. **“As you go make disciples . . . teaching them to obey everything Christ has commanded us.”**

Application: If we discriminate, we do not love our neighbor. The emphasis from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ is that in the OT, “neighbor” was primarily Israel. But in the NC, EVERYONE is our neighbor. Jesus makes this point in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In doing this, we miss the intent of the law of Moses and we do not fulfill the law of love given by Christ.

Final Application: The standard of God’s love and our love for others is the cross of Christ. Let me read 1 John 3:16-24 in closing: **“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.”**