

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 8

March 17, 2002

SUMMARY:

What is favoritism? It is the acceptance of others based on their outward appearance and social status. This discrimination manifests in how we treat others. James gives several

reasons why we should not show preference to the outwardly successful:

- Generally speaking, they are not God's choice.
- God often chooses the poor and weak so that He receives the glory.
- Example of Mary, a humble teenage girl, chosen to bear the Messiah.
- Ignoring the poor and needy means we could be ignoring the Lord Himself.
- Discrimination is evidence of an evil heart.
- Many times the rich and influential cause the church the most trouble.

Instead of showing favoritism, we are commanded to respond to everyone in love, especially those in need. Demonstrating mercy instead of judgment is demonstrating the Spirit of Christ.

In a moment, we will come back to these two last points, and develop them further. But before we do that, let's look again at some questions concerning favoritism:

1. Where are some specific struggles that we face in this area of discrimination?
2. What are some practical ways that we change to reach out and minister to the needy?
3. Why do we sometimes avoid people that have needs?
4. What changes in our attitudes and beliefs need to occur to obey this passage?

We briefly touched on verses 8-13 last week, and I would like to take a closer look at this royal law of love.

READ James 2:8-13

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking 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 commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. ¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

We've seen that favoritism is passing judgment on another person. According to James 2:4, one who shows favoritism has set himself up as judge, and his judgment is based on his own evil thoughts. Because he passing judgment based on his imperfect knowledge and his own standard, he has also usurped the

authority of God's law. He has put himself in the place of God. Isaiah 33:22 says that the Lord is our judge, and is our lawgiver, and is our king, and is our savior.

Look at James 4:11-12

James 4:¹¹ Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

According to this passage in James, we are not to show favoritism, and be judgmental and speak against each other. So instead of judging our neighbor, we are to love our neighbor. This is what James calls the royal law, the law of love. What else is this law called in chapter 2 verse 12 and in James 1:25? Both verses refer to this as the law that gives freedom. It is the law of mercy that triumphs over judgment. Let's look at some other passages that teach us about the relationship of law, freedom, judgment, and mercy. It is interesting to see how these concepts appear together in many other places in the scriptures.

Galatians 5:13-15

Gal 5: ¹³ You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

We are set free in Christ! We are not called to be in bondage. But the liberty we have been called to is a freedom to love one another from a new heart. We have been set free to be servants! And serving another person is the opposite of judging them. Judging is elevating ourselves above another, and serving is humbling ourselves to give to them. We choose to serve that person, not because we judge him to be worthy of our service, but we serve them from a heart filled with mercy, compassion and love. Because God has shown us mercy, and set us free from our selfishness, we are empowered and enabled to love and serve others as we have been loved. We are to treat others as we have been treated. This isn't just a New Testament concept. Listen to the Law: Leviticus 19:33-24:

Lev 19:33 "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. ³⁴ The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

Galatians 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Romans 13: ⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

This raises a question. What is the believer's relationship to the law? Are we justified before God because

we keep the law? Absolutely not! None of us has kept God's law. And the Scriptures declare that if we have broken the law, we are under the judgment of the Lawgiver, God Himself. No, God accepts us solely on the basis of Christ and what He did. He alone kept the law perfectly, and then bore the penalty and guilt of our sin on the cross. God now accepts us because our sins have been borne and carried away by Christ. We stand before God counted as righteous. That imputed righteousness comes only by His grace through the gift of faith that He places within our hearts when we hear the gospel.

So since we are not justified and accepted by God based on the law, does this mean that we should ignore the law, or live apart from the law, or that the law serves no purpose or benefit in our lives? Absolutely not. In fact, when we are justified by faith, God sends His Spirit within our hearts to enable us to fulfill the law! What we were totally unable to do outside of Christ, we are now enabled and called to do in Christ! Turn to Romans 8:1-16

Rom 8: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

Before we were in Christ, we were condemned! We were under the law of sin and death. God's law declared us guilty, under God's wrath, and headed for eternal judgment.

³ *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.*

The law is not bad, it is just not able to save us. It can't save us because we can't keep it because we are in bondage to sin. We are born sinners, being the descendants of Adam, and we willfully express that sinful nature in disobedience and rebellion toward God. We are totally consumed with our selfish desires. Before we are in Christ, we stand condemned, guilty, and powerless to be made right before God. But what the law could not do, God did! He sent Christ to remove the thing that keeps us from obeying God and being able to live a righteous life – He sent His Son to remove our sin. He took our sin away at the cross. And then He sent His Spirit into our lives to enable us to obey the law.

And so he condemned sin in sinful man,⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

Notice that Paul plainly says that the true believer lives according to the Spirit of God. He is led and controlled by the Spirit of God, and therefore he submits to God and obeys the law of God. The same Spirit that we receive when we are saved that marks us as belonging to God also enables us to live righteous lives.

¹² *Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.¹³ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

Here is the heart of the passage. Because we have the Spirit, and have been set free from the bondage of sin, we no longer are obligated to serve our selfish desires. In fact, we can now live in the very life and presence of God. We can be led moment by moment to live lives that are pleasing to God and bring Him

great glory. This is the purpose of our salvation!

15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

The law is no longer a source of bondage and fear to us. It is a source of life, because God has empowered us to obey it, and thus experience the fruit of that obedience. And obedience to the law is walking in love toward God and toward one another. We have been set free to love. We are no longer bound to our selfish desires. We can enjoy the freedom and blessing of serving Christ and others. We can experience the privilege of being filled with the expressions of God's glory, kindness, love, and goodness towards others through us. We can come to know God intimately as we experience His life flowing into and through our lives to bring His mercy and hope to others. This is what James means when he says that mercy triumphs over judgment! As we walk in love and mercy towards others, our obedience demonstrates that we have received the mercy of God in our lives. Obedience to the law brings freedom, and now we can obey the law by the enabling grace of God shown to us through Christ.

So the next time you are faced with a choice to either be selfish or serve someone else, remember that God by His Spirit has filled you with the ability and capacity to love supernaturally, and that you have before you the opportunity to experience the very presence and life of God flowing through you to bless another person. God has given you an opportunity to be a vessel of His glory! When you see that stranger this morning, and are tempted to turn the other way, or when you see that brother in need, or when the thought comes to write that note of encouragement, or to wash those dishes, or you think of visiting that person in the nursing home, or you are considering helping with the prison ministry, or doing that mundane chore for your wife or husband, or offering a word of thanks or encouragement. Realize this – those are the things that God has saved you and empowered you to do. Not only will you have the blessing of thinking of someone else, you will be fulfilling God's purpose for your salvation. Ephesians 2:8-10 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.*