

James 2:12-13
March 26, 2007

Good morning! Open your Bibles to James 2:12-13. But before we get there we need to walk through where we've been the past 2 weeks and in the past 11 verses so that those who were gone during Spring Break can catch up but also because these 2 verses today are still tied tightly to what James has been saying.

James is confronting a specific problem in the church: the sin of **favoritism - making decisions about people on the basis of the WORLD'S standards instead of GOD'S**. He made it clear in verses 1-4 that true **authentic faith in Christ and an attitude of favoritism do not MIX**.

Do we think we are better than others? Do we judge others in terms of external or temporary factors? Do we treat people differently depending on what they can do for us? If so we are showing favoritism. And that kind of attitude, James says, is incompatible with the gospel. Because favoritism is a form of worldliness that can slip in the back door of your life and pollute your life which is what James warns us about in 1:27.

But as we began to see last week, James doesn't stop with merely pointing out that favoritism is wrong. He understands people. We are experts at minimizing the seriousness of our own sin. When confronted we quickly come up with a million different reasons our behavior is justified. We're kind of like a Teflon pan, nothing sticks. It is all too easy for confrontation to roll right off our backs.

And it's because James realizes it would be very easy for these believers to gloss over this issue, to treat the sin of favoritism as if it were something unimportant, to sweep it under the rug, he tries to help them understand in verses 5-11 just how serious this sin really is. In doing so, he helps us understand just how serious all sin really is. In 5-7 he points out that favoritism doesn't mesh with biblical truth, and it doesn't make common sense, and then in 8-9, favoritism flat out is sin.

James is simply calling these believers to stop and evaluate their lives and their actions in light of God's law. If you are obeying the law, the law that says "love your neighbor as yourself," you do right. But if not, if you show favoritism, you are convicted by the law as law-breakers. It's not about me, it's not about my opinion, it's about God's law. Evaluate your lives in light of that.

You'd think that be enough. It's not. Because James knows the tendency of the human heart. Even when pinned against the wall, we'll look for a way to wiggle out.

If one reason many in the world don't take sin seriously is because they have rejected God's law, **one reason many in the church don't take sin seriously is because they don't EVALUATE their lives in light of God's law**.

Kind of like a used car salesmen who can make a junker sound good, we are experts at making our sin sound better than it really is. And when confronted with our sins we easily explain them away. That's particularly easy to do with sins of attitude, sins that occur in our hearts, sins like favoritism. We're especially good at explaining those kinds of sins away.

So in verses 10-11 it is like James is about to make a footnote. O.k. let's take a step back for a moment. I've shown you that favoritism is wrong. Let me remind you why it is so serious. You've disobeyed God's law. Now to really grasp that, you've got to understand the nature of God's law.

James explains, "Whoever keeps the whole law and stumbles in one point has become guilty of it all."

Imagine a man, who is absolutely diligent in his pursuit of obedience. This is the most righteous person you have ever met. But even though he's worked hard, there's one time, just one time, where he accidentally stumbles into sin. He breaks one of God's laws.

What's the result? James says that his failure in one point has brought him into an abiding state of being guilty of all. By his one sin, he is condemned. Most people would say, one sin, what's the big deal? James would say, 'don't you get it?' **He who stumbles in just ONE point of the law is guilty of breaking ALL of it.**

Stop and make sure you feel the weight of that. If you are sitting here this morning and you are thinking you are a good person, look again at this text. If you are sitting here this morning and you are thinking that you are better than the person next to you, look again at this text. If you are sitting here this morning and you are thinking you can make it to heaven on your own apart from Christ, look again at this text. He who stumbles in one is guilty of all.

The world looks at a sin like favoritism and at the very best says that it is a minor sin, not a very big issue. But the Christian knows better. They say that because they don't understand the nature of God's law. **The Christian's not into GRADING sin because he understands it's not about what sin, or how many sins, it's about WHO you sinned against.**

James explains that the same God who gave one commandment gave all the rest of them. The same law is broken - breaking even one commandment breaks the law. The issue then is not how many laws have been broken, or which laws have been broken, but whether God's holy law has been broken. The same lawgiver has been offended.

All sin is serious because all sin is against God. Sometimes we look at our sins and we think, well it's not that big of deal. That's because we are looking at our sin the wrong way. We are looking just at the action. Instead we need to think about who the sin was against. It's not so much about what we did; it's about who we did it against.

(Show slides) If I draw a little scribble on a piece of paper, it just takes me a few minutes to do, and I put it on the table - and then you come up and make a little mark through it, messing up my drawing, no one would think that's a big deal, right? But if you went up to the Mona Lisa and drew a little moustache on her, same action, but this time it's a big deal. What's the difference? What you did it to! If I go outside and step on an ant, probably nobody here would get that upset. But if I go outside and step on your child, that's a much more serious offense. Why? What's the difference? Who you did it to!

That's what James is saying here. Doesn't really matter what sin you've done, they all are against God, and they are all incredibly serious.

If you are showing favoritism, making decisions about people on the basis of the world's standards, you have broken God's law; and you must not attempt to minimize the seriousness of that by saying that it's only favoritism, because when you break God's law, you are sinning against God Himself.

So when you walk through what we've seen the past 2 weeks, do you see how James has effectively stripped us of every possible excuse? There's only one response left – and that's where we are today in verses 12 & 13.

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!

Believers understand that God is a JUDGE. And that there is a judgment coming in which He is going to evaluate our lives. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:10

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

And in Romans 2,

5 But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

6 God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

I joked a few weeks ago that in this study, I feel like James has decided that I should not have any friends at all. Each week is just full of in my face and in your face truth that many times has been toe stomping hard to hear. But I get it today. See –there is a judgment coming. And James is saying all he has to say to cause pain now so that at judgment there can be joy.

Listen to what Oswald Chambers said this past March 16 in My Utmost for His Highest:

“Paul says that we must all, preachers and other people alike, appear before the judgment seat of Christ. But if you will learn here and now to live under the scrutiny of Christ’s pure light, your final judgment will bring you only delight in seeing the work God has done in you. Live constantly reminding yourself of the judgment seat of Christ...

If you don’t, your heart will become hardened through and through.”

We are heading for the day of judgment. This is a moral universe. For every action it is the living God who supplies the power. For every word it is the Lord God who provides the energy. We live and move and have our being in him. "How did you use the strength I gave you?" he will say. "Your breath was in my hands. How did you use your breath to speak? Were there words of hate, and threat? Did you boast and blaspheme and sin with the strength I was supplying?" "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged." Since you understand that there is a judgment day, and God is going to evaluate your life in light of the law of freedom, speak and act in a way that conforms to his law.

And what's the law of freedom by which we will be judged?

James doesn't define it but treats it as common knowledge for the early Christians. So let me defer to John Piper who takes the definition partly from a verse in Galatians where the language is very similar. Turn to **Galatians 5:13** says, 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.

Christians are set free from their sins. That is, we are forgiven and freed from the condemnation and slavery of sin. Now we are to live in that freedom—forgiven, not condemned by God. Does that produce lawlessness? Does being free mean I do whatever I want to do? Both Paul and James answer no. It produces love. For James the summary of the law of freedom is given in verse 8: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And for Paul the summary of the law of freedom is given in Galatians 5:13, “Through love serve one another.”

For both of them, love is the natural fruit and the necessary evidence of being justified – made right with God - by faith. **LOVE is the kind of law that governs us when we are freed from condemnation by the blood and righteousness of Christ.** And we will be judged under this law of

freedom. If we have not loved, we will be condemned, because there will be no evidence that we are born again and justified by faith.

Do you see that James and Paul put favoritism based on the world's standards in the context of your eternal judgment? This is not a light thing. **How we treat others is the EVIDENCE of our relationship to Christ.** If we have been set free from sin's condemnation and slavery by Christ, then we live in freedom. And in this freedom there is a law—the law of freedom, that is, the law of love. We will be judged under this law. And this law says; Do not show favoritism on the basis of the world's standards.

Now look at how he ends it in verse 13 he says,

13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

The meaning here is plain. It's based on the words of Jesus. In Matthew 5:7 He says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." If we don't show mercy, we have not known Christ. A Christian is a person who has seen and tasted, and lives on, the mercy of Christ. If there is no mercy in our lives—if we show favoritism because of the world's standards and come to no remorse and no repentance—we don't know him and we will be condemned. **But if we have TASTED his mercy and treasure it, and live in the freedom of his love, then we will SHOW mercy and that mercy will be the evidence of our faith which carries us through the judgment.**

Now stick with me here because I want to make sure we catch something we may have missed from the beginning. It would be incorrect to assume because of this passage that obeying this command means that we should not judge others. I have heard time and time again Christian people saying, "I can't judge that person," "I am not the judge," "Don't judge me." "You are so judgmental." Let me just say that you are not obeying this command if you reduce its meaning to "Don't judge someone else." That is not what is being commanded here.

What we must do is judge rightly, according to God's TRUTH. The idea of not judging at all can't be supported by Scripture. And when we take a closer look at this text we can see that it is really calling for the right judgment.

Listen to an Old Testament passage that is foundational for this passage in James, Lev. 19:15, "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not show partiality to the poor nor favoritism to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly."

The directive here in James is to not show favoritism – **don't make decisions about people based on the standards of the world INSTEAD of God's.** We must not be judges with evil motives. We can and we should, however, make judgments based on the right criteria – on God's standards. That is what the text is saying. Do not treat the rich better than the poor. Do not act on the basis of outward appearances. Treat people on the basis of what God sees. Make a judgment that will result in acting towards others on the basis of truth.

The illustration that James chooses shows people who are in a position to judge and act on the judgment. They judge based on the wrong criteria. If these same people had showed no preference for the rich, but had loved their neighbor as their selves, they still would have been acting on the basis of a judgment. The difference is that the judgment would have been based on the right criteria – the truth. Being judges whose judgment is based in truth is exactly what we are supposed to be.

So what is the truth that will protect us from sinful favoritism?

1 Samuel 16:7 tells us that God looks at the heart and so we must seek to see the heart. That gives us two ways to see people – lost or saved. And to see people in those ways does mean that we are

making distinctions but we are judging with pure motives, that all may be saved and that all may walk in righteousness.

What about the **lost**?

If someone has never trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, they are not saved. In talking about the lost, I am not talking about those who claim to be Christians. I am talking about those who clearly do not make that claim based on the shed blood of Jesus Christ through faith alone. When we consider the lost we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Love the lost and do not judge them in their sins so that you prefer to have no lost people in your life. **Judge their lostness so that you seek to share the GOSPEL in word and in deed.** Do not be surprised when lost people act like lost people. Love them and share the gospel with them. Lost people need us to judge them as lost so that we will urge them to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

What about **saved** people - Those claiming to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ?

By their deeds, by their fruit, we can judge when they are seeking to follow Jesus Christ. This is how we can look at the heart. Listen to **Luke 6:45**,

“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”

The people who are seeking to follow Christ, we must embrace as brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter what they have or what they look like, or whatever external qualities that might cause us to show or not show them favoritism. **We must look at their hearts by way of their DEEDS and embrace them with the full acceptance of Jesus Christ**, the same acceptance that we have found in Christ.

Then what about those **claiming** to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ but by their deeds they consistently **deny** their Lord?

Those people we must judge based on the right criteria. **By their deeds we have a biblical case to judge them and in compassion and concern call for REPENTANCE.** We must seek to help them out of their sin. We must implore them to walk with Christ. We must in compassion walk with them in their willingness. If they do not seek to walk in Christ and yet continue to claim to be Christians, then as last resort we must for the sake of protecting the body of Christ and provoking repentance, avoid a relationship of identification with such as these. That is judgment, but it is on the basis of truth, it is with pure motives of righteousness and repentance.

And listen – in that motive is the understanding that Jesus says in Matthew 7:1 whatever measure of judgment you used on others will be held to you as well. And that’s a good thing.

I’ve shared this before when it comes to the law of freedom & a judgment of mercy – that you have to decide what is more important to you: your friend or the friendship. It is easier and more common to value the friendship over the friend because that is what we get out of it. We don’t want to risk confronting a friend who is slipping out of fear of being called judgmental and losing what we want – the friendship. That’s favoritism of the worst kind because it means you will watch your friend spin down the tubes in order to protect yourself and your interests.

But if you truly care about the friend, you will risk the FRIENDSHIP to help the FRIEND – you’ll make a judgment based not on your opinions or your benefits but on God’s Word and His will for the friend and you’ll speak up accordingly. *That is how mercy triumphs over judgment.* And that is exactly why James has been so hard on us here in the last 13 verses – because God loves you through him.

The question is **does your judgment of – your decisions about other people in your world push them to JESUS or pollute your life with WORLDLINESS?**