

m MASTERCLASS | JAMES

DAILY DEVOTION

DAY 8

READ

JAMES 2:8-13

FOCUS

⁸IF YOU REALLY KEEP THE ROYAL LAW FOUND IN SCRIPTURE, "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," YOU ARE DOING RIGHT. ⁹BUT IF YOU SHOW FAVORITISM, YOU SIN AND ARE CONVICTED BY THE LAW AS LAWBREAKERS. ¹⁰FOR WHOEVER KEEPS THE WHOLE LAW AND YET STUMBLES AT JUST ONE POINT IS GUILTY OF BREAKING ALL OF IT. ¹¹FOR HE WHO SAID, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," ALSO SAID, "YOU SHALL NOT MURDER." IF YOU DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY BUT DO COMMIT MURDER, YOU HAVE BECOME A LAWBREAKER. ¹²SPEAK AND ACT AS THOSE WHO ARE GOING TO BE JUDGED BY THE LAW THAT GIVES FREEDOM, ¹³BECAUSE JUDGMENT WITHOUT MERCY WILL BE SHOWN TO ANYONE WHO HAS NOT BEEN MERCIFUL. MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT.

REFLECTION from PASTOR DOYLE SURRATT

Ever shake hands with a homeless person? Ever think twice about shaking hands with a homeless person? Is that some kind of subconscious form of prejudice and, if so, is it OK? Favoritism is forbidden in the beginning of this chapter in James. We as Christians are not to treat people better if they are wealthy or worse if they are poor. Not long ago, I heard of a wealthy sinner who convinced a denomination to establish what looks to most observers as his own personal church in exchange for a promise of a large donation. In the middle-ages "indulgences" were sold so that, for a price, one could be absolved of their sin by the Church. We all recognize those kinds of obvious improprieties when we see them, but are much less apt to see this same attitude in ourselves. In this passage we are called to recognize a higher law, the law breaker in all of us, and a better way.

The law that James calls the royal law is the command to "love your neighbor as yourself." It is called the royal law because it is the law to which all other laws concerning relationships are subordinate. Loving God and loving our neighbors really kind of covers all the other stuff we need to do. It is interesting that the idea of loving your neighbor has, for most of us, fallen into some sort of "nice idea" or "idealistic-leftover-from-the-60's-but-in-Scripture-it-is-a-command" category. I know for me, this royal law is so counter-intuitive and frankly, just plain hard, that I would often rather focus on other disciplines. But it is not optional. It is a requirement and an indication of whether God's love has truly been accepted into our hearts or not. To not show love but to show favoritism is called a sin and in verses 9 and 10 compared with some very obvious and "serious sins" (as if there are any other kinds). To put showing favoritism on par with murder is shocking to us but... we better take it seriously.

In verses 12 and 13 we are told to act and speak like people who have been loved. The law that gives freedom is God's love for us--it is His love that allows us to love others and will always include mercy. We tend to think that the reference to judgment means we will be measured on how much mercy we gave out in this life and will be treated accordingly. But it might be more helpful to recognize, as I said earlier, that the presence of mercy (real, undeserved, sustained, and habitual mercy) is indicative of one who has truly received Christ, more than seeing it as a way of earning eternal favor. The problem for all of us is that we have spent our entire lives learning how to identify/classify others. Whether it be economically, racially, ethnically or any other number of ways we want to know where we stand with people. Are they "my kind of people" or am I above or below them in some social caste system? How else will we know where and to whom we belong? As Christians we already have those answers--we are sinners saved by grace and we belong to Jesus, therefore we are to look down on no one.

I challenge you to watch yourself as you interact with others and observe if your immediate inclination is to, like me, compare, categorize, and evaluate them before you decide how to treat them. Treating someone who is wealthy better or treating someone who is poor differently (not even just badly, but differently) may be an indication that you/I have a heart/mercy/love issue. Be aware of those split second evaluations you make and choose to allow the Spirit to convict you of favoritism and any other "isms" that prevent you from treating folks equally.

QUESTIONS

- HOW (IF AT ALL) HAVE YOU USED YOUR STATUS/WEALTH/POWER TO TRY TO GAIN PRIVILEGE/FAVOR FOR YOURSELF?
- HOW HAVE YOU SHOWN FAVOR/PRIVELEDGE TO SOMEONE BASED ON THEIR STATUS/WEALTH/POWER?
- ARE YOU LIVING A LIFE CHARACTERIZED BY MERCY? WHY OR WHY NOT?