

# Sermon Notes

## THE ROYAL LAW

*James 2:9-13*

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### Introduction

#### 1. The unity of the law (verses 10-11)

- The law of God is like a glass window. Hitting the glass with a hammer just at one spot, shatter the whole glass.
- The illustration: the sins of adultery and murder. They are all punishable by death.
- Why illustrates favouritism with such extreme sins?
- All sins are certainly not equal in degree (Mat 23:23).
- All sins are certainly not equally ugly, horrible and heinous, but James argues that they all shatter the unity of God's law and they turn us into violators, rebels against God's sovereign authority and His rightful role as our ruler and judge.
- Sin of favouritism may not as weightier than murder and adultery, but favouritism at its root can lead to an attitude of hate which is the attitude behind murder. Compare: lustful look with adultery and angry with murder.
- Hence, we must not tolerate our small, "refined", or subtle sins. We cannot claim to have faith in Jesus Christ, if we show partiality. Favouritism is a test of our faith in Christ.
- The royal law is called royal because it is the greatest commandment in the Law and it has a special place in the heart and wishes of the King of kings. It reflects what he is and what he wants.
- Lord Jesus says, "*All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*" (Mat 22:40). So the individual injunctions and precepts given in the Ten Commandment and the Prophets, according to Jesus, are one indivisible whole commandment of love.
- To break one precept is to break 'the royal law' and violate the nature of God who is God of love.
- This is not a system of credit and debit balance for justification as taught by the Jewish Rabbis.
- Like Paul, James knew that no one can depend on the law for justification. See also Chapter 3, verse 2.

#### 2. The law and the Christian – the law of liberty (verse 12)

- We, Christians, have a law to obey because we will be judged by "the law of liberty."
- Is James contradicting Paul, to say that Christians are under the law?
- But Paul also says, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil*" (2 Cor 5:10).
- To understand the principle we need to understand what James means by "the law of liberty" that is used to judge Christians.
- The Ten Commandments are given to Israelites not as a means of their salvation from Egypt, the house of slavery (Ex 20:2). They have been brought out of Egypt.

- The means of their redemption was the blood of the lamb which was put on the sides and top of the doorframes of their houses.
- So the purpose of the law given is not as a means of salvation, but as a rule of life for those who have been already saved, in order to safeguard the freedom He has secured for them.
- The law is the nature of God expressed in commandments. We are in the image of God. So, when we obey his commands, then we are living like him, and at the same time, ‘being ourselves’ – we are truly free.
- By this law we will be judged, not the law as a means for liberation of those in bondage, but the law for those who have been liberated, once and for all, by the atoning blood of Christ.
- Westminster Larger Catechism, Q 97: “What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?”

### **3. The law and the unbeliever – judgment without mercy (verse 13a)**

- It is a characteristic of the unsaved, not to be merciful. In this case, mercy to the poor.
- “Judgment without mercy” means judgment to eternal hell.
- “Without mercy” does not mean “come under the old ruthlessness of the ‘law’” as J. Adamson interprets it.
- When God punishes his people, it is not because He is ruthless or merciless, but his people deserved the judgment and punishment.
- Westminster Larger Catechism, Q 96: “What particular use is there of the moral law to unregenerate men?”

### **4. There is hope for the unsaved and those who repented (verse 13b)**

- The “mercy” may refer to the mercy we show to others or to God’s mercy to us.
- Whether it is the mercy we show to others or it is God’s mercy, we must finally fall back on God’s mercy to us in Christ who works in our heart.
- Douglas Moo: “While setting forth a strict standard, conformity to his holy law, as the basis of judgment, God ultimately is a God of mercy, who also provides in his grace a means of escaping that judgment.”
- This does not mean that justice is compromised. E. Hiebert: “Mercy does not triumph at the expense of justice; the triumph of mercy is based on the atonement wrought at Calvary.”
- There is only one way to escape judgment without mercy that is through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Lord Jesus said, “whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”
- There is always hope for you who have not believed yet, because God is a merciful God.
- Let us not lose sight of the need to continually deal with our own more “refined” or subtle sins, but exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of us may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
- “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”