

XII. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“True Religion and the Law of God”
James 2:8-13

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February 2, 2014 – Morning Sermon

We are currently looking at the development of Gospel wisdom maxim number three and we're in James 2. Our study will cover James 2:8-13 but I need to set it in context so initially I want you to look with me in James 1:26-27 and then we'll pull all of this together. James 1:26-27 says [26] *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I want you to get an anticipation of getting to the end so when we get to the end I will pull out of James 2:1-13 addressing why with Gospel wisdom and the Gospel life, favoritism, prejudice, discrimination from a judgmental heart is antithetical to Christianity. We covered James 2:1-7 in the last study and now we'll cover James 2:8-13 in this study and we'll pull all of that together to show how James will have amassed five reasons why prejudice, favoritism and discrimination is based upon worldly status and worldly distinctions is antithetical Christianity, contradictory to Biblical Christianity as God's grace is at work.

Why does God through James by the Holy Spirit give us five reasons why it is antithetical contradictory? Why doesn't he just say 'don't do it'? Why go through all these reasons? You can google this illustration I'm about to give where Bob Newhart is playing the role of a counselor and when the counselee comes in he says "This will take five minutes and it will cost you five dollars." She said "Don't you want to hear what my problem is?" He said "No, it will be five minutes, five dollars, so go ahead and start." She told him her problem, gave him his five dollars and he looked at her and said "Stop it!" She said "Is that all you have to say?" He said "No, stop it, stop!" That is my kind of counselor. So why doesn't James just tell us to stop discrimination? Why does he go through five reasons? I will get to that at the end of our study.

First I want to come back and set the stage. The book of James is written by the brother of Jesus and is a wisdom book. It is the first written book of the New Testament. It is the most quoted book that gives you Gospel wisdom. The theme of James is the Gospel life is a life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of wisdom from above. Why persistent and why joyful maturation? It is because you need God's grace from above. You are in a broken world where trials are not interruptions in life for they are life. It is in the hands of a sovereign God and these trials are now being used of God in a sin-cursed world. When the trials come it shows you what you know. Every test shows you what you know, and then it reveals what you need to know.

He said that you're my beloved brothers. You have a new heart. You have a new life. You have a new family and a new home. You have all these new things in Jesus

Christ but what you don't have is a new mind and you need a renewed mind. You need Gospel wisdom to live the Christian life. How do you get the Gospel wisdom as the trials of life come? The trials of life will show you what you don't know, what you need to know and will uncover any strongholds of idolatry in your life.

He says that if you lack wisdom then you pray for it single-mindedly and believingly. You ask of the Lord and He gives it liberally. Secondly you read your Bible. Here is where Gospel wisdom is found, in the Word of God. How do you get to your Bible? Number one, become a prioritized, prepared, purposed hearer of the Word but don't be a hearer only. Don't just look in the Bible, look in the mirror, see who you are and who Christ is and then walk away. Take the mirror with you. You are not a hearer only who deceives yourself but you are a doer of the Word also. When you become a doer of the Word you are taking the mirror of God's Word with you into life. The result is true religion.

Christianity is a religion. Don't let anyone tell you differently because you can't have Christianity without religion. It is not a man-made religion built upon human imagination of who God is. It's a God-given religion and we know God not by human imagination but by Divine revelation. The Ten Commandments say have no other gods before Me. Do not make for yourself any graven images. Don't create a god from your imagination. It's the God who reveals Himself in the Word of God, that's the One. We don't have a man-made religion with the arrogance that I can work my way to heaven but we have a God-given religion that declares that God has come from heaven to save us by His grace, change us and the result is true religion – a life lived, increasingly, growingly by His grace for His glory. All of life is sacred and religious.

That's why your forbearers put that first amendment in the constitution. It was for the free practice of religion. Why? It is because all of life is the practice of our true religion. It is not just Sunday morning at 11 am at a particular building. It is all of life for the believer. It's a sacred offering growing in the grace of God designed to give glory to God. That is true religion. The trials of life tell you where you are on this.

An unexpected trial of life shows up. The church has gathered for worship. As they gather for worship they get at least two visitors. This trial of life has now come. True religion is marked out by three things. True religion is from a life that flows from a grace-saturated relationship with God, learned from His Word by the Spirit through prayer and that true religion has three marks. It has a bridled tongue because the tongue speaks from what overflows from the heart and fills it. When you become a Christian you get a new heart and that means you get a bridled tongue. Increasingly grace is reigning in your tongue. It doesn't mean you won't have a slip of the tongue.

Secondly, you do public ministries to the poor, marginalized and the powerless. The two most poor and marginalized in that day were the orphans and widows. In those days once the dad died the widows and orphans were either abandoned to die or in some cases were put to death. This is not so among God's people. They were to minister to the least of the cultures of that day, even the widows and orphans and anything and everything in between.

So they had public ministries of grace and mercy and the third mark was a personal commitment to holiness. Keep yourself unstained from the world. We divide up in the church today. Our church does public ministries of mercy and justice. Our church does personal growth and grace in piety. Jesus says 'no it's both.' You do a

public ministry of grace and mercy and you do a personal commitment to do holiness, not to be saved but because you love your Savior. You want to keep unstained. You don't want your testimony to be stained before the world as you grow in your intimacy with the Lord.

Having given you the three marks of true religion, James shows us an unexpected trial of life. I bet you didn't think the worship service would contain a trial of life. Trials of life come in all kinds of ways – through adversity, prosperity and even in two visitors to an assembly of worship. This is what we covered in the last study. James 2:1-7 says *[1] My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, **the Lord of glory.** [2] For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, [3] and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," [4] have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with **evil thoughts?** [5] 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, which he has promised to those who love him? [6] But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? [7] Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

It says in I Samuel 16:7b, *[7b] For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.* Man can't look on the inside for we make judgment calls about what is driving a person by looking at the outward. A rich man comes in with lavish clothing and every finger covered with gold. Your immediate assessment is that this is a man who is a rich man and do we have a seat for you. Then there is a man who comes in dressed in shabby clothing who is poor and you say to him 'we really don't have a seat for you but if you need one then sit at my feet.' The one you put up and the other you put down. James says your problem is not your human limitation of not being able to see the heart of those men but your problem is when you made your judgment call you were drawn to the glory of the rich man. Your problem was evil thoughts. It is the way you evaluate it. It was what you valued.

Your response revealed your life view and that means this was a trial. If we have Christians here then they either need their life views adjusted and need to grow in Gospel wisdom or it has uncovered an idolatrous position in their life. Or it's revealed that they don't really know the Lord. So this has revealed not a lack of growth but the absence of saving grace. If you are believer then we need to correct these evil thoughts, what you are thinking which James address in James 2:6-7.

Everybody who becomes a Christian is a poor man. You may have riches in the world but you have to get poor to get saved. It is for those who are poor in Spirit. Lord, I'm helpless and hopeless. It doesn't matter how much money you have, you are helpless and hopeless without God. He has saved those who have come to an end of themselves. You see someone who has riches and you are valuing that. God brings you to poverty in order to save you. So what should you do as you deal with people like this? James says, why are you valuing the glory of the world? You have the Lord of glory. What you are revealing is that you are valuing the glory of the world. So you elevate the man with the glory of the world and you demean the other man to sit at your feet. You oppress the one, elevate the other and it reveals the problem with your heart.

Having brought this to us, James now takes us to another level. This is not only inconsistent with the Gospel work in your heart but it's inconsistent with the Gospel use of God's law in your life. Now let's look at the text for this study. James 2:8-13 says *[8] If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. [9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. [10] For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for 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 murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. [12] So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. [13] For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Here James knows what Paul and Peter know and what Jesus said when He said no man by the works of the Law can be saved, but notice that even though it is clear you aren't saved by obedience to the Law there is the expectation that the beloved brothers desire to fulfill the Law. They haven't dismissed the Law for it has its proper use in their life. The Law has no power to save you but yet it does have a place in your life which is why Paul says oh how I love Thy law (Romans 7). It is good and spiritual in its right use, framed by the Gospel. He is expecting Christians to want to fulfill something and James calls the law of God, the royal Law. In other words, God's law was a gift to His people from the King.

Where do you find the Law? You find it in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Who was the Law given to? It wasn't given to the Egyptians. It was a gift of grace to His covenant people. It has a spiritual, grace-saturated use and James is expecting them to want to fulfill it. James uses the same summation as Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40 which says *[36] "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" [37] And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.* He summed up the first five commandments 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind' and He sums up the last five commandments when He says 'and the second is like it; you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

James is saying when you are demeaning this person and you are elevating that person, you are not loving your neighbor. You are giving a false hope to the rich man that his riches will save him and you're giving a condemnation to the poor man that he is beneath you. You are lifting up the rich man giving him adoration with reserved seating but you don't even have a seat for the poor man. How does that fit into the royal Law your King gave you as a gift when you love your neighbor?

He says that showing partiality, favoritism, discriminating in worldly status is committing sin. Why? It is because you just disobeyed the royal Law. Sin is the want of, conformity unto or transgression of the Law of God. So if you just violated the Law of God then you just sinned. How can that possibly be a statement of love to the Lord or to others? Not only that, James now goes from royal Law to the whole Law. James is saying that God's law is Law not laws. It is Ten Commandments, ten threads but one Law. So at any point you disobey a commandment you by necessity have disobeyed all

ten of them. It is not ten laws. It is the Law of God. So when you violate one you have of necessity violated all of it.

For instance, I'm supposed to love the Lord, right? I have demeaned the poor man who is made in the image of God. So how can I say that I am fulfilling these commandments to love the Lord when I am violating this commandment of one made in the image of God? I have violated every aspect of God's Law and yet you say you want to fulfill it not for salvation but because you love your Savior. So what are we to do?

He says in James 2:12 [12] *So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.* This is James' third reference to the Law and now it is referred to as the Gospel law of liberty. That is now what is guiding you in your decision making. The Gospel Law has set you free from the thunder of Law and it has set you free to embrace the sanctities of God's Law; who God is, what God has said, His Day, His worship, the family He created, marriage with no adultery, life with no murder, truth with no false witness, contentment with no coveting. I have now been set free by the Gospel not to live my own life but to desire to live my life for Christ, guided by the King who died for me, the King's Law who now leads me into how to love the Lord with all my heart, soul and mind and how to love my neighbor as myself. The Gospel Law has set me free that I might embrace love to Him and my neighbor.

Then James gives this awesome warning in James 2:13 about the judgment day coming where we all must appear. All of us are under judgment. What triumphed? It was God's grace and mercy that triumphed over our judgment. What should we be showing to others? We should be showing grace and mercy. If you don't show mercy that's not revealing a faulty Christian life view. That is revealing that there is no relationship with Christ and when you stand at that judgment that Day has no mercy. Here is the day of mercy and that Day is the Day of Judgment. Those of us who have erected our own judgment seats with no mercy have evidenced that we have not tasted of God's mercy and it will be declared in that day. That is what James has walked us through so far.

Now I want to give you Gospel wisdom maxim number three. We started putting it together in the last study. We have to do away with evil thoughts. If I'm a believer and the trials of life come I need to think right in order to love right in order to do right. The third Gospel maxim is true religion is derived from a Christ-preeminent life view propelled by a Christ-passionate life love producing a maturing Christ-shaped life style that is informed by God's Word and empowered by God's Spirit. What would have happened if the Lord of glory had taken hold of those who had encountered the rich man and the poor man when they came into that church service? So I need to be growing in the trials of life so that when they come I can say "Wow, God has taught me, praise the Lord, the trial revealed it." "Wow, God has taught me for I didn't know enough about the Gospel and I did not deal with this rightly." The problem isn't the trial the problem is in me. I need to grow with a Christ-preeminent life view, a Christ-dominating, passionate life love for that will lead me to Christ-shaped, growing life style.

In order for James to get you there he has given you five reasons why in true religion that there should be no partiality, favoritism or discrimination. Here is the takeaway. Partiality, discrimination and favoritism in Gospel relationships in ministry are inconsistent with true religion because of five contradictions that they reveal. I am drawing these five contradictions out of James 2:1-13. James says why would you

discriminate with a judgmental heart based upon worldly value systems and status? Here are the five contradictions.

The first one is that it is inconsistent with the three marks of true religion. There is false religion that is man-made. There is God-given, God-centered, grace delivered true religion that comes from a grace given relationship with Christ. True religion has three marks. It has a bridled tongue because of a new heart. It has a life of grace and mercy in ministry to the powerless, the marginalized and the abandoned. Then there is a pursuit of personal holiness. The rest of the epistle is going to take on issue after issue in light of what is true religion and how you ought to respond to it. When you have done what these people did to the rich man and the poor man you have violated all three marks of true religion.

First of all you didn't speak or act consistent with the Gospel. You spoke demeaningly to the poor man. You spoke with false admiration to the rich man when you lifted him up. Your tongue was not guided by Gospel values but by worldly values. Secondly, you have just denied an opportunity to minister to a powerless and a marginalized person. You demeaned the poor man instead of reaching out to him. James says our biggest fishing pool is to the poor and in a sense all of us have to get poor before we'll ever get saved. You have just denied public ministry of benevolence, mercy and grace to someone when you've drawn these conclusions. Whether it's racial, economic, national, you are not allowed worldly distinctions in Gospel ministry and Gospel relationships. It is inconsistent with true religion because you'll be speaking with a grace absent unbridled tongue. Thirdly, you just stained yourself because when you did this you not only violated one law but you violated every law and that means you just stained your witness with sin. You have become a transgressor. So it denies all three marks and that's why it cannot be found in our midst.

The second reason is that it contradicts the Gospel of grace and mercy. We who were poor, Jesus came and saved us. We who were helpless, Jesus came and saved us. You must show mercy. It is the evidence you have received mercy. That is why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, 'the merciful shall receive mercy.' Why did He say that? They are merciful because they have already received mercy and their mercy is evidencing that they have received grace and mercy. If you are not showing grace and mercy, either you haven't been properly taught, you need to grow and you still have that worldly way of thinking where you have evil thoughts that need to be removed or you don't have a new heart or you don't have a relationship with Christ. To make that kind of distinction on worldly status symbols and worldly divisions is in fact contradictory to the Gospel of grace and mercy.

Thirdly, it is contrary to the Gospel use of the royal law. Gird up your loins for this is big stuff. The law is not your enemy. God gave the law. The King gave the law to you as a gift. It becomes your enemy if you think by your obedience and the works of the law, you can work your way to heaven. It has a glorious use. Paul says, 'by the works of the law no man shall be saved, no man shall be justified in the sight of God.' Then he says 'O Lord, Your law is spiritual and good.' What is its spiritual, good, Gospel use? It is three things. Number one is that it brings to you the bad news that sends you to the good news in Jesus Christ. When the law comes it shows me three things; I'm a sinner who is helpless, hopeless and hideous. The law just keeps reminding me that I need a Savior and I can't save myself. So Mount Sinai's first blessing is to send

you to Mount Calvary where Jesus hushed the laws loud thunder. He has paid for all of our sins and His obedience of perfection wraps us up. So we call that the evangelistic use of the law that gives the bad news to send you to the good news.

When you get to Mount Calvary Jesus cuts out your heart and gives you a new heart in which He writes His law on it. Jesus then sends you back to Mount Sinai, not with thunderings but how to love Him. The law has no power but it is an infallible, inerrant direction of how you love the Lord and how you love your neighbor as yourself. It is an infallible director and it is at work in your life. That's what we call what we call the sanctification use of the law. It guides you. Jesus said, 'if you love Me you will keep My commandments' not to be saved but because you love Him. You love Him because He first loved you. He taught us that at Calvary. Here is why He gave His law to His covenant people. It guides the new heart in how to love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind and how to love your neighbor as yourself. That's its right use, don't abandon it.

Our problem of sexual anarchy today in the church was the silence of the church in terms of sexual sanctities of 'do not commit adultery.' We were silent on cohabitation and now it has led to all kinds of rebellion against God. If you want to restore marriage then don't commit adultery. Pursue purity. If you want to restore marriage then honor your father and mother. If you do those things and embrace them then that brings you to the third use of the law which is the overflow of common grace to culture. When God's people use God's law to guide them out of their love to Christ and embrace its ethics, watch what would happen to the traffic patterns out on highway 280 on Sundays. Watch what would happen to how people handle marriage and family in our culture. God's people are salt and light when they embrace God's law out of love to the Lord and it restrains sin in society. It can't save society but it restrains it. It starts putting into society the love of things that are glorious and right.

A couple of weeks ago I got this email that said "Harry did you know" and then attached was this email that said 'Birmingham is one of the top five cities that are Bible-minded, Bible knowledgeable.' Give me a break here because I'm a pastor. On the one hand I said 'praise the Lord' and on the other hand I'm thinking 'ok Bible-minded but are we Bible doing?' I know we have a long way to go but I love the many things that went on this last week during the ice and snow storm that paralyzed our city. We had 400 people stranded at our church last week who couldn't get home and I don't remember anyone standing at the front of the church saying 'ok all the white people over here and the black over here' or 'if you're income is \$25,000 or more we have a place for you.' I just saw people loving people. I wanted to cry, I had joy, I wanted to laugh and it wasn't just Briarwood. I saw so many other churches in this area doing the same thing.

Personally I think that is the overflow of a gradual, not a starting, revival that was ignited in the midst of one of the most terrible moments in the history of our city in the 1960s that has continued to grow. So unlike some cities where I was reading news reports where governors and mayors and weathermen were being lynched and all basically I just saw many saying 'weatherman missed that one.' What man proposes God disposes and I saw people who looked at it as what does this trial give us the opportunity to do. Then I saw signs that read 'Walking home, stop here. If nothing else we can give coffee.' I didn't see it say that only rich people can get the coffee. I was rejoicing that they didn't specify who could get it because it was for anyone who stopped. I not only

saw this with churches and Christians but I saw it with businesses. Businesses were giving out free food. Children's Hospital sent us blankets so that the kids here could have a blanket. I don't think Children's Hospital is a Christian organization but there is some blessing of common grace at work there through believers. Then our people sent food down to them. Department stores were opening their doors to people. It's common grace at work here. God's people had loved their neighbors and it was spilling over in the midst of a trial of life. That's the Gospel use of the royal law of God and it brings blessing upon blessing which opens the door to talk about the Gospel law of liberty that sets you free from your sins. How many witnessing opportunities did this give us?

That's what the right use of the law is. Its evangelistic use is to send you to Jesus. Its directive use shows how to love Jesus and how to fulfill what Jesus says He loves. Then when it's embraced and loved it spills over into blessings. That brings us to reason number four.

The fourth reason is the Gospel law of liberty where the Gospel sets us free from our sins. It set us free from the guilt of our sin, the power of sin. We have been set at liberty to love the Lord now instead of loving the rich man's riches. Love the rich man but not his riches. Love the poor, the black, the white, the Asian and all of them. Don't have any worldly distinctions. We want to reach Birmingham to reach our nation to reach the world for Christ. That means we want to love people continually and consistently so that we say because of the law of God no to that abortion for that's taking a life. Then we go after the abortionist to love them and bring them to Jesus. We go after the woman being deceived by the propaganda of this world for the answer is not the destruction of your child. We want to love them. As long as there is a church – no orphans – as long as there is a church there are people committed to foster ministry. Those of us who aren't gifted at it, we stand with those who do it. We support them and work with them and around them. God has set us free from the guilt of our sin and the power of our sin, the Gospel law of liberty.

Finally, the fifth reason is it is inconsistent with the Lord of glory, if the Lord is your glory. We say to the poor man 'sit here at my feet, worship me.' We say to the rich man 'you sit here for I'm going to worship you.' I worship what I see about you. The problem is not our limitation that we can't see the heart of the rich man and the poor man for man looks on the outward. The problem is that what we saw dominated our heart. The riches were more important than the Lord of glory. The One who left glory to come to us in the dust of the death of sin, laid aside His glory to die on a cross to bring us to glory.

This gives us reason after reason that partiality, favoritism, discrimination is contradictory to those who are living on the foundation of a Gospel relationship with Christ. If we're caught up in this judgmentalness it either reveals we need to develop our Christian life view and life love and therefore life style or it reveals we are stranger to grace and we need the grace of God because we have our own judgment seat and we sit on it. That is consistent with no mercy when you stand before the Lord.

Do you ever wonder why, at least with Christians, at one time were always sensitive to their vocabulary? I remember when I became a Christian. Before that there was a four letter word that was constantly in every sentence I spoke and it was the word 'damn.' When I became a Christian it never showed up again except in this study right now. I hate it because I am not in a position to damn anything or anybody. I'm certainly

not going to put the name of my God in front of my utterances of condemnation. I don't want any part of it. If that is true verbally then it needs to be true ministerially. I don't want to demean or condemn this man nor give a false exaltation to this man. I want this man to know the God of grace who could have sent His Son to judge you but He sent His Son to bear your judgment and that Son becomes our glory. That's the One who becomes our glory.

Aren't you grateful that everything I've walked through is a revealing of your relationship with Him? He is either telling you that you need to come to Him and no 'my mercy' so that you can live in His grace with mercy or He is telling you that you are a child of God and all I have to do is reason with you. James would have called man-made religion a discrimination and he would say 'stop it, stop it, stop it!' He sits down with you as Your Father to his son and I know that there comes a time when parents need to say 'stop it, stop it, stop it!' Every once in a while God will get to that but here is the way He treats us. We are His children and He reasons with us.

If the Gospel is your foundation and your motivation this is contradictory. It is contradictory to grace, mercy, true religion, the Gospel and the right use of God's law. So you say 'no' to it and make Christ preeminent. That sets you free to love Him and live like Him. Now you can go with your Savior to the Table to win the prostitute, the poor, the outcast and even the rich because you're not after their riches. You are after them. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You Father for the majesty of the Gospel life that James has displayed for his reflecting Your patience with us as You reason with us through this trial of dealing with our limitations of where we look on the outward but also with our freedom that which You value and we value that we love that which You love and increasingly we can have this Christ-preeminent life view that propels a Christ-passionate life love that grows day by day a Christ-shaped life style. Father, give us this wisdom. We hear Your Word. Help us do it. Give us this wisdom to pray to You. Give it liberally in Jesus' Name, Amen.