

# Judgment And Mercy

James 2:8-13

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:8-13 (NKJV))

Over these years of my being a Christian and having been involved in efforts to evangelize lost souls, the most common form of resistant response that I have encountered from unbelievers is one that argues, "Well, I really try my best to do what is right. I try to love my neighbor as best I can, and to do unto others as I would have them do unto me. And I believe that when I die and am judged, God will weigh my good deeds against my bad ones and because of my good deeds, He will let me come into heaven". And then some also add, "at least I hope so".

Sadly, for every person who places their hope in beliefs such as those, on their day of judgment, they will be sorely disappointed. Because instead of the heaven they will be hoping for, they will instead hear the words, "depart from me into everlasting punishment. I never knew you".

Those words probably sound very harsh to some people. But they aren't. Not really! Why must that be so? Why is God so "set in His ways", "so absolute and unchangeable in His righteousness and His laws"? It is because of His nature. God is Holy, absolutely Holy! And it's also because of the nature of sin and of sinful man. Sin, of any kind and to any degree, is unholy. And because God is absolutely Holy, He cannot abide with unholiness in His presence, especially for an eternity. If God were to do that, to allow any form of sin, no matter how small, to enter in and become a part of His kingdom, then it would corrupt heaven, and His perfect holiness. And He can't do that!

What that means for us is that before we can ever hope to be allowed to enter heaven, the dilemma of sin within our souls will have to be dealt with. All sin, no matter how seemingly small will have to be removed from our souls, absolutely and completely removed, washed clean, without even a trace of it remaining, and then we can enter into heaven.

And there is only one way that that can take place, only one solution for the dilemma of sin. And the truth of it is spread throughout the pages of this Gospel, with words crying out loudly continually, “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus”. “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus”.

I love the words of that gospel hymn. Listen!

What can wash away my sin?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;  
What can make me whole again?  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh! precious is the flow  
That makes me white as snow;  
No other fount I know,  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can for sin atone,  
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;  
Naught of good that I have done,  
nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Did you hear those last words? They speak directly to the error in belief that we are talking about here, and also the words that are here in our scripture text, the false belief that as long as I do more good deeds than bad ones, then somehow my good deeds will wipe away the bad ones, and then, God will welcome me into His kingdom? But not so! As the words of this song refrain, “Naught of good that I have done, nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Yes, as we’ll study about in a moment, God truly is merciful and He wants to show mercy to each of us. But Folks, there is so much more to the personality and character of God. He is not “one dimensional”, as so many people want Him to be, only love, or only mercy. No! God is more, far more. He has other elements to His character, and other requirements within the covenant that He has made with us, especially regarding dealing with the dilemma of sin that is so rampant within our souls.

Part of the covenant that God has made with us has to do with His measurement of sin and the errant standards with which we, His children, choose to measure sin, that of

“little” sins being of less importance and of less severity than “big” sins. And folks, God simply does not think as we do. Note these words beginning here verse 8, 8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:8-11 (NKJV))

If we read verse 8 by itself, we are immediately pleased.

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; (James 2:8 (NKJV))

And this verse 8, truly is a very good thing. But then verses 9-11 follow,

9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:8-11 (NKJV))

The good that we do in fulfilling the “royal law” does not cover over, or erase, or take away the wrong that we do when we show partiality in a sinful way. And verses 9 and 10 are a truly “defining” requisite of God,

9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:9-10 (NKJV))

Sin is often interwoven into and within the good things that we do, so cleverly so that we can move from good to evil without ever realizing that we have crossed the line, here in this example, doing good for one neighbor, but showing partiality, in a sinful way, towards another neighbor.

And then, notice carefully that God takes a step that surprises many. He elevates the seemingly “small” sin of “partiality” to be on the same level as “adultery” and “murder”. Verse 11

11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (James 2:11 (NKJV))

Now, does God consider the mistreatment of partiality to be as heinous as murder and adultery? I would think not, but though the two measures of sin are not equal in their heinous nature, if not dealt with in accordance with God's plan for atonement and forgiveness, each of those sins will carry the same eternal penalty, death and hell.

Does that seem "unfair" to you, that God would send a person to hell for such a seemingly menial sin as showing one person partiality over another?

May I quickly caution each of us carefully about this consideration, that first and foremost of all, you and I must never elevate ourselves to the high position of becoming the "judge" of our Almighty God, and of His character and holiness and behavior, accusing Him of being "unfair"! Please, please, never do that.

As to His "fairness", the scriptures are clear, it is not God's desire that any should perish. And such matters of sin are never on God's side of the equation. They are ever and always on our side of the equation.

On God's side of the equation, He has established laws, laws that have the expressed purpose of showing forth His loving kindness and holiness. Laws such as those that tell us not to murder someone, or commit adultery with our neighbor, are very pure and very simple "laws of love", love for us and love for the ones we'll hurt with our violence and immorality.

And it is from the very same heart of love that God tells us not to show partiality, in a sinful way, towards anyone, whether they be a stranger, or our neighbor, our relative, even one of our own children over another of them.

Sin is sin folks, and we will not be allowed to bring it with us into the kingdom of God! And that is that!

And may I pause here to remind us that the "Kingdom of God" that we often talk about is not just a place that begins later on after we die and go to heaven. It is that, yes, but so much more. The "Kingdom of God" actually begins now, in this life. The moment that we receive Christ as our Savior and Lord we immediately enter into the "Kingdom of God". And God does not allow you and me, even now, to bring those old sinful habits and behaviors into our "new eternal life in Him".

It all begins now. That is why God's servant James is saying these words to us now. Our righteousness has begun now, from the first moment that Christ implanted it within our souls.

And again, His righteousness in us cannot co-exist with our old sinful ways. So, as we are being told here, you and I need to deal with our sinful behaviors now, today and every day. That is why God instructs us here saying, beginning today,

12 . . . Speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:12-13 (NKJV))

In Matthew Henry's commentary on these words, He tells us that

1. The gospel is called a law. And It has all the requisites of a law. It has precepts with rewards and punishments. It prescribes duty, as well as administers comfort; and Christ is a king to rule us as well as a prophet to teach us, and a priest to sacrifice and intercede for us. We are under the law to Christ.
2. But it is a law of liberty, and one that we have no reason to complain about as a yoke or burden; for the service of God, according to the gospel, is perfect freedom; it sets us at liberty from all forms of bondage, either to the people of this world, or the things of this world.
3. And we will all be judged by this law of liberty. Men's eternal condition will be determined according to the gospel; this is the book that will be opened, when we shall stand before the judgment-seat; and there will be no relief to those whom the gospel condemns, nor will any accusation prevail against those whom the gospel justifies.
4. It concerns us therefore so to speak and act now, as become those who must shortly be judged by this law of liberty; that is, that we come up to gospel terms, that we make conscience of gospel duties, that we be of a gospel temper, and that our conversation be a gospel conversation, because by the rule of the gospel we must be judged.
5. And the consideration of our being judged by the gospel should compel us all the more to be merciful in our thoughts and our regard towards others, for as these words tell us, "he shall have judgment without mercy that hath shown no mercy; and mercy triumphs over judgment."

Matthew Henry goes on to say,

- (1.) The doom which will be passed upon impenitent sinners will be judgment without mercy; there will be no mixtures or reliefs in the cup of wrath and of trembling, the dregs of which they must drink.
- (2.) Those who show no mercy shall find no mercy in the great day of judgment.
- (3.) All the children of men, in the last day, will be either vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy. It concerns all to consider among which they shall be found; and let us remember that "blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy".

So then, as for us, you and me, how will we respond to these truths that God has set before us today. Yes, it does, at first glance, seem at least “odd” to our senses that our simply showing favoritism towards one person over another, in the manner spoken about here, would receive the same judgment of hell as that of a person who commits adultery or kills some innocent person.

But again, with God, and now with us who have His righteous presence within us, the degree of sin is not the question. It is rather the actual presence of sin at all, in any form and at any level. You and I might not like that strict a standard, but folks, God cannot change His holiness and His character just to suit our sensibilities and rationale. He is holy, absolutely holy. And He cannot abide in the presence of any form of sin. If He allows Himself to do that, then He Himself will become unholy. And He can never do that, and we should not ask it of Him.

So then, our response can only be one thing, and that is, we must join Him in His holiness. As He instructs us, “Be ye holy as I am holy”.

And we must not fret as we recognize that we cannot, of ourselves, be holy. Because in His great love for us, God has made every provision. The holiness that He requires of you and me is holiness that He Himself will “put into us”. And all we have to do is “receive” it. And then the Holy Spirit will do the rest. It really is as simple as that!

A question as we close . . . How will we know if this imputed righteousness of Christ is really taking place within our souls? It is as simple as these words imply. Our hearts and our responses will begin to change, and “mercy will begin to triumph over judgment”. We will find ourselves wanting to stop being the way we once were and instead wanting to show genuine mercy and love toward others, especially the less fortunate. Praise be to God!

12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:8-13 (NKJV))