

# Dr. David Bauer, Inductive Bible Study, Lecture 21, James 2:8-13

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This is Dr. David Bower in his teaching on Inductive Bible Study. This is session 21, James 2:8-13.

We move now to the second substantiation of the exhortation that we have at the beginning of chapter 2, and that is that partiality is contrary to God's law.

He talks about it being contrary especially to what he calls the royal law, which focuses upon the law of command there. Now, he begins with the demand of the law and then moves to consequent exhortation, which is found in verses 12 through 13. This is a kind of a subordinate exhortation to 2:1, to show no partiality.

I consider 2:1 to be the primary exhortation. These in verses 12 and 13 are somewhat secondary to that. But we begin with the demand of the law.

He indicates that the law requires complete versus partial obedience in general, and therefore, showing partiality actually involves something less than full compliance with the law and renders one a lawbreaker as a transgressor of the law. Now, we note that he talks really about, as we see here, the royal law. If you really fulfill, verse 8, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Now, why does he talk about the royal law here? Well, almost certainly, he does so insofar as he links it to the love command: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. He seems to be talking about the law as a royal law in terms of the law's relationship to Jesus the King because according to the New Testament, the gospel tradition of which James is familiar, it was Jesus who actually elevated this love command, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, to the center of the law. Remember Matthew 22:34 through 40.

What is a great commandment of the law? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it, which really means you can't have one without the other. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Upon these two commands hang, or depend, all the law and the prophets so that the love command, according to Jesus, stands at the center of the law. When James talks about the royal law, then, as a law that centers on the love command, he is suggesting that it is the law as interpreted by Jesus, as taught by Jesus, and as embraced by Jesus in his role as King. But also, I think he refers to it as a royal law

because of the relationship of the law insofar as it is understood as having a structure that centers upon the love command as being in relation to the kingdom of God.

It is a law of the end-time kingdom of God so the royal law really goes back here to verse 6, heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him. This is the law of the kingdom, the end-time kingdom of God, the law of the kingdom ushered in by Jesus the King. The Old Testament law, then, the royal law, is the Old Testament law in light of and in terms of Jesus' interpretation of it.

Now, and in this sense, this royal law is the liberating law, the law of liberty. Now, this has all sorts of implications. Let me mention just about five of them.

This indicates that the law, notice, according to the scriptures, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. This indicates that the law, *kata ten graphen*, according to the scripture, is still in force and is obligatory upon Christians. Now, here we have, to some extent, a distinction with Paul. I do not think it's a contradiction with Paul, for reasons I'll mention in a moment, but a distinction with Paul who tends, and I underline that word tends, who tends to see the law as essentially, to use Paul's own expression, a *paidagogos*, hard to translate, a schoolmaster, a tutor, or the like.

You find that kind of language in Galatians 3:23 through 29, which serves primarily a negative function in relation to the Christian life. That is to say, it confines us and confines us, or is meant to confine persons until, again, to use the language of Paul in Galatians 3, faith came. Now, part of its negative function as a *paidagogos*, the schoolmarm, schoolnanny, however you want to understand it, a bondage, a binding force, a bondage-producing force, part of that, which of course stands over against this being a liberating reality that James talks about here, for Paul, it is a binding, a bondage-producing sort of reality, is that it shows us really our moral impotence outside of the grace of God and outside of faith.

That is to say, the law in Paul's mind functions in part in order to show us that it is impossible really to satisfy God, to have a relationship with God on the basis of our own efforts at the moral performance of God's law. The law in its form as law really invites moral performance, the attempt to live up to its standards, to satisfy the divine demands on the basis of our own obedience. But as we try to do so, we recognize that we are actually in bondage to sin, that insofar as we attempt on our own power to obey God's law, we actually find ourselves to be incapable of doing so, to be sinners, and again to use Paul's expression, which is reflected both in Galatians 3 and in Romans 7, so that sin can be shown to be truly sinful.

It really then serves to cast us back upon faith in Christ, depending not upon our own moral accomplishment, satisfying the divine demands, putting God under obligation

to us in terms of wages, Romans 3 and 4, but rather, as I say, depending entirely upon God's gracious mercy in Jesus Christ achieved by faith. James' understanding of the law then is really somewhat closer to Matthew than to Paul because James understands the law really positively, not negatively, but positively in the Christian life as properly understood in terms of interpreted by Jesus with a love command at the center and as coming to fulfillment. That is to say, the performance of the law is made possible, the performance of the will of God that lies behind the letter of the law being made possible by placing faith in what Christ has done; he sees the law as having a positive role within the Christian life.

But I say that this involves a distinction in a measure or, to a certain extent, with Paul because actually, Paul's understanding of the law is broader than this. Paul also includes a more positive role for the law, and by the way, this is found in Galatians as well, particularly in Galatians 5, where Paul actually agrees that the whole law is summed up in one word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. He refers really to the law then being fulfilled in the Christian life as a Christian obeys that love command, and he talks, of course, also in Galatians 6 with regard to fulfilling the law of Christ, which is really the love command.

As far as Paul is concerned then, the law also continues in force, but, and James would have no disagreement with this, but only insofar as the law, the commandments of the law are understood as expressions of the law of command, and James actually deals, and Paul actually deals with the law this way. Remember, in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, verses 8 through 11, Paul quotes the law, the commandment of the law, you shall not muzzle an ox when he's treading the grain and asks, is God concerned with oxen? That's a rhetorical question. The expected answer is no.

Of course, one could argue that God is concerned with oxen, but Paul really wants to emphasize that all the commandments of the law are expressions of the dual love command: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and you shall love your neighbors yourself. So, Paul sees that command regarding oxen as being an expression of love, namely that one should not expect labor without paying for it, that the laborer deserves his wages and the like. So, both James and Paul, well, let me put it this way, Paul adopts a view of the law that not only accords with Luther's understanding of the law, that is to say, the law as negative, as pointing to us our moral impotence, as revealing sin to be truly sinful, and thus casting us back upon faith in Christ, that's a Lutheran understanding of the law, which is reflected more in my judgment, although there's great discussion about this at present, is expressed, I think, in large part in Galatians 3, but Paul also adopts a more Calvinistic understanding of the law, that is to say, a view of the law that you have in John Calvin, and that is that the law continues to be an index for Christian discipleship.

It continues to be an index of God's will in terms of how He expects Christian disciples to live, but only if it is properly interpreted with love at the center and all the commandments then being understood as expressions of the love command. Now, the second implication is that this indicates that, in certain ways, the law has even greater authority and significance now than before, in that it is the royal law, that is, it is a law adopted by Jesus Messiah, the Lord of glory, the King, and the righteous standard of the kingdom of God that has come in His person, as well as the standard of judgment at the coming of the end-time kingdom, according to chapter 2, verses 5 and 12. Also, the third implication is that it indicates that this royal law is, however, not identified with the Mosaic law of the Old Testament as such or even with the Old Testament Torah instruction throughout the whole of the Old Testament.

Jesus has not only adopted the Old Testament law, He has also adapted it. A major alteration has taken place. He has not left the law alone.

There is now an ethical structure to the law. I suppose, really, Jesus would say that there was always an ethical structure to the law, but it was not revealed. Now, the ethical structure to the law has been revealed by Christ.

There is now a law within the law, a supreme commandment that governs and interprets all the others. The law of love to the neighbor, Leviticus 19:18, becomes the center of the law, and that makes all the difference in the world with regard to the law in general. All the other commands of the law that are still in force, and it is to be assumed that they are enforced in some way, but that's the whole issue, isn't it, are expressions of the love command.

James, apparently, does not include cultic or ritualistic commandments as you have, for example, described in Hebrews or maybe even in 1 Peter and the like. But as far as James is concerned, all the commandments, and one doesn't know what he would do with the cultic or ritualistic types of commandments, but the point is that the law as a whole, all the commandments are specific expressions of the commandment to love. The fourth implication is that this indicates that partiality involves the love of self over the love of neighbor.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to Scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You do well, but if you show partiality, you commit sin. That is a contradiction especially of the love commandment, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You are not loving your neighbor as yourself, you're loving yourself more than you love your neighbor.

If you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. This points really to the self-serving character of such behavior, and the fifth implication is that this indicates that impartiality relates to the center of the law

itself. And by the way, remember that the commandment with regard to not showing partiality is found in Leviticus 19:15, only three verses away from the love command, Leviticus 19:18. This great commandment that stands over the rest of the law and interprets the rest of the law has to do with the neighbor.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself over against any concern for the status of the other person, rich or poor. The mere fact that the person is a neighbor, that is, in the Christian understanding, that that person is close, that you have the opportunity to do well to him or her, is a basis for loving the person. The only thing that matters about the other person is that the other person is sufficiently close to you that you have the opportunity to do good to him or her.

The fact that the person is there and that you, therefore, have the opportunity to do good is the only basis for action in relation to the neighbor. According to the love command, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But he says, if you show partiality, he says by way of contrast though, if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as a transgressor. You're convicted by the law as a transgressor.

Really, verse 9 reads, you work sin. Very interesting. Ergadzomai, from which, and of course, that's a verb form of the noun ergon, work.

You work sin, he says. Very interesting that he uses that language in this chapter when he talks about faith and works.

You work sin. This really anticipates 2:14 through 26. When he says, you work sin, he indicates that works are inevitable.

It's not a matter of works versus no works, but of works of faith versus works of evil, evil, rebellious, sinful works, works that stem from deep unbelief. And because you work sin, the consequence is you are convicted by the law. He has described these persons who show partiality as judges.

In verse 4, have you not become judges? He said back there. Now, the judges have become the judged. You are convicted by the law.

In fact, they are judged because they have been judged. The difference is that they will be judged rightly versus wrong and unfair judgment that they performed, according to verses 1 through 7. Because they are convicted by the royal law, their judgment is just. So, you have the movement then from sin to conviction by the law as transgressors.

The word for transgressor is parabatai. In terms of its meaning, the connotations of this term involve breaking of law, being a lawbreaker, thus suggesting the idea of

criminal. But it also, the connotation of this term, also indicates the idea of rebellion, so that what he's talking about here is not simply an act, but an attitude that underlies the act, an attitude, of course, that is clearly contrary to faith.

How can one have faith in God and rebel against God at the same time? It involves rebellion, willful and deliberate rejection of authority, hence really criminal rebellion. But not only does he talk here in terms of the meaning of the term, but also in terms of experience. He says you are convicted as transgressors of the law of liberty, convicted by the law as transgressors, for whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all, etc.

In terms of experience, you have become transgressor of the law of liberty. Thus, this person cannot experience, this person not only experiences guilt, that is, wrong relationship with God and all that that implies for present spiritual existence, and is not only liable to judgment and what this implies for the future, but this person also must of necessity remain bound, remain enslaved. This person has not been and cannot be freed by the law of liberty.

Because this person is a transgressor of the law, this person cannot expect the liberty of the law, the freedom that the law affords, but remains enslaved. Remains enslaved to what? Remains enslaved to self-obsession, to a concern for the self that has no real regard for the neighbor, who is not free to love his or her neighbor as himself. But also, in terms of scope, this business of being convicted as transgressors indicates complete guilt.

As Hauck puts it, parabatis, knows no degrees. The person who is one is so totally. This notion of being a transgressor really defines the person.

He says you have become transgressors, convicted by the law of transgressors because it involves a violation of the whole law. In verse 10, he says, For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill.

In other words, because there is one lawgiver, therefore there is unity within the law. If he who said, do not commit adultery, also said, do not kill. If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Now, he says whoever has violated the law at one point has become guilty of all of it. The reason why violating the law at one point makes one guilty of the whole law has to do with the character of the lawgiver who is one. Repeatedly, James talks about God being one.

In 2:19, he says, You believe that God is one, you do well. In 4:12, he will say, There is one lawgiver and judge he was able to save and to destroy. This then picks up a

major theme in James and the main element of James' theology, his doctrine of God, which is a unity of God.

His logic really runs like this. Whereas God is one, that's a basic premise, not simply in the sense that there is no other God, but also in the sense that God is not divided. All that God is and all that God does and all that God says coheres in perfect unity.

That's a major premise. Then the minor premise, and whereas the law is a reflection of the character and will of this one unitary God, therefore, the law is one, even as the lawgiver is one. And to break one part of the law is to be guilty of breaking the whole law.

Now, the purpose of this whole line of argument here is to argue against a flippant attitude towards partiality. It's no big deal. I am not an adulterer.

Actually, what he suggests here, very subtly, though, is that to commit adultery is to commit a form of murder. He who said do not commit adultery also said do not kill. If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Insofar as you show partiality, insofar as you violate your neighbor in this way, you are actually, in a sense and in a measure, taking life from him, taking away from that person what it means to be fully and vibrantly alive. Again, he's arguing against a flippant attitude toward this issue of partiality. It's to be taken with utmost seriousness, and he's arguing against a flippant attitude toward obedience to the law of God.

He is contradicting the argument that says my heart is right with God, I have faith, even though I do not keep all his laws, or I keep some of the laws of God or most of them, and therefore I'm not truly guilty. God demands full compliance. Anything short of that is tantamount to full disobedience and is unacceptable.

Another way of putting it, really, is that because the law is one and is one around the love commandment, to violate the love commandment is to violate the whole law. And so, he says here in verse 12, and this, as I say, is really the consequent exhortation, so speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. Now, when he talks about, again, the law of liberty, this implies some kind of bondage, some kind of slavery, perhaps bondage to passion, 1:13 through 15, 4:1 through 3, bondage to the world, 4:4, or more precisely, internal, bondage to internal passions that are vulnerable to the world, that lead us to unite ourselves to the world.

There's an irony, of course, implicit in this notion of law of liberty. He is suggesting that the law does not restrict freedom, as was and is the general understanding of

the law and of law, that, as I say, law exists in order to restrict freedom, not in order to promote freedom. But here, he talks about the law of liberty.

This view of the law as restrictive and binding assumes the inherent freedom of the individual. It assumes that we are bound by that which is outside of ourselves, by external forces, including law, that keep us from doing what we want to do. But the New Testament notion of bondage is not that persons are in bondage because of external constraints, but that that which really binds persons is not external to persons, but is internal to them.

It is precisely, to use James' phrase, our desire that binds us. The notion that we are bound by something that is outside of us, and therefore, if we did not have that external constraint, we would be free, assumes a notion of the autonomous self, that human beings are essentially and inherently free. But actually, the New Testament, including James, disagrees with that assumption.

Human beings are not inherently free. They are existentially bound. They are bound by their own desires, their own passions.

And the law, far from constraining freedom, actually makes freedom possible. The law frees us from the bondage of the self, the bondage to the self. James knows that the individual is not free.

That which truly binds or restricts a person's freedom is not some external force, a law, but an internal force, the yetzer, this desire that he had talked about in chapter 1, this internal desire that when given free reign, towards the world, rather than towards God. Ironically, in seeking self-determination, one loses self-determination. In seeking to be free, one becomes bound.

This phrase implies, therefore, that true freedom is to be found only in God, and that God grants us freedom precisely through the means of the law. That is, the will of God expressed in Scripture, as that Scripture has been interpreted by Jesus Christ and is embraced as an act of faith. This is one dimension of the so-called implanted word, which is able to save or to deliver your souls.

This, then, is true freedom because if one had total freedom to choose, one would always choose life and wholeness versus death and destruction. In doing the law, one becomes more and more free. Now, of course, it is true that legalism is binding, but legalism is a force outside the law itself.

It's a way of relating to the law, a wrong way since it contradicts the character of the law as the law of liberty. Now, all of this ends in judgment, according to verse 13. He says, so speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty, for



judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy, yet mercy triumphs over judgment.

Now, what he's really saying here is that because one is responsible for all the implications of the royal law, to obey all the commandments that specify the principle of love, and will be judged accordingly, there is hence the need for mercy. If the law is viewed in a strict and rigorous sense, we have all fallen short. James 3:2, For we all make many mistakes, and if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.

And therefore, in need of mercy, if we are to escape eternal judgment. Hence, in verse 13, judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy, yet mercy triumphs over judgment. This really points to two inclinations.

This first points to two inclinations of God, mercy or compassion on the one hand, and of course, later in chapter five, he will describe God precisely this way, where he says in 5:11, you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. So, one inclination in God is mercy and compassion. The other inclination of God in God is justice.

There is, I think, some tension here, though not a contradiction. They really work together. God is characterized ultimately by mercy.

According to 2:13, mercy triumphs over judgment. Also 5:11, that the Lord is merciful and compassionate. Since God is one, God's justice is seen as a dimension of his mercy and of his compassion.

A world without justice would really not be compassionate and merciful. There is nothing compassionate about anarchy. But to have mercy on the unmerciful would involve a serious violation of justice and, hence, ironically, an ultimate violation of mercy.

It would be a betrayal of mercy itself. To have mercy on the merciful would be a betrayal of mercy itself. Mercy stands at the center of the law.

For God, then, to disregard the demand for mercy would be tantamount to overthrowing the law entirely. In the Bible, God's love involves accountability. For the sake of the person, him or herself, and for the sake of victims of persons, love must involve accountability.

Really, for God not to hold persons accountable would be to depersonalize them, really to dehumanize them. Holding persons to accountability, which of course carries with it the corollary of judgment, is really showing regard for persons as persons, giving over to persons really the power of their own self-determination,

giving into their hands the power of their own future and the like. Any other understanding of love, any understanding of love that does not involve accountability, actually turns human beings from being true persons to being objects to being automatons who do not have sufficient freedom in order to exercise true personhood.

Of course, the point that he makes here is that mercy at the judgment will be shown towards those who have shown themselves shown mercy, even though they might not have always obeyed all the specific implications of the love command. Again, 3.2, we all make many mistakes, and a funny one makes no mistakes when he says he is a perfect man able to bridle his body also. We all make many mistakes.

This is a concession. This, of course, points back to verses 1 through 13, but it also points ahead to verses 14 through 26. The work in this context is primarily the work of showing mercy to the poor.

So, when he goes ahead to talk about faith about works being an expression of faith, as he will, in 2:14 through 26, really the thing he has primarily in mind in this context is work of mercy, work of mercy so that one really will be acquitted on the day of judgment on the basis of one's faith if it is true faith if it is a faith that expresses itself in work, and especially the work of mercy, which is attached inexorably to the love command, which is at the center of the law, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Now, in the next segment, we will go ahead and note how he substantiates this exhortation with regard to partiality by this great theological statement regarding faith and works in verses 14 through 26.

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