

Wednesdays in the Word
Digging Deeper
July 15th, 2020
James 2:1-13
The Law of Liberty

Our friend and brother James in his exploration of faith looks to the law in chapter 2. Every Jew knew the law and many kept it as strictly as possible. James here explores the law and begins to reason it through. This reasoning had been done over the centuries by the Rabbis and became doctrine. But now in the Light of Jesus Christ the veil has been removed and God's Word is clearly seen. (James 1:22-25) By naming some of the Commandments in verse 2:11 he quickly spins us on our heads to tell us that though we may keep the law even perfectly that the heart must be our true focus. In verse 13 James explains to us that God will judge us with His law according to the level of mercy that we show others when we judge them. These 13 verses are truly about the judgments we make in our hearts. Whether we judge others for the way they are dressed as an example or for any other difference among men, we are wrong because we cannot see the heart. Remember from a few weeks ago that Jeremiah reminds us that our own hearts are desperately wicked. (Jeremiah 17:9) After cautioning us to judge the parameters of our own Christianity in verse 1 and giving us our example in the next few verses he comes out with a bold statement in verse 8. He mentions the Royal Law of loving our neighbor which if practiced would abolish all sin. James was a half brother to Jesus. See Matthew 13:55. Early in Jesus' ministry, it is safe to say' James along with his other brothers and sisters did not even believe that Jesus was the Messiah. See John 7:2-5. We can, however, understand that growing up under the fatherhood of Joseph along with his mother Mary, that James, like Jesus and their other siblings were raised in a good Jewish home. They would have gone to synagogue regularly. See Luke 4:16. We can also assume that all the children of the family went through the proper Hebrew rituals, education and training as well as learning the Torah and memorizing most or all of it. Somewhere along the line James picked up the idea of "Loving Thy Neighbor". He surely would have been present when Jesus was giving his early sermons. See Matthew 5:43-44, along with Matthew 22:36-40. Were these new ideas that Jesus was putting forth? Not at all. Jesus was simply embellishing upon the statements of the law in the Torah. As was mentioned, James also would have been studying all this in his education and would have known for himself what the Word of God said. See Leviticus 19:18. So we can now reason that James, knowing the law and his brother, Jesus, who by now had been crucified and was the risen Messiah, had come to fully understand the law and the many commands and precepts therein. They had gone from a dry list of rules and regulations to an understandable style of life and indeed the writings of the law were now upon his heart as well as upon the hearts of the other disciples. See Ezekiel 36:26 and Hebrews 8:10. Perhaps one of the greatest dichotomies in the Christian faith is the fact that we see the Bible for its strict lines of guidance and misunderstand that it is a book instructing us to judge ourselves while training us to treat others according to the love of God.

James chose to quote from Leviticus chapter 19 for a very good reason. Let's turn there and follow through on what he surely would have learned as a child and had come to know deeply as he grew in the faith of his Savior. Chapters 18 and 20 are such difficult and demanding

chapters and yet sandwiched between them is chapter 19. God here seems to take a pause from all the hard teachings to look at life from a very plain and common level. The Lord here almost says to us, "I know all this is very difficult but here is the way I want you to live day by day among others". Verse 1 tells us that the Lord is continuing to instruct Moses concerning His law but He wants to simplify some of the points that he has been making and will continue to make. In verses 3 and 4 He reminds us all of the very most basic commandments. We are to honor our parents and our God. If these alone were kept faithfully, just imagine the condition our world would be in today as opposed to the lawlessness we see. Verses 5-8 talk about freely offering our gifts to the Lord but doing it according to his regulations. Life with God is our choice but it is not free and easy. God demands that if we choose to live under His authority, we must do it His way. Verses 9 and 10 speak of the arrogance and selfishness of the human heart when we would choose to share nothing with others or to assist them in any way. Clearly, a harvest missing its corners would still be plentiful but would also allow the poor and the hungry you have sustenance. In fact our beloved Ruth and her beautiful story survive to this day because of such practices. Verses 11-14 used to be taught in our Public Schools. Not word by word but as principles on how to treat one another. Now, by removing God and His Word from the schools and hence all of society, we also remove the very heart of His love for us and even defiantly reject how He would have us treat one another in the name of separating state from religion. How has it gotten from sharing the love of God and others to being accused of forcing our religion against the state's laws? All the fruitless teaching about bullying that has been going on for years with little to no effect is simply wrapped up in verse 14. Verse 15 gets to the heart of the matter concerning judging others in righteousness. Without Christ we cannot do that. The rejection of this very principle and the Wonderful Savior who made it a reality in our lives is the root cause for the violence taking place in our streets. All mankind seems to be able to do anymore is to viciously judge others through the hatred of every perceivable difference. If you are a politically-motivated person or are thrown about by all the division in our nation please put it all aside and stand with Christ, understanding that all people are indeed created equal and all equally deserve loving treatment as well as righteous judgement. Judge all through The Eyes of Christ. Where sin or evil exist we have laws to practice, though we have disqualified those laws as part of our national rebellion against Almighty God. He is patient with sin. So must we be. The Lord, in verse 16-18 addresses the very core of human relationship. We must put aside gossip, look out for our neighbors' welfare, control our heart attitude towards one another, watch our words with others and certainly watch our deeds, exercising self-control. Do you bear a grudge against anyone anywhere? We can be reminded that Jesus tells us that we shall not judge others (Matthew 7:1-2) and gives us the alternative of loving the very neighbors that we would wish to have vengeance against. (Romans 12:17) Verses 19-25 give us real life examples meant to show us not to mix our faith in God with anything or anyone else. God will not share His throne. He also gives us strict rules on how to deal with sin when we have failed. Again God is strict about Sin. All these frightening things that we read here have been covered by the blood of Jesus and are marvelously forgiven through His sacrifice. Why do we lose ourselves in sin and trample on the very blood that bought us? See Hebrews 6:6 and Acts 20:28. Back to Leviticus chapter 19. Verse 26 tells us to avoid the spiritual and supernatural realm which we cannot control and which also blasphemes and dishonors God. Verses 27 and

28 are strict rules for God's Nation to keep themselves pure and unique and to keep their bodies as living temples for him. We don't observe these rules anymore because Jesus has fulfilled every one of them and we find our perfection in Him. That does not mean though that we ought to live as if there were no rules. We should still use our bodies in honor and for His glory. Verse 29 seems to speak of an ancient culture that we no longer tolerate but the very sins in this verse are quite common in America today. When will we turn back to the Lord? Please pray for yourself and your land that the United States would finally return to God so that we may once again live in His blessing. Reading on from verse 30 we are again reminded of God's laws and of the fact that we seem to ignore them all today. There ought to be holy times and holy places which we would all do well to honor. Do we need to keep the law? No. But should we abuse it? No. Another reminder to stay away from the mystic world. We are so obsessed with mysticism, spirits, ghosts, fortune tellers, astrology and all the new age beliefs. Be they pyramids, electrical vibrations, stones, oils and so many other natural and supernatural things that seem to try to stand in front of God. Verse 32. Oh my oh my. Can you imagine how things would be if we would respect our elders? The elderly among us are fearful of crossing the street for the violence they will endure. And not to get political but verses 33-34 could be addressing illegal immigration or simply visitors from foreign countries. Either way we are not to trouble these people until we know the truth about their intentions and their concerns for the customs of our land. This point can be debated again as to whether folks come to be a part of the good of our nation or to destroy it. We can go back to what James said in 2:13. We will be judged by the parameters we place on others when we judge them. What a great statement that "mercy rejoiceth against judgement". Mercy, personified in Christ, finds joy in replacing judgement with love. Back to Leviticus 19:35-36. Absolute honesty in every business transaction, every word of our mouths, every dollar we earn. Why should a Christian do any other thing? Verse 37 reminds us to live holy in our new testament paradigm. We are free from the punishment of the law and it's strength to condemn us. We ought still to have that law written on our hearts. It should go against our very being to do things that are evil, dishonest or ungodly. God and James, His scribe, desire for us that we live justly and have mercy before others. (Micah 6:8) The Law of Liberty gives us the freedom to do what is right as we interact with one another.