

“Three Laws for Life”

James 2:8-13

February 17, 2013

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<sup>A</sup> Judges 21:25; 17:6 but see also Deuteronomy 12:1-9 for laws of the land

<sup>B</sup> Romans 13:1-4

<sup>C</sup> Mark 12:30

<sup>D</sup> Matthew 7:12, Romans 13:9

<sup>E</sup> Luke 10:27-28

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<sup>G</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4

<sup>H</sup> James 1:25, Romans 3:10, 7:12; Galatians 3:21-22, 5:1; John 8:31-32, Acts 15:10; Hebrews 10:16, 2:2-3

<sup>I</sup> Romans 8:1, Hebrews 9:27, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 John 4:16-17

<sup>J</sup> Matthew 25:21, 23, 26

—{1}. **James 2:8-13..... Three Laws for Life**

A. Introduction

1. Rule of Law

- a. it is said that we here in Canada live our lives under the rule of law
- b. before defining what the term the 'rule of law' means it is perhaps made clearer by describing what happens in its absence as is the case in many countries throughout the world today
  - (A) dictators rule according to their personal whims
  - (B) property and goods may be confiscated, and people imprisoned and executed, in an arbitrary fashion
  - (C) rules may be imposed without any due process
  - (D) Judges 21:25 describes such a situation: 'In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.'
- c. the definition of the rule of law however, can be somewhat cloudy as Farlex' legal dictionary<sup>—{2}</sup>. says, 'The rule of law is an ambiguous term that can mean different things in different contexts.'
  - (A) In one context the term means rule according to law. No individual can be ordered by the government to pay civil damages or suffer criminal punishment except in strict accordance with well-established and clearly defined laws and procedures.
  - (B) In a second context the term means rule under law. No branch of government is above the law, and no public official may act arbitrarily or unilaterally outside the law.
  - (C) In a third context the term means rule according to a higher law. No written law may be enforced by the government unless it conforms with certain unwritten, universal principles of fairness, morality, and justice that transcend human legal systems.'
- d. it is in that area of there being a 'higher law' that there is, of course, much difference of opinion: frequently these reflect the norms of a particular society – as Christians, we believe that those norms are tainted by the universal malady of sin

2. Law Expresses the Will

- a. in democratic societies, this is nominally the will of the people

- (A) governments, our own included, often make their laws on what is popular rather than on what is morally right
- (B) pressure groups – lobbyists – can substantially influence the laws, beyond the relative size of the people they represent
- (C) yet in the main, despite imperfections, we discover Paul’s words to be true, ‘Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. ... for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.’ (Romans 13:1, 4)

b. which brings me to the point I want to make by way of introduction

- (A) the law given in the Scriptures, is an expression of the will of God
- (B) in a special way it expresses His counsel and plan for His people
- (C) it constitutes God’s revelation to man of what and who God is
- (D) but it is also God’s revelation to man of what man himself is

c. the Christian, therefore, needs to take a deep interest in it; to pay attention to what it says; to apply it to one’s own heart and life

d. we, therefore, will have nothing to do with the antinomian heresy the early church faced – the belief that under the gospel dispensation of grace the moral law is of no obligation because faith alone is necessary for salvation – a heresy, a mixture of truth and error, still around, saying ‘believe in Christ, be saved, and live just as you please.’

B. The Royal Law. . . . . 2:8-9

1. 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself,’ you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

2. Why Is It Royal?

a. the Law is like a Coin

- (A) in the NT, the great commandments are expressed as two parts

- (B) the first is this, quoted by Jesus from Deuteronomy, *'and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'* (Mark 12:30)
    - (1) this is represented on one side of the coin which bears a picture of the monarch, the king
    - (2) it deals with man's relationship to the King
    - (3) in the OT, the law in respect to this relationship were given in the first part of the ten commandments as well as in the laws of the tabernacle, its sacrifices, and the worship therein
    - (4) when a person is in Jesus Christ all that law has been satisfied
  - (C) the royal law is the second part, the second side of the coin
    - (1) it deals with man's relationship to other people
    - (2) *'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'*
    - (3) deals with the second part of the ten commandments as well as the righteous laws that were to govern God's people to mark them off from all other nations
  - (D) it is the royal law, because it is given by the King, to govern the lives of Kingdom people, both of the OT and the NT
- b. there is a second reason that it is the royal law
- (A) in the Sermon on the mount, Jesus expressed this law in other terms, *'In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you,* (that in practical ways, is loving your neighbour as yourself; and He says) *for this is the Law and the Prophets.'* (Matthew 7:12)
  - (B) it is the king of laws, to which all other laws governing human relationships are subordinate: it is a summary of all such laws
  - (C) Paul says the same thing in Romans 13:9, *'... and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ...'* quoting it
- c. it is a kingly law, given by the King, for people of His Kingdom; as stated in both the OT and NT Scripture ... the written word of God

### 3. "You Do Well"

- a. when put into English in this fashion, the statement seems weak in comparison to the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ
- b. Jesus said this was second only to the greatest commandment, that of loving the Lord our God

- c. in Luke 10:27-28, in answer to the lawyer's question how to gain eternal life, Jesus quotes these verses saying, 'Do this and you will live'
- d. but the Greek word has another meaning when used in a context of morality as we have here; namely, beautiful, noble, honourable
- e. if you are obeying this royal law, then you are doing that which is beautiful, virtuous and honourable
- f. unlike those rich to which we referred last week in verse 7, who cursed the name of Christ, such a beautiful way of life honours that beautiful name of Jesus, our Saviour-Lord. So, then, we see in verse 9 that ...

#### 4. Partiality Is Incompatible

- a. to play favourites with the rich at the cost to the poor is totally out of keeping with the royal law of loving our neighbour as ourselves
- b. and to anyone who might seek to limit the generality of the royal law by asking 'Who is my neighbour?', Christ gave reply in the parable of the Good Samaritan – it is the person in need where we are in a position of being able to help
- c. in physical terms, that may be the poor; in spiritual, the rich
- d. if my concerns for my neighbour, are as strong as for myself; and my actions for my neighbour, as those I take for myself, then I have started along the path of keeping the royal law

#### 5. Such Partiality is Sin

- a. the travelling of Israel from Egypt to the promised land gave to them a metaphor: '... the Lord your God, who goes before you on your way, to seek out a place for you to encamp, in fire by night and cloud by day, to show you the way in which you should go.' (Deuteronomy 1:32-33)
- b. that metaphor describes a person's life as walking along a path
- c. keeping the law is then portrayed as having that path's boundaries demarcated by God's law; to step outside is to commit sin
- d. a person who shows partiality, plays favourites, is such a transgressor; he has stepped over the line
- e. he is thus convicted – the Old English word is convinced – of a sinful act

C. The Whole Law . . . . . 2:10-11

1. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not commit murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

2. Unity of Law, Unity of God

a. let us continue for a moment with James' picture of a person walking that pathway of life and never transgressing its boundaries ...

b. except, ... at one point he stumbles across the line –

(A) stumble could refer to a minor rather than a major fault

(B) as does the Roman church, having its two categories of sin: the venial, that can be pardoned, and the mortal, that cannot

c. but the context here is otherwise, for the stumbling sin is considered every bit as serious as any other sin; with the same consequences

(A) Picture for a moment your taking a child to a park into a play area that is bounded by a fence. Of course, you tell the child, 'Now don't you leave this play area.' And, of course a little while later you find the child wandering about outside of the play area. You ask why and he replies, 'The fence was fallen over there and I stepped across it.' You of course do not accept this excuse!

(B) society – the world and its norms – has broken down the fence in places and undermined it here and built ramparts over it there – so there are places it is easy, unremarkable, if you should cross it

(C) but like that child, you are just as guilty of that sin (partiality in this case) as if it were murder or adultery

d. consider a moment the nature of the law and of sin and of God

(A) Deuteronomy again: 'The Lord our God is One, and you shall love the Lord your God ...'

(B) there is no inconsistency in God – He is Perfect in every aspect of His being; in His holiness, in His love, in His justice, in every way

(C) and the Law, as we have said, is an expression of the will, the plan and the purpose of this Almighty God who is One

- (D) so to disobey this or that command because it is inconvenient or does not suit our desires, is to flout the sovereign God completely
- (E) it is not which command we break, but that we break it – it is an defiant act of the created being against its Creator: hence

### 3. Partial Obedience Is Disobedience

- a. It has been said,<sup>{3}</sup>. 'You might find a primitive community where committing adultery is absolutely wrong because then a wife could be bearing someone else's child. But in that same community killing and eating your enemies is not considered wrong. So James' words would be right up to date for them: "For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker."
- b. it was for this reason that John Elliot to the North American Indians and John Paton to the natives of the New Hebrides, first taught the ten commandments, so that they saw their sin and guilt before God.
- c. you cannot by the keeping of most commandments, however many, excuse yourself of the breaking of the one: it alone places you in a state of guilt before God, with the need of His forgiveness

### D. The Final Law . . . . . 2:12-13

- 1. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement.
  - a. we call it the final law because it has already been so described it in James 1:25, 'But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.' – it is perfect, having achieved God's design; complete; the final word

### 2. Freed from Bondage

- a. by the royal law, by the whole law, we all fall short
- b. the Scripture makes clear that we cannot keep the whole law of God and thereby gain our salvation – 'there is none righteous, no, not one'
- c. so keeping the law – 'So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.'

(Romans 7:12) – as it may be,

- d. cannot save: '21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. 22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.' (Galatians 3:21-22)
- e. that is our state; shut up in the prison house and only one way out
- f. that is why the final law, the law of liberty in Christ is needed: belief, faith, trust in Christ brings the liberation Christ has promised, '31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" (John 8:31-32)
- g. which Paul describes later in Galatians 5:1, 'It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.'
- h. the law of liberty is not an externally imposed set of rules, which the Pharisees expanded and Pharisaic Christians sought to place upon the Gentile believers; which Peter describes as '... a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?' (Acts 15:10)
- i. but instead of being engraved in tablets of stone, it is engraved on the tablets of the believers' heart, 'This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.' (Hebrews 10:16 NIV)
- j. because it is the work of Holy Spirit, all the more we should obey it: '2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? ...' (Hebrews 2:2-3)

### 3. Judgement and Mercy

- a. There are two related words in the Greek which are confused in most, if not all, of the English translations in one place or another
  - (A) the first is krino, which means to judge; that is to decide whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, innocent or guilty
  - (B) the second is katakrino, (and there are other similar compound words of krino ), which means to 'judge down': that is to condemn and to pronounce sentence of punishment upon



- (C) a relative of the second word is used in Romans 8:1, 'Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.'
- (D) but the words in these verse are related to the first; krinesthai, krisis, kriseos - Hebrews 9:27 describes it, 'And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment'
- b. 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.' (say Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- c. how are we to face this? 1 John 4:16-17 answers, 'We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.'

#### E. Conclusion

1. Oh! that each one of us here, when we come before the Saviour-God may hear these words, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant' (Matthew 25:21, 23 AV) rather than those sad ones, 'Thou wicked and slothful servant!' (verse 26)
2. I seek, along with Paul, to make known unto you the whole counsel of God as we find it in these verses; may the Holy Spirit take that which is true and right and apply it to each of our hearts this morning.

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
- EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
- Lange – Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
- NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
- TYN – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, [www.holwick.com](http://www.holwick.com).

2. Online at <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Rule+of+law>

3. ‘*God’s Royal Law Gives Freedom,*’ by Rev. Geoff Thomas (a message most worthy of reading) – Kerux sermons #2379