

February 18, 2018

"Consider it pure joy..."

"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism...If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in just one point is guilty of breaking all of it...Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!"

James 2:1-13

How do you judge others? How often do I? We would all, of course, like to deny that we judge others, but we all do it. What criteria do you use? What criteria do I use? Maybe we judge others based on their race. Maybe we judge others based on their nationality, or on their political beliefs, or on their relative wealth, or on their looks, or... All of us are guilty of making snap judgments about others based on what are really very much just surface trappings.

James would call these judgments "***favoritism***" and he would say, "***...if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.***" Making judgments about others is a sin. Treating others differently because of surface differences is a sin. Our Lord was not kidding when he said, "***Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the measure you use, it will be measured to you.***" (Matthew 7: 1-2)

How often do we make these kinds of judgments? How often do we choose our behaviors towards others based on some supposed difference? How often are we quick to condemn those who are not just like us; don't agree with us?

Here's a simple test: Keep track of how often you use broad sweeping terms to categorize and then dismiss whole groups of people? We call young people born at the turn of this century "Millennials". We call older people born after World War II "Baby Boomers". We label people "Conservatives" or "Liberals"; "Democrats" or "Republicans". We categorize people as "Black" or "Hispanic" or "Indian". We label people as "Rich" or "Poor", and then we treat them differently based on the box we have identified for them.

James would tell us that all such behavior is sin. Why? Because making these kinds of judgments is in direct opposition to what he will call the "***Royal Law***". When we label others and then dismiss them we are breaking God's commandment to "***Love your neighbor as yourself.***"

Jesus would tell us that the summation of all that God demands of us is found in his "Golden Rule": "***So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.***" (Matthew 7:12). Anything less than that is sin. So, how do we begin to break this nasty, destructive, sin-filled habit that we all practice? The solution is surprising simple. It is this: **See people as individuals. Get to know people as individuals. Seek to understand people as individuals.**

The truth is, none of us fit into boxes. We are not types, and we cannot be defined by labels. We are all individuals and very different from all the others. We are the product of so many different things coming together to make us, us, that labeling us always falls far, far short of really identifying who we are. Even after all of these years together very few of you know me all that well, and I don't really know you all that well either. That being true, how can I possibly judge you? Or you, me?

You and I are individuals. To really understand us; who we are, what we think, or how we feel about any issue would require that we spend hours in deep, open, and honest conversation. As good as our fellowship is very few of us ever do that, do we?

Thus, we must learn to see each and every person we meet as an individual and, in keeping the "Royal Law" and the "Golden Rule" we must treat each one just as we would like to be treated. James would tell us that the secret to accomplishing this task is to focus on **mercy**. I want others to be merciful to me. I want them to "cut me some slack". I want them to understand that I am not perfect. So, if I want to receive mercy from others I must learn to be, first and foremost, merciful in the way I treat them. James concludes, "***Mercy triumphs over judgment!***"



k31833542 fotosearch ©