

• Not "Under" but rather "Fulfilling" the Mosaic law

1. James is concerned with a balanced godliness

• The Christian reads the law in a higher level than its original intention. And he may break it at a higher level also!

• When we think about righteousness we tend to think mainly about sexual matters!

• But poverty leads to immorality

• Gossip and discrimination against the poor – or against anyone – is a form of spiritual murder!

2. Failure to keep the royal law of love is spiritual murder

James is obviously writing to Jewish people. His readers are very interested in the Mosaic law, but James himself is very interested in their 'fulfilling' the Mosaic law (which is more than being 'under' it in a simple direct manner).

1. **James is concerned with a balanced godliness.** We are to be concerned with 'fulfilling' by the Holy Spirit every part of the Mosaic law. He says: *'For anyone who keeps the whole law, but goes astray in one ruling, has become guilty of breaking all of it'*¹. The law is a unity. The reason why it is a unity is that it comes from one God who gave it all. *'For he who said, "Do not commit adultery" also said "Do not kill". But if you do not commit adultery, yet you do kill you have become a transgressor of the law'*². By 'the law' James means the **fulfilled** version of the law coming to us at a higher level in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is clear because James is taking discrimination as murder. He is arguing that his readers are murderers. Later he will say they are adulterers and adulteresses!³ It is obvious that it is not the Mosaic law simply and literally that he refers to, but the Christian way of reading it 'in the Spirit'. The Christian reads the Mosaic law (which he is not under) and hears in it the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to him at an altogether higher level. If he does **not** hear the voice of the Holy Spirit he is breaking the law in a Christian manner. The Christian reads the law in a higher level than its original intention. And he may break it at a higher level also!

The main point here is that when we think about righteousness we tend to think mainly about sexual matters! 'God said, "Do not commit adultery", so you must take no risks! Don't talk to that lady' (but what of John 4:7?). 'Don't wear this, don't wear that. Don't ever smile at a man. Don't ever talk to a woman. Don't be nice to anyone of the opposite sex.' A great Christian reformer complained about those who 'run away from the world into the wilderness and into the monasteries' and 'forbid even a glance, and have taught that all companionship between men and women should be avoided'.¹ People who discriminate against the poor are generally so super-spiritual, but they act as if the only sin is sexual sin, and constantly denounce the poor for their immorality! Poverty leads to immorality. These super-spiritual people would be immoral also if they were poor!

James says: 'He who said, "Do not commit adultery" also said "Do not kill".' And gossip and discrimination against the poor – or against anyone – is a form of spiritual murder!

2. **Failure to keep the royal law of love is spiritual murder.** People who are moral are often self-righteous. But lack of compassion, lack of sympathy for the poor, the orphan, the foreigner, the widow, is spiritual murder. God regards it as a sin against the Mosaic law in its 'upgraded' and transformed form as the law of Christ. *'But if you do not commit adultery, yet you do kill you have become a transgressor of the law'*¹.

□¹ 2:10

□² 2:11

□³ James 4:4

□¹ 2:11

3. There is not freedom from judgement altogether

• There is great liberty

• And we must take care about how we live and guard how we speak

• God wants mercy much more than He wants judgement

• Discrimination is judging without mercy which will bring God's chastening

• God wants mercy from us, in the form of practical works that help and assist the poor and under-privileged

3. Freedom from condemnation and Mosaic legislation is not freedom from judgement altogether. The 'royal law' is a law of liberty. In Christ we are not condemned to hell. We need have no fear of the death penalty at the hands of magistrates (unlike the fear of death penalty that was known in the Mosaic law). Many matters are left to our own conscience (matters of food, clothing, agriculture). The Sabbath - legislation is now wholly a matter of 'entering into God's rest'¹. It all leads into the joy of great liberty!

Yet it is not freedom from judgement altogether. We are still under God, and God demands a new style-of-life as our visible gratitude for our salvation. We must guard against how we speak. 'Speak in such a way ... ' And we must take care about how we live. 'Speak in such a way and live in such a way as people who will judged by the law of liberty'¹. And God's judgement against having no mercy is for Him to have no mercy! 'For judgment is without mercy to the person who shows no mercy: mercy triumphs over judgment'². It is a sentence that seems to be contradictory. 'Judgment is without mercy ... mercy triumphs over judgment'³. God wants mercy much more than He wants judgement. When we discriminate we are judging others without mercy. If we hand out that kind of judgement we shall have a taste of God's dealing with us in the same way. Christians will find it a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God if they do not learn to show mercy. It is not that God threatens us with eternal hell – for we are always under a law of liberty. But even the law of liberty has fearful chastenings both in this life and everlastingly.

God wants mercy from us, and He wants it to show itself in practical works that help and assist the poor and underprivileged. The Christian is not to be gullible and easily deceived by those who pretend to be poorer than they are! He is to see what is going on in the situation of others by personal involvement and close observation. But then he is to be a man or woman of mercy. Then the poor will come into our meeting places and will enjoy the same welcome as everyone else. It is the best kind of 'church growth'!

Note

1. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 21, p. 85.

¹ Hebrews 4:1

¹ 2:12

² 2:13

³ 2:13



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