

Overcoming Prejudice Part 2

Epistle of James

By Ty Blackburn

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Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 2. We are continuing a message we began last week, or at least the title for last Sunday is the title for today, and we see that the first 13 verses, this is the burden on James's heart as he writes to the believers to whom he writes, we believe Jewish believers who had been dispersed throughout the area of the Mediterranean because of persecution that had broken out upon them, and so James writes to them and encourages them to live out the Gospel, to practically live out the reality of what God has done in them. And as he comes to chapter 2, he is concerned about the sin of partiality or the sin of prejudice so we titled the message last time and today as well, the title of the message is, "Overcoming Prejudice." Overcoming Prejudice so this will be part 2 and these verses, particularly we are going to be focusing this morning on verses 6 to 11. Last week we really dealt with verses 1 to 5 primarily but the larger passage 2:1-13 concerns this issue, overcoming prejudice. One of the realities that we see throughout history at every time and at every place in a fallen world is the problem of prejudice, racial division, socioeconomic strife, people rejecting others based on surface concerns. And we see the key word we're going to see as we read the passage in a moment is the word translated "personal favoritism" by the NAS in verse 1, and then "partiality" in verse 9. It's actually one Greek word translated with those two different words, favoritism and partiality, and it has the idea of on the basis of external circumstances, external realities, the lifting up of the countenance upon someone so that you favor or you are partial to someone based on external surface issues and concerns; that is, you are demonstrating partiality, to demonstrate favoritism or to be prejudiced, that is to prejudice without really seeing the character of the person.

So James realizes that in the first century this was a problem that was present in the Jewish church. Now for them, they were particularly as we are going to see as we read the Scripture, dealing with the issue of prejudice and partiality as it related to showing favor to the wealthy over those who were poor. It applies across the board because this is a temptation that afflicts us and we see in this passage is one James sees that we need to fight very hard against. So let's read verses 1 to 13. We'll be focusing on 6 and 11, overcoming prejudice. Chapter 2, verse 1,

1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your

assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 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. 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 judgment.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are grateful that the opening of your law, the entrance of your law gives light, enlightens the darkness that is in our minds, in our hearts, and we pray that in your light we might see light that we might walk in truth, repentance and faith and in a deeper way in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we might walk in ways that are pleasing to him. We pray in his name. Amen.

Overcoming prejudice, the tendency to judge people on the basis of surface issues and to withhold affection is essentially the idea that we see here in James as we looked at this last time. What I want to do is I'm going to hit the first two points from last time, I mean super quickly, but I'm going to do that so that you understand that the first point today is going to be point 3. Do you follow what I'm saying? So don't be confused if you, "Where did I miss those?" Oh, you're going to miss them if you don't listen to the next two or three minutes here but we are going to focus on points 3, 4, 5 and 6 today, so 1 and 2 were last week.

In this passage as we begin to unpack it, we saw last time if we are going to overcome prejudice, we first of all last week, first point was we have to acknowledge the problem. That's the first thing we saw and let me just quickly remind you of that. James says, "Do not hold your faith in an attitude of personal favoritism," with an attitude of personal favoritism. Don't hold your faith. We mentioned that that verb "hold" is the key verb in that passage. Don't hold your faith and it's a present tense Greek verb which means continuous action. Don't go on holding your faith with an attitude of favoritism or partiality. To put a negative with that, do not go on holding your faith. You could

translate it stop holding your faith with favoritism. So he's saying, "I know that this is a tendency that afflicts all of us. Stop doing it." It's actually natural to fallen men to group together, birds of a feather flock together. There is truth in that. We are more comfortable with people that are like us, whether it be they dress like us, they sound like us, they think like us, they look like us, and James says stop it in the church. Stop doing this. Don't let this be a part of your life as a Christian and particularly in the way that you treat one another within the body of Christ.

So acknowledge the problem, that's the first step. The second step we looked at last time was to recognize the contradiction. Really, I think a better word would have been inconsistency. Recognize the inconsistency of prejudice with the Gospel. Completely inconsistent. That's what James deals with when he says, "Don't you realize God chose the poor? So if you're not choosing the poor, you're going against God. You're being inconsistent with how God is." And we talked about how it is inconsistent with Christ to judge things from external appearances. If you judged Jesus by merely external appearances, you would have missed the glory of his person and work. You would have found yourself outside of Christ. You have to look closely below the surface to see the glory of Christ so in the same way it's inconsistent. That's what James was dealing with in the first five verses.

Acknowledge the problem, recognize the inconsistency, those are the first two points. Now our first point today which is number 3: recognize the foolishness of this sin. Recognize the foolishness of prejudice. That's what he's dealing with in verses 6 and 7 when he says, "But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?" He's saying this is just foolish for you to favor. He's talking about visitors coming into the church, people that you don't know. Two people come in, one is dressed in fine clothes, he's a rich man clearly, he has a gold ring, the other is dressed in dirty filthy clothes and if you show favoritism to the rich man, James says you're just being downright stupid. That's the force of what he's saying with these questions that he asks. "Is it not the rich who oppress you? I mean, if you're going to go on the basis of appearances, why would you give more honor to the rich man, odds are he's going to be an unbeliever, a wicked man, on average? And the poor man is more likely to be a godly man. You're not even thinking in a rational way," he says. James loves to do this, with great emphasis expose the folly of ungodliness and disobedience. It's a thing we see throughout his letter. He says things emphatically.

So when he says, "they oppress you," it's the wealthy if you think about it because most of the believers are poor to whom he writes. In the first century particularly, those Jews that had been displaced and spread about throughout the area north of Palestine or Israel and then throughout the region of the Mediterranean, they had to leave, fleeing persecution, leave their homeland, leave their land, their livelihood and many of them are impoverished. So now you are dishonoring the people who are most likely to mistreat you.

They oppress you and the word is strong. Oppress, it's used in Acts 10:38 to speak of how Satan oppresses the people that are demon possessed. The oppression of these rich people and that's something we see throughout society, that the wealthy tend to on average, tend to oppress the poor. You find more oppressors among the wealthy, James says. They drag you into court and they are more likely to blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called. It's more likely that this person, though he may be coming in for a worship service, will in the end, end up to be a blasphemer. Far more likely that the poor man will not be and he says it's just irrational. It is foolishness. Recognize the foolishness of prejudice.

Now in truth, we are to be treating all the same without reference to appearances. In fact, Leviticus 19:15, the Old Testament law, Leviticus 19:15 says, "Don't be partial to the poor nor defer to the rich." Isn't that interesting? Don't be partial to the poor nor defer to the rich. "You shall treat your neighbor fairly." So don't on the basis of external circumstances, make a judgment. So James does not argue with that, he's just saying if you're going to make a judgment, you're making it the illogical way but he's arguing for don't make a judgment. Don't be prejudiced. Don't believe that because the person is poor, that they are going to be a believer either. Show equal honor. What's happening is he's saying essentially the rich man came in and a poor man came in and you took the poor man's honor and you doubled it up and gave the rich man his honor plus the poor man's honor. You gave the rich man a double portion of honor and the poor man got none. You should have given both the same amount of honor. It shouldn't have been based on external circumstances. You should have treated a human being with the value that a human being deserves to be treated, the image of God. It's unseemly James is trying to say. It's unseemly. It's ridiculous to be doing what they are doing.

I was thinking about this, it's almost like he's saying something like this. You know, if someone comes into my house, okay, the IRS audits me, God forbid, right? Nobody wants to go through that. I mean, we have nothing to hide but we just don't want to deal with that, the hassle that that is, right? So you would rather not have that happen but say he comes in and say they are coming at us because we are Christians and they are really coming after pastors that preach the Gospel or something. This happens in years to come, and so the IRS man comes in, well, I should be kind to him and show him kindness and love him and not return evil for evil if he is really coming with malice. That means I might want to ask him if he wants some coffee. If he is there for hours, if we are having lunch, I'm going to ask him if he wants to eat but I'm not going to take my children's food off their plate to give it to the IRS man. You go hungry so he can have a double portion. That's just crazy. That's not really that great an illustration either but the point is they were taking honor that should have been given to the person over here and they are withholding it. That's why he says that you dishonor the poor man. It's in our minds, sin is so deceitful. We think we are being kind to the wealthy man, perhaps but if we are being unkind to the poor man, we know that we are sinning if there is a difference. So this applies not just in the areas of socioeconomic differences but in every area, we are tempted to prejudice. Do we show more favor to some than others?

We talked about one of the keywords in the passage in verse 4, "have you not made distinctions among yourselves," that that verb "made distinctions" there in verse 4, "have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives," "made distinctions" implies a withdrawing from some. It doesn't mean that what you've done is so wrong to give somebody a nice seat, it's that you have withdrawn from someone else to do that. You withheld from someone else and James says these things ought not be. On top of that, it's foolishness. You may be showing this double kindness to someone who is going to soon bring you into court and you will find out is a blasphemer. So don't show favoritism either way to anyone based on surface issues. Look at the heart.

So he says, the third point we just covered: recognize the foolishness of prejudice. The fourth point now: recognize the wickedness of prejudice. The wickedness of prejudice. We see this in verses 9 to 11 when he says, "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." James is piling up terms here to show how God sees prejudice and partiality. It is wicked in the sight of God and he says he is doing this because he knows we tend to minimize sin. One of the great problems that we have is we have a shallow view of sin, particularly our own sin. We have a shallow view of our own sin. We are much more apt to see someone else's sin accurately. You know, we see where they are being selfish, we miss where we are. And he understands that it's easy for people to think, "Well, yeah, so I showed a little too much kindness to this person. That's not that big a deal. I mean, really is it, to be overly kind, is that a problem, James? So I was just too kind?" Do you see what I'm saying, how the logic works?

And James is going to demolish that and say, "It's not being too kind, it's being wicked." Because he says if you show partiality, if there is a distinction in the way you deal with one another, he says first of all, you are committing sin, verse 9. You are committing sin. That verb "committing" could be translated "working." The Greek verb really means working sin. You are producing, you are creating, you are working in producing a product and that product is sin. It's missing the mark of what God has made you for and you are producing all of this garbage, is what he's saying. And you are working hard at producing this garbage.

So God sees it as garbage. That's the first term, then he piles another one on: you are committing sin and are convicted by the law. You are convicted by the law. The law charges you and it convicts you. It confirms the wickedness and the evil of what you have done. It passes and renders the verdict.

Then he adds a third term: as transgressors. You are convicted by the law as transgressors, verse 9. A transgressor is someone who has gone out of the way, the way that God has prescribed. They stepped over the line and they are now walking on a different path. So we were thinking or we are prone to think like the people that James writes to, it's not that big a deal for me to be overly kind to this person. James says, "You are walking along a completely different road than what God wants you to walk. You are a transgressor." Working sin, convicted by the law, transgressors.

Then he continues to add on and pile on, verses 10 and 11. He says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." That's a verse that probably many of us have memorized. It's a very helpful verse in witnessing. People will say, "Well, I've never done this and I've never done that and I've never done that." Well, if you have committed any sin, you've become guilty of all, James 2:10, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." We need a Savior, right? But it's interesting the context that that verse comes up in. He's trying to convince those who were prone to minimize their sin of prejudice by showing how radically it affects them before God and the way God sees their behavior. So you're thinking that it's a small thing. "James, I'm not doing this and I'm not doing this and I'm not doing this. Look how I have improved in this area and this area and this area and this area. I'm just showing a little too much kindness and partiality. I'm being just a little bit prejudiced. Think about where I grew up, think about my background, think about my experiences. So you see, my prejudice it's just not that big a deal." James says if you keep all of the law, if you can look spotless everywhere else but you have a habitual sin of prejudice, you are as guilty as the most violent transgressor of God's law. You are guilty in the sight of God. You are not walking in the Spirit. You are not walking before God in a way that is pleasing to him.

Prejudice is something that God hates and so he illustrates this by saying, "So imagine how foolish it would be." This is kind of what he's doing in verse 11. So if you want to just say, "I don't do this and I don't do this and I don't do this, yeah, yeah, I've got a problem over here," he says think how ridiculous it would be. I'm supplying some words but that's essentially what he's doing here in verse 11 because you don't have that in the NASB, it's not in the Greek either. Think how ridiculous this would be. But it's in the heart of what he's saying. He said, "For He who said," and he's talking about if you want to say I'm just disobeying one law, "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." If you sit around and say, "I used to be a really bad adulterer but look how much I've changed," and you are murdering people, what? Who cares? I mean, you just changed one sin for another, one aspect of wickedness for another. So stop sinning in every area. Don't tolerate any sin in your life, he's saying. Apply the Gospel. Walk in the Spirit. Use the royal law, as we are going to see in a moment, so that every area of your life is increasingly acceptable and pleasing to God.

The wickedness of sin is seen in this piling on of terms and he says, "has become guilty of all," another term. So you're working sin, you are convicted by the law, you are transgressors, you are guilty of all, and then he ends up, if you commit murder, you have become a transgressor. He comes back to that same term, "of the law."

Really to understand what the sin is in verse 6, "you have dishonored the poor man," going back to that. You have dishonored. The idea here in the Greek, it's emphatic. The pronoun is added into the verse here but it has the force of you yourself have dishonored the poor man. You yourself have dishonored the poor man. If you are showing partiality, you are dishonoring the ones that you are not partial to. You're not just being kind to another, and you're not just sort of withholding something, you are actively dishonoring.

He says we ourselves are guilty of this. By showing disproportionate affection, attention to people based on surface issues, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, intelligence, the color of someone's skin, the way they dress, the background, any of these things he says, when we are showing disproportionate affection or attention and withholding it from others, that is dishonoring, it is devaluing and it's ugly in the sight of God and it's ugly, really, in our own sight. When you see it in someone else, it's ugly, and unbelievers look at it and they particularly see this as ugly.

I mentioned last week that one of the things I remember hearing when I was a young minister, student of the ministry, and people were talking about how Sunday mornings tended to be in America the most segregated moment in the week. How can that be? How can people be gathering to glorify God for what he has done in Christ by reconciling sinners to himself, demolishing the barrier between sinners and a holy God so that sinners who all of us were dead in our trespasses and sins, separated from God and those who have repented and believed now have been brought near, and in being brought near he demolished the dividing wall of hostility between us. He demolished the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile and if he demolished that dividing wall, he has demolished every other horizontal dividing wall. So people gathered together in the fifties and sixties and seventies and lifted up the Gospel of Jesus Christ, preached the word, preached the cross, and yet were separated and segregated. What an amazing contradiction. How ugly that was and yet for us today, rather than just looking back then, we have to look today in our own hearts and say are there seeds of that that I have not dealt with in my life? James would say there probably are. Deal with them because the natural bent of the human heart even with the new life in us, we still have the old man, the old nature, the old ways of thinking, the world system surrounding us continually trying to stain us as we saw at the end of chapter 1. The only way to not be stained by the world is to actively resist the staining and James says actively resist the wickedness of the sin.

So we see now to overcome prejudice we have to, first of all, acknowledge the problem; secondly, recognize the inconsistency; and this morning then we saw, we need to recognize the foolishness of prejudice; and fourthly, recognize the wickedness of prejudice. Now we come to our fifth point: we need to recognize the beauty of God's remedy. The beauty of God's remedy. It's verse 8, "If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well." The remedy is the royal law. James uses the term "royal law" to describe this commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." He says if you're doing that, you're doing well.

So recognize the beauty of God's remedy. The word "beauty" comes from, in my mind comes from the end of verse 8, "you are doing well." The adverb there at the end of verse 8, "you are doing well, well." It's from a word in Greek which means "good." To describe a verb, of course, you've got to use well. It went well, it didn't went good, right? So you are doing not good, you're doing well but the idea is goodness in this particular there are two main Greek words that are used throughout the New Testament, one emphasizes more the benevolence or the benefit of goodness, the beneficial quality, something good and beneficial. This word pictures good and beautiful so you have good/beneficial,

good/beautiful. This word is the one that emphasizes beauty. So you are doing well, you are doing well, there is goodness manifested in your life and it's a beautiful goodness. That's the idea. That when you are applying the remedy, when you are recognizing the beauty of God's remedy and you are walking in it, there is a beauty about it. There is something beautiful when brothers dwell together in unity. How good and pleasant it is, Psalm 133, for brothers to dwell together in unity. It's like the dew on Mount Hermon. It's like the anointing oil coming down upon Aaron, his beard and his robes, as he prepares to go into the presence of God. It is beautiful when brothers dwell together in unity. There is something of that behind what James is saying. You're doing well. You're doing beautifully. If you are laboring at this to overcome prejudice, in God's way it is something that is beautiful.

I mentioned that sin is ugly and people, unbelievers notice it. It's interesting. You know, unbelievers are very good at also noticing sin in the church, aren't they? How often have you had conversations with someone you are trying to witness to and they bring up the hypocrites in the church? It's always good to just say, "Well, you can come. There's room for one more." But, why is it? I read an illustration by a guy, one of the commentaries on James and it's an excellent illustration. He said one of the reasons people react to that is weeds are ugliest in a garden. You take a weed and you just put it out there beside the road, off in the ditch, nobody really notices it. But you put a weed in a beautiful garden that is perfectly manicured and, man, that thing looks ugly, doesn't it? It's out of place. And so even the world looking at the hypocrisy within the church, they are actually affirming even something of what our high calling is. They recognize it ought not to be like that.

And so prejudice has no place in the lives of God's people. It's something ugly, but when we overcome it, James says that is beautiful. There is something glorious about it. The fragrance of heaven when brothers dwell together in unity. When we overcome our differences, when we learn not to judge a book by its cover but we engage in relationship and we come to understand one another and we see the unity that is there because when two believers come together, this is talking about unity particularly in the body of Christ, it's not just unity among men. There is only unity in one place, in Christ. But when we get close to one another, though we may seem different, and this can be all kinds of things. We can become cliquish because somebody thinks like us because they have the same spiritual gift that we have and they notice the same problems that we have and we get thinking sometimes, "Why doesn't everybody else see it like we do," and we forget that we have spiritual gifts that are helping us to see this and other people have different gifts and they see that differently. They see the same reality from a different perspective and we can think in our foolish arrogant pride, "What's wrong with them?" If they are walking in arrogant pride, they're thinking the same thing about us, "What's wrong with them?" Well, when we get past that and we don't judge one another but we come close to each other and we say something like, "Hey, I don't understand. You know, the way I see this it's just so clear like this. How do you see it?" You don't prejudge and withhold yourself. You move toward them and then they begin to share their heart and if you're listening and you're laboring at loving them as yourself, then suddenly the perspective that they are offering is enriching and what you hear underneath the surface is another

person who loves Jesus and who is serving the same Master I am, and there is the drawing together of two souls.

James says that the key to this is the royal law. It's beautiful when, he says, you are fulfilling the royal law. The verb "fulfilling" means "bringing to completion; completing something and bringing the picture together." So the picture is being made beautiful as it all comes together and it comes together as we focus on the royal law. Interesting, the law. For James, the law has a place, in the entire New Testament the law has a place in the life of a Christian. This is something that is debated quite a bit. We're going to be looking at this throughout chapter 2. We can't say much about it today except to say this: there are many areas where we get off of the biblical balance and the ways that we do that related to the law is some people become legalistic, that is they see the law in a way that God does not intend a believer to see the law. They see the law as a means for attaining favor with God, for God accepting me, and they use the law as a means to feel accepted by God, to feel loved by God. My obedience, I'm earning something of God's favor. Even though I believe in Christ and his death at Calvary, his resurrection has taken care of my righteousness, somehow, I'm still living to please him in a way for his acceptance and love. That's legalism. We are not to live that way because we are accepted by God in the Beloved. We are accepted by God completely as if we had lived Jesus' life, his perfect life every moment of every day after you repent and believe, his righteousness is your righteousness. So you avoid legalism by understanding that the law has no place in helping me earn or curry favor with God. It's not to earn something, his approval.

But there's another extreme which is the extreme of antinomianism. Anti-nomianism. Anti-nomos. That's the word for law. There are some Christians who believe the law has no place in the life of the believer, that once you have been accepted by Christ, by God in Christ in the Beloved, you are accepted in the Beloved, you don't need the law at all as a Christian. So they celebrate the fact they are free from the law. But when you look at the New Testament, that's not the Christian life that we see laid out. Jess read earlier from John, "If you love me, keep my commandments. Abide in me. And how will you abide in me? You keep my commandments. You let my word abide in you and you keep my commandments, even as I abided in my Father and kept his commandments."

So the law has a place in the life of the believer but the balance is we don't keep the law to be accepted by God or to curry favor with God, we keep the law because we are accepted by God, as an expression of gratitude and actually an expression of love. We want to walk in obedience to his commands not so that he will love me more, so that I can express my love to him for loving me perfectly already. But James says the law has a place. The law is the King's law. That's what the idea of "royal law" means. If you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, this is the law of the King. This is my King's commandment. If you have repented and placed your faith in Christ, then you are saying you are trusting in his work on Calvary, his blood to pay for your sins, his resurrection to offer you his righteousness, his perfect life credited to your account. You have repented and placed your faith in him and you have submitted to his kingship and if he is your King, he is your Savior, then James says keep his royal law. This is the law of

my King. King Jesus wants me to love my neighbor as myself and out of gratitude to him, I want to do that.

I mean, think about how important that is. We saw this when we preached through John a few years ago. John 13 to 17, five chapters of John, or through one evening in Jesus' life: The Last Supper, the last night of his life before the cross. Five chapters, a few hours. In the shadow of the cross, what is it that Jesus is concerned about? He says in John 13:33, "I tell you the truth. I am going away and where I go you cannot come." This is after Judas has left and he knows now is the moment the cross is looming right there before him. He says, "I tell you the truth, I'm going and where I go you cannot follow. A new commandment I give to you," this is the next thing he says. "I'm leaving. What I've got to tell you is this: love one another just as I have loved you. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The commandment is love one another. Then he came back to that later, the passage Jess read was that same evening, John 15:12, John 15:17, "The new command I give to you is that you love one another. The new commandment I give to you is that you love one another." Jesus says, "Love one another. Love one another. Love one another." Then when he gets ready to pray, John 17, we have the high priestly prayer. He says, "Father, this is what I'm asking you, that they may be one even as we are one; that they may be loving each other in the same way that we as a Triune Godhead love one another. I in you and you and me, that they may also be in one another that the world may know that you sent me." What is important to the King? That we labor at loving one another.

Now how we do that? How do we do that? Applying this, this is the last point. We said recognize the beauty of the remedy, now applying. Number 6: applying the beauty of the remedy for prejudice. Applying the beauty of the remedy for prejudice. If the remedy for sin, the sin of prejudice is the royal law, how do you apply this remedy? How do you apply the royal law? How do you love your neighbor as yourself? This is a matter of changing in a fundamental way the way that we relate to one another, the way we think about one another. We have to make a fundamental mind shift in the way we see one another, the way we see ourselves in relation to others in the body of Christ. As with all Christian life change, it comes by renewing our minds or as James said in the last chapter, to look intently at the perfect law and abide by it, and not become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, remaining in the word, letting the word transform us.

In fact, we have another window into how it's our thinking that is the problem. We mentioned last time in verse 4 when he's talking about, he's indicting them for their prejudice, he says, "have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?" The word translated "motives" in the NASB is translated "thoughts" in the other translations. Young's Living Translation translates it, it's not the Living Bible, anyway, he translates it "reasonings, evil reasonings." That's really a better window into that word. The idea is if you're making distinctions, you're showing that you have an evil way of thinking about one another; that you have been stained in the way that you think about each other. In your mind you think, "I like being with people like me." You may not consciously think about it that often but at a fundamental level there is a preference to be around people like me and James is saying to walk out the royal law,

you've got to change at a fundamental heart level beliefs and commitments like that that are ungodly. If I want to give glory to God for the great salvation that he has made for me in Christ, I want to be one with every other believer that I can meet and know and especially among the church that God has placed me as a part.

We have to labor at these changing of our thoughts. How do you do that? One of the misconceptions we have to watch out for about this verse, the royal law, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, which remember is from Leviticus 19:18. Remember I mentioned earlier when it says, 19:15 says, don't show preference to the poor, don't show preference to the rich, treat your neighbor fairly, three verses later, love your neighbor as yourself. That whole section is about how to love other people and interestingly enough, the reason we need the law, love is the motive but the law channels the motive. How do you love someone without doing certain things and not doing other things? That's why the two tablets of the law, Jesus said, are contained in two Commandments. Remember when Jesus was asked what is the greatest commandment? And he said, they were expecting probably thinking one of the top 10 is he going to say number 1? Is he going to say number 4? Well, he went outside of that list and picked two Commandments that summarized the whole thing. He said the first commandment, the first and greatest commandment is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. Then he gave them a second one. They didn't ask him for the second one. He said the second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. He was quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 and he said, "Upon these two commandments hang the law and the prophets. If you get these two things right, you get everything right."

Now think about how the whole law hangs on those two commandments. There are 10 Commandments in the Decalogue, the 10 Commandments, the main moral law that God gives in Exodus and Deuteronomy. The first four Commandments, you shall have no other gods before me, you shall not make for yourself an idol and worship it, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; those four Commandments relate to our love for God. So you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength takes care of those four Commandments. The second six are honor your father and your mother, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not lie, do not steal, do not lie, do not covet. Those are summed up by you shall love your neighbor as yourself. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will not steal from them, you will not lie to them, you will not murder them, you will not commit adultery. You see, if you love your neighbor as yourself, all of those things go away.

So the law is good. The law is precious to the Christian. The one who has been born again now knows that the law is the most wonderful place to be as James is going to say here again, it's the law of liberty. He says that in chapter 2 verse 12 and he said it in chapter 1 as well. The law is the law of liberty, verse 25. It's the perfect law, the law of liberty. God's law shows me if I'm standing in grace, trusting in Christ alone, the law gives me the place to which I can run and express my love for him. By his grace, he gives me the power to walk in obedience. It's not our own strength, it's love for him infused

with his power channeled by his word working in our minds changing us, making us walk in holiness. That's what we are called to do and James is saying you have to do that aggressively as it relates to prejudice. We have to labor at loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Now I started down, I mentioned a misconception and I got sidetracked. The misconception that is often, it's a false teaching that says to love your neighbor as yourself, this is an evil false teaching as many well-meaning people are mixed up in it but it's just wrong, they say to love your neighbor as yourself you first of all have to work at loving yourself. That is completely unbiblical. The Bible in every place assumes we love ourselves. In fact, our problem is not that we love ourselves too little, our problem universally across the board is we love ourselves entirely too much. So when he says love your neighbor as yourself, he's saying love your neighbor as you already love yourself. You don't have to work at loving yourself.

Well, people say, "What about this person that they have low self-esteem?" Well, low self-esteem is a manifestation of great self-love. They love themselves so much. When you talk to someone with low self-esteem, see who they talk about all the time. They are talking about themselves. They are wanting you to tell them that they are not as bad as they think they are. Their world is centered around themselves. Even the person that commits suicide is a great act of self-love. "I deserve better than this and I'm not going to take any more of it. I'm going to take my life." There are various complicated ways that Satan tempts people to that sin but in essence it is self-love. That's our problem.

So he says love your neighbor as yourself, it doesn't mean work at loving yourself more, it means work at loving your neighbor like you already love yourself by God's grace. And how does that happen? I think one of the great windows and we're going to go to this passage as our application, Philippians 2. This is a passage that works on changing our thinking in the same way. Verse 3, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves." Elevate the way you see other people, bring down the way you see yourself and its importance. Do you see that? "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." Love other people like you already love yourself. Then he says how do you do that really? What's the key? He gives us the key in verses 5 to 10. The way that you really infuse with power the commitment to esteem other people is you look at the cross. You look at Jesus and you look at his cross. That is the key to loving other people because when you look at the cross, you see Jesus. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant," a slave, taking the form of a slave, "and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." He says look at your Master, look at your King, look what he did for you.

There is something powerful about the cross. It is the great leveler. Someone said the ground is level at the foot of the cross. I mean, think about what the cross says. The cross

changes the way I see myself. When you look at the cross carefully, you see God leaving the glory of heaven and coming all the way down as Paul is describing, to be found in appearance as a man, a slave, and then going to die, and not just dying but dying on a cross. That is being cursed. When you see that God to save me had to come and die on a cross, the Father in a sense cursing the sin bearer, the Son, the man Christ Jesus, that's what it took to save you and me. When we understand that, how can we look with pride at any other human being?

I deserve the wrath of God. We are all equally in need of that, even the person that you meet that is a blasphemer. There is no elevation of us above them. There but for the grace of God go we. It changes the way I see myself. It changes the way I see God. It makes me see God in a wonderful refreshing reminder of his love. God loved me so much that he in spite of nothing lovely in me, he did this for me. And then how can I express my love to my God, how can I express my love to my King Jesus who did this? How can I wash his feet with my tears? How can I anoint his head with perfume? Remember the woman, the prostitute who was forgiven who washed his feet with her tears? Wiped his feet with her hair? Or Mary, the sister of Lazarus who anointed his head and his feet with oil, wiping his feet, again, with her hair. Such love. They were able to express that to the man Christ Jesus.

How can you and I do that? Jesus says at the end of time at the judgment he will say, "If you did it unto one of the least of these my brothers, you did it also unto me." You want to wash his feet, you want to express your love to Jesus, if we want to do that, love your brother and your sister. Serve them. And as you do it expressing your love to Christ, learning to listen to them, learning to be patient with them as you would want them to be patient with you, not because they deserve it but because he deserves it, and they do it to us not because we deserve it, he deserves it. And we find as we do that, we love Christ more and we love those that Jesus loves more.

That is the route to unity: loving Jesus leads to loving one another and then the world sees love like that, they see a group of people becoming one more and more and more through difficulties and offenses and sins because that is what is going to be a part of what it is to live together, and we have to pursue unity, we have to pursue peace with one another, and in those moments that seem like they are so discouraging when we find ourselves separated from a brother or sister over some sin problem, those are moments to really look at the cross and pursue oneness because it's an opportunity to see the power of the cross. There is no bad situation in the church that can't be fixed by the Gospel and the worst the divide, the greater the glory to Christ when it is bridged through the cross. Let's be people who walk in oneness and unity and love and with an increasing freedom from prejudice.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the cross of Jesus Christ which makes us one with you, children of God, servants of Christ, and brothers and sisters of one another. Lord, help us to pursue the kind of love that you want us to have. Help us to be diligent and hard-working

and to work on reprogramming our minds to think of one another as more important than ourselves; to listen to one another; to understand one another; to care for one another. Help us walk out the glory of what Christ has done. May our relationships be a testimony to unsaved family members, unsaved neighbors, unsaved friends as they see the love that we have for one another here in the body of Christ. May they believe that you sent Jesus and may they come to be followers of Christ because of the power of love that you have set in the hearts of your people. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.