

The Perfect Law of Liberty

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Reading: James 1

1 Background

1.1 Inspiration

During the **New Mexico Bible School Brother Jim Millay** from the **Springfield Vermont Ecclesia** gave an excellent class on the **book of James**. He intitled his class “**Pure Religion**” quoting from **James 1:26, 27**. “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

1.2 The concept

During the week Bro. Jim Millay explored most of the **book of James** showing the various aspects of **those who practice pure religion and what is meant by the term**. By **Thursday** I was so interested in the book of James I decided to **read the epistle myself**. As I was reading it, one thing that caught my attention was **the concept of the “Pefect Law of Liberty” found in chapter 1:25 and 2:12**.

2 Summary

This morning we will look at this phrase, its context, its meaning, and its application. I have relied in part on both on some of the concepts that Bro. Jim Millay brought out in his class as well as *The Epistle of James* by Bro. Neville Smart published by The Christadelphian in 1968.

3 The Context

3.1 Authorship

Before we look at the textual context of the Epistle of James, we will briefly review the history of the book. In James 1:1, we learn of the author and the audience, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.” The author is thought to be James the brother of Jesus who remained in the background during most of Christ’s ministry, yet from what we read in the gospels it appears that he and his brother and mother were often among the crowd surrounding following Jesus. [Matt. 12: 46-47] However, it may have been quite a while later that James realized how great his brother’s ministry was. For, when they desired to talk to Christ is presumably was about family matters, not the subjects that Christ was speaking about at the time. If indeed the author is the brother of Christ, as we will see later, James put a strong emphasis on listening, believing, and living the words of Christ, which would make sense from James personal experience if indeed he was the brother of Jesus. At first, he knew Jesus as his brother through Mary, later he realized how much greater a privilege it was to be His brother through baptism. In other words, James gives us insight into the strength of Christ’s words, the strong influence they impressed upon him is evident in his writing, and his desire to impress upon all believers the gift that we have in the gospel message.

3.2 Audience

It is, therefore, evident that James wrote to a fairly broad audience. It was not written for a particular Ecclesia and as such it focused not on the problems faced by any single group of believers, but on the conduct of all believers. James therefore presents a series of lessons that are meant to strengthen our faith and walk.

3.3 Scriptural Context

The scriptural context that we find the the words “the perfect law of liberty” in, speak of the word of God. The word “law” in the clause is *nomos* (greek) and refers to applicable law, often refering to the gospel text. Therefore as we read the verses prior to verse 25 keep in mind that what is being refered to is the perfect law or the gospel writings.

[read 1:19-21] Note that we are to receive the word, engrafting it in our hearts. In II Cor. 3:1-3, Paul speaking of and reflecting on his own ministry, says ... Paul goes on after this speaking of the contrast between glorious engraven law of Moses, the ten commandments and how much greater the glory of the spiritual law of Christ, not to downplay the Mosaic law, but rather to demonstrate to the Jews the beauty and relevance of the New Testament. The word or law is made known unto each one of us through the gospel. Christ as Paul explains later in verse 13 lifted the vail, manifesting the law, it is this that makes the New law better than the old, it is freer, not held in full by a select few, but directly open to everyone through Christ. Now, as Paul later explains, the vail lays over our hearts and we must seek to understand the Gospel message. Which, if we turn to the Lord this will be made possible. And by the allowing the Spirit of the Lord into our hearts we may obtain liberty. For in verse 17 we read, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” If we are to seek liberty, we must engrave the Spirit-Word on our hearts.

[read 1:22] As James leads up to the concept of liberty, he demonstrates that it can not be accomplished by simply hearing the word, but by doing it. It requires

a transformation of mind and an open heart, which is manifested in works, not just knowledge. In verse 23 and 24 we have a contrast to the person who lives their life in the word of Gospel. [read 23 & 24]. In these words we envision a person walking past a store front taking a glance at the mirrored glass, stating “I think I look alright” and then walking on forgetting about what he really looked like. So is the person who looks at the Bible, says I’m an upright person, I think I do most of the things the Bible teaches, and then forgetting to make sure to apply those words to his or her life. This attitude at the surface sounds alright and can be referred to as the “moral law” a law of rightful doing. Many profess in the world today to have this type of religious “experience.” They take pleasure in the fact that they are emotionally uplifted by the words that are preached, but that is where their practice of religion ends. Religion to them is a surface issue. They demonstrate an outward appearance and an excited emotional state, but lack the emotion, which James found and we should also strive to find.

4 It’s meaning

In verse 25 we see a different person. This time, however, it is not a glance, but a peering into, *parakupto* in the Greek. After Christ’s resurrection, John and Mary when they came to the sepulchre and saw it open they peered into it and found not the body. It is this kind of awestruck searching for the meaning of what just happened that we should have when reading the Bible. For, we get the idea of straining and a strong desire, rather than a casual glimpse. It requires a change, a change from the moral law to a spiritual one.

4.1 The Perfect Law of Liberty

An earnest desire is what we should have when looking into the Gospel message. And it is here we find the words “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work this man shall be blessed in his deed.” We see the combination of all of the thoughts

of the previous verses combined into this single rule, seek the gospel, apply it, and you shall be blessed. Similarly Christ when speaking to the scribes, Pharisees and those Jews listening in John 8:31-32 says, "...If ye continue in my word, then ye are my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." If we apply the words of Paul that we read earlier in II Corinthians we see the fullness of this law. Christ words came from the Spirit of his Father, and as Paul stated God's Spirit brings liberty and therefore we see what James is speaking about makes sense. It is indeed perfect. In Psalms 19:17, we read, "the law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul." But, this not something we automatically see or find evident, instead it is the result of a change. A zealous desire to serve under the law of Christ who made perfect that law through his sacrifice because he loved us. In II Cor. 5:14-17, we see the very clear distinction between the old man living under the law of morality and the new living under the law of Christ, through the putting on of Christ through baptism. [read] Indeed then, as James saw the words of Christ, he notes that the message is perfect when heard correctly with a new spirit of understanding.

5 It's application

We therefore should not be like the person glimpsing at our appearance. Instead we should allow our appearance to be restored by applying the perfect law of the gospel. We need to compare ourselves with the words that Christ spake, seeing our fallibility and not look just at our moral countence as the passer by did, but at our complete nature and seek the freedom that is found in Christ. For Christ knows us not by our outward appearance, but by our thoughts and works. We do not want be perfect in the looking glass, but seek to be perfect under the law of Christ. In Matthew 7:16-23, Christ speaking about the Kingdom age states: [read].

We therefore, brothers and sisters, must be likeminded unto Christ, the first-fruits, and make sure that we are found seeking to apply the Word of God in our

lives, engraving it on our hearts, so that we may be made perfect in them, obtaining the liberty through the Spirit of God's word made manifest in his Son.