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James and the law of God

The law of liberty, and the royal law

James 1:25; 2:8, 12

The law of liberty

The perfect law for us as Christians is the law of spiritual freedom, that is, freedom from the former dominion of sin and the power of the Spirit to act for God's glory and serve Him alone. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death (cf. Rom. 8:2-10). There is a new principle of life for the Christian, namely the resurrection life of Christ Himself, and there is a new Source of life and power in us by the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer.

In Galatians 5, the apostle Paul devotes an entire chapter to Christian freedom and walking by the Spirit. We are called to be free, but that freedom is not to be used as an occasion for the flesh. On the contrary, we are to serve one another by love and by the power of the Spirit. For the whole law of Moses is fulfilled in one word, in this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; Gal. 5:13-14; cf. Rom. 13:9-10).

That is why Paul speaks of fulfilling "the law of Christ," because we have seen in Him and in His work perfect love and self-surrender (Gal. 6:2). That is henceforth the rule of life for those who belong to the new creation, because all things have become new for us in our Lord and Savior (Gal. 6:15-16; Jas. 1:18). That rule demands everything and will cost us everything, because we imitate the Lord Jesus Christ.

The royal law

James also calls this perfect law, that of freedom, the royal law, because we are heirs of the kingdom of God, which He has promised to those who love Him (Jas. 2:5, 8). The royal law is nothing else than the rule to serve others through love. That law will be perfectly realized in the coming kingdom of Messiah, the Lord of glory, because the law will then be written in everyone's heart. Royal conduct is not ruling, but serving through love.

The apostle then gives another warning to pay close attention to our own behavior. For the law of liberty will judge us before the judgment seat of Christ if we have not shown love and mercy in our conduct toward others. Mercy triumphs over judgment (Jas. 2:12-13).

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