

## James - The Perils of Partiality

Sign Title: The Perils of Partiality

July 3, 2011

Good morning Faith Church! My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. I would like to welcome you to worship on this Independence Day weekend. This summer, we are studying the book of James and today we continue that study. What we are covering today is closely connected to last weeks message. Last week, we looked at James 2:1-8 and we learned about the *Folly of Favoritism*. While most of us thought favoritism was just bad manners, last week we learned God takes it much more seriously. It is sin and it has no place in the church.

The more we studied favoritism, the more common we realized this sin is in our lives. Playing favorites ranges from something as innocent as grabbing old friends in the halls after church for coffee and a conversation while somebody new stands in the corner by themselves feeling like an outsider. Playing favorites happens when we invite young families over to our homes for a meal while the single folks in the church are conveniently ignored. Playing favorites is limiting our friendships to those who are the same age and have the same interests as we do. It is the elderly ignoring the young or the young ignoring the elderly. Of course, one of the most common ways we play favorites is looking at others through financial glasses. Last week, James used financial favoritism as a specific example of favoritism when we cuddle up to the rich and leave the poor to fend for themselves. This happens in positions of leadership in the church.

Those who are successful in business, are the ones we elect to leadership positions while faithful men of God with blue collar jobs are often passed over.

As I combed through my memories, one of the first places I remember favoritism is when we were picking teams for gym class. I was the one who was picked last. Was anybody else like me? When we played dodge-ball, the team captains argued over who would have me on their team because I was considered a handicap. Those times of favoritism sting and they are hard to forget.

Moving from the playground to the classroom we learned about national favoritism. In social studies we learned about American history and slavery. The whites were the in-group. The blacks were the out-group. The sin of racism is the sin of partiality. It wasn't just in American history but we even find it in early church history with the tension that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jewish Christians were the in-group and the Gentile Christians were the out-group in the church. Gentiles were considered the newbies, second class citizens. There is a good portion of the New Testament written to counteract this and show we are all one in Christ. The sin of partiality, of playing favorites, is a much bigger part of life than we think.

Last week James told us partiality is sinful and it is foolish. This week, James takes it a little deeper. The sin of favoritism is lethal. It has the potential to condemn our soul to hell. Those are strong words, but they are James', not my own. Let's read the text to whet our appetite for what follows.

**James 2:8-13**

If you listened closely, maybe you heard James' logic in motion. Beginning where we left off last week, James shows how favoritism, if it is not addressed in the church and in our lives, can lead us down a staircase that ends in hell itself. Let's put our foot on the top step and follow James as he shows us the perils of favoritism.

### **Favoritism is sin.**

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. James 2:8–9 (ESV)

We need to begin with a basic understanding of the Ten Commandments. In the future we will have a chance to study them but for now I just want us to notice that the Ten Commandments break into two groups. The first four are vertical in nature and pertain to our relationship with God: 1) No other gods before him, 2) Don't make an idol, 3) Don't misuse the name of the Lord, 4) Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. The next six are horizontal in nature and pertain to our relationship with one another: 5) honor your father and mother, 6) don't murder, 7) don't commit adultery, 8) don't steal, 9) don't give false testimony, 10) don't covet.

In their day, just like in ours, one of the questions people got wrong when they played Bible trivia was name all *ten* commandments. It is hard to commit that list to heart. So in Leviticus and Deuteronomy God captured the Ten Commandments into two overarching principles that are easy to remember. Jesus affirmed these overarching principles from Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the New Testament as the easiest way to remember and apply the Ten

Commandments in our life. These principles are based upon the vertical and horizontal categories of the Ten Commandments.

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:37–40 (ESV)

James calls these the royal laws. There is a lot of discussion among the commentators what royal law means but, in essence, it boils down to these commandments being the summary of the law. In our text, James is focusing on the second one about loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Most of the Jewish Christians who heard James’ discussion on partiality immediately began listing off in their head what they could remember of the Ten Commandments. I am sure they were thinking... favoritism, partiality,... is sin? I don’t remember that being in the original top ten list from Mt. Sinai. Then James says... remember the Royal law. They are forced to agree with James. I guess partiality is sin. It would not be treating your neighbor as yourself. But, they reason, it is not a big sin. It is sort of like a minor parking ticket. It isn’t a moving violation. It isn’t points on their spiritual drivers license. Moving violations would be a violation of one of the Ten Commandments. Favoritism is a little sin. It isn’t that big of a deal.

James reasons back with them. Favoritism is a bigger deal than you think. It isn’t a minor sin we shouldn’t be concerned about.

**All sin, leaves me guilty.**

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.”

If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. James 2:10–11 (ESV)

James is going to correct a misunderstanding these Christians have of God's law that is leading them to believe some sin is minor sin they shouldn't concern themselves with. Before we look at James corrective, let's take a moment to look at some common misunderstandings of God's law.

### **Wrong views of God's law.**

#### **The sins I omit cancel out the sins I commit.**

This is the way many people think about the Ten Commandments. They reason that while they may have committed murder, at least they didn't commit adultery so not committing adultery cancels out committing murder. They reason that as long as they end up with a better than 500 record at the end of the day, they are in a good position.

Never mind that in the beatitudes Jesus tells us that God is also concerned with the heart behind the act of sin, not just the sinful act itself. Is that you? Are you here this morning thinking that as long as the sins you omit outweigh the sins you commit, you are in a good way? That is a sinful view of the law.

#### **If I specialize in some, I can ignore others.**

This was something to which the religious elite of Jesus' day fell prey. It is something the church-going folk of our day are guilty of as well.

**"But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Luke 11:42 (ESV)**

The Pharisees, who were the religious jokes of the day, were into tithing. They were tithing specialists making sure they gave 10% of *everything* they earned to God. You can just picture this Pharisee cutting the mint leaves from his potted herb plant for a glass of mint tea and he is counting the leaves. Nine for himself and one for God. He meticulously places the mint tea leaves into the offering bag. That Sunday the ushers are wondering why the money smells minty fresh. The financial people are trying to figure out how to log a few tea leaves as a tax-deductible financial contribution in case they are audited by the IRS.

Notice, Jesus doesn't fault this guy for being a tithing specialist. Jesus is OK with this because he knows it is coming from a heart that wants to do everything it can to be faithful to God in the area of giving.

The problem is he specializes in the area of giving to the neglect of the rest of the law. This guy neglected justice and the love of God which, incidentally, are much more important than tithing tea leaves. So specialization in one area of God's law doesn't mean we can ignore the rest of it. What is the right way to view God's law?

The right way to view God's law is like a chain. How many links need to break to snap a chain? Just one. So thinking that as long as we don't break more than five links of the ten links in the Ten Commandments is the wrong way to view it. Having one link that is super thick, called tithing, while the other links are twisty ties, won't do it. James' point



is we should think of the law not as ten links but as one link. Any time we break the royal law and fail to love our neighbor as ourself, we are guilty before God.

Let's move on to step three.

**I will be judged for how I live.**

**So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.  
James 2:12 (ESV)**

The first thing we need to talk about is a major Christian corrective. The message we often hear around the church is, "Come to Christ, be forgiven of your sins and go to heaven." It doesn't matter what we do or how we sin after we come to Christ because our sin is paid in full by Jesus. That *is* true, but it is only part of the picture.

After death, even as Christians, we will face judgment. Many of us think we will face judgment and whip out our "Get out of Jail Free with Jesus" card and go straight to heaven, do not pass go, do not collect \$200, go straight to heaven while everybody else gets ramrodded and roasted. In fact, many Christians think, "Why not give in to sin when I am tempted? After all Jesus has forgiven me of all my sins and he will forgive me for my sins." So I can sin when I want because I am forgiven all the time.

That is a twisted picture. Will God always forgive us through Christ? Yes, but even as Christians, we are still accountable before God for what we do with our lives. All who don't know Christ, will stand before Christ and be judged by him. They will be justly and eternally punished. Those us of who have trusted in Christ will still be examined by Christ and judged by him to see what we have done with the salvation Christ gave us. Get it in your head. Nobody comes to

Jesus and is saved to sit, we are saved to serve. Some day every one of us will give an answer to Jesus for how we served.

So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:9–10 (ESV)

Get this straight, as Christians, my eternal reward will be based on how I live today. Paul says that what I do *right* counts as well as what I do *wrong*. So the Christian who thinks it doesn't matter when we sin because Jesus has already forgiven us has a screwed up mental picture. Christians who tolerate sin, at the very least, forfeit a portion of their eternal reward. By the way, any pleasure gained by sin now is nothing compared to the pleasure and joy that God would have given us as an eternal reward had we turned away from that sin. If that was not true, it would not be called an eternal *reward*, it would be called an eternal white elephant gift because we would always be wishing we had chosen something better. In the same way, every right thing we do for Jesus in this life will be amply rewarded in eternity. Otherwise it wouldn't be called a reward.

Are we saved by our good works? Absolutely not! We are saved for good works and then we are rewarded by God for carrying them out.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8–10 (ESV)

Get this straight. I am saved completely by grace, through faith but I am not saved to sit. I am saved to serve. If you are here this morning and you are very comfortable just coming to church but not connecting to others to serve

them in small groups and through ministry teams, I want you to know that you are not living the Christian life. I love you too much not to say this. If you are not involved connecting and serving, you have little reason for assurance that you are saved. Those are strong words. Come back next week and you will see why I say them. Let me take this up a notch.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 (ESV)

I love this picture from Paul. He describes the point of salvation like the pouring of a slab of concrete for the foundation of a house. When the foundation is in place, something can be built upon it. Paul says he was an expert builder and he gave them a perfectly square and level foundation to build their Christian lives on, that is, Paul gave them the pure gospel of Christ. Now the question is, what will they build on it? Friends, especially those of you who have known Christ for years, get it through your head that the point of your conversion was only the beginning. For the rest of our lives we are building on the foundation of our conversion to Christ. What are you building upon the foundation of Christ? Is what you have built upon your faith something of enduring value, gold, silver and precious stones... or are you investing in things that will not last, wood hay and straw?

How do we build on the foundation of Christ with things of lasting value? We involve ourselves in the lives of others helping them with practical service, teaching a Faith U. class, helping on a mission trip, acts of purity, those are a few ways we build upon the foundation of Christ.

Lets go over this once more to get this straight. What is the only way people are saved? By grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But after we are saved, we are not saved to sit, we are saved to serve. The eternal reward we will receive in heaven is based on what we did right and wrong for Jesus after we are saved. Many Christians are building on the foundation of Christ things that when they stand before Christ it will be revealed they had no lasting value. Will they still be saved? Yes, but they will enter heaven with little more than their BVD's

James pulls this whole background of Christian judgment and eternal rewards into our discussion on favoritism. He says *speaking and acting as ones who will be judged by the law of liberty*. James says, as Christians, will be judged not by the law from Mt. Sinai, the Ten Commandments, but the law of liberty. The question becomes, what is the law of liberty?

I want to avoid a lengthy discussion here so let me sum it up. The law of liberty is another term for the royal law.

We are freed from the law of Mt. Sinai through Christ but that freedom is not so we can focus on ourselves, but we are now to focus on loving and serving one another. When we stand before Christ, he will judge us on how we have done that. Pull that whole concept into the idea of favoritism.

As I studied, this changed the way I thought about standing before God. Instead of the focus being on just personal purity, the focus will be on how each of us have loved and served others God has put in our path. Do you see why playing favorites is so incredibly foolish? That brings us to the fourth and final step.

### **NO mercy equals NO faith.**

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:13 (ESV)

This is a verse that has led to a lot of misunderstanding. One of the keys to understanding it is remembering the logic James is using in this section. Each subsequent statement ratchets up our comprehension of the consequences of playing favorites in the church.

James says those who insist on living a life of partiality have little confidence of salvation when they stand before Christ for judgment. If the risen Lord Jesus Christ has transformed a life, that life will be characterized by mercy, not partiality and favoritism. Those who insist on partiality in the church need to question their very experience of salvation itself. Those are strong words, frightening words, but true words. Partiality, especially if it is insisted upon, can lead to devastating consequences.

### **Conclusion**

As we close, lets run through James' logic once again. Playing favorites is much more dangerous than we thought. It is more than poor manners, it is sin. Sins leaves us guilty before God, even if partiality is not on God's top ten list, it still violates God's royal law and that leaves me guilty before God. We will be

judged by the law of liberty which is how we loved others as we would love ourselves. Did we treat others the way we would love to be treated? Did we serve others the way we would like to be served? That is how we will be judged. Playing favorites in the church is one of the fastest ways to imperil your eternal reward.

Those who consistently play favorites have no reason for confidence when they stand before Christ for judgment. If the Holy Spirit has come into a heart, one of the great indications of evidence is the merciful impartial love they will have for others in the household of God.

Brothers and sisters, my prayer for us is that we would avoid the perils of partiality. I pray that we would be a body that lives by the royal law.

Let's pray.



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