

When It's Not OK to Favor

James 2:1-13

The Book of James #3

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “the righteous will live by faith.”

Those two verses from the first chapter of the Book of Romans were my favorite verses in the Bible yesterday. They are today. And they will until they bury me right side up in my boots. We have favorite verses for every season and situation in life. When you, ladies, are married to a strong-willed man who refuses to call the plumber because he thinks he can do it himself. Your favorite verse may be Genesis 7:12: *“And water covered the earth forty days and forty nights.”* Men, when your wife asks you why you have to spend hours a week adjusting the Direct TV satellite on your roof, the Spirit of the Lord might implore you to quote Proverbs 21:9: *“it is better to sit on the corner of a rooftop than to sit in the house of a quarrelsome wife.”* Children, when your parents command you to do as they but as they do, you might feel inclined to quote Proverbs 22:8: *“whoever sows injustice will reap calamity.”* Parents, when your children refuse to do as you say and do as you do, you might feel compelled to quote Genesis 3:24: *“So he drove them out of the Garden with a flaming sword.”*

The word “favorite” is an interesting one in the English Language. When used as an adjective, it means “preferred before all others of the same kind.” And common and ordinary things, it is quite alright to prefer one thing before all others of the same kind. In movie selection, I prefer Rudy to Gone with the Wind. In vegetable selection, I prefer Green Beans to Brussel Sprouts (as a matter of fact, I would prefer a hammer over the head to Brussel Sprouts). In sports, I prefer watching the Cornhole Toss Championships over Olympic Synchronized Swimming.

Church, I want to suggest to you this morning that there is one place in a particular area of our lives where it's never ok to prefer one particular thing before all others of the same kind. It's not in movie selection. Or in vegetable shopping. Or in Comcast channel choosing. Instead, it is in the Body – that Bride – of Christ we call the church – the Ecclesia – the House of God. In the most practical book in all of the Bible, James makes one thing very clear. And you will see it today. That is this: in the economy of the Lord Almighty, confessing Jesus out of one side of the mouth and voicing preferential treatment out the other side are completely incompatible. In essence, Christianity and Favoritism go together about like oil and water or peanut butter and ketchup. And today I want to speak to you, very simply, about when it's not ok to play favorites. To do that, please turn with me to James 2:1-13.

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? ⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “You shall not commit

adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. ¹²Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Reasons Christianity and Favoritism (Partiality) Are Incompatible

1. The Gospel of God Reason (1, 5)

- **Country Songs Usually Have a Nugget of Truth in Them to Make Them Relatable, Regardless of the Content:** (1) Flipping the stations between visits to the dump this week, I heard this one written by a native Vero Beachian: *we got winners. We got losers. Chain-smokers and boozers. We got yuppies. We got bikers. We got thirsty hitchhikers. And the veterans talk about their battle scars...mmm mmm mmm. I love this bar.* (2) The idea of the song is that the one place in the world where people found equality was at this bar. (3) James says this is the way people should feel about the church.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Who we are by the world's standards has no relevance at the foot of the cross.
- **Main Textual Teaching Emphasis:** (1) Notice the sudden change between trials in chapter 1 to the most important item on James' agenda in chapter 2. (2) It's not faith and works, or taming the tongue; those come later. (3) Instead, it is this problem of partiality. (4) Why it's incompatible with Christianity is apparent in the introductory clauses: "brothers and sisters" and "believers in the Lord Jesus Christ."
- **The Equality of the Cross Through the Eyes of Two Disciples:** (1) Simon the Zealot, who wanted to kill the Romans; (2) and Matthew, who were for the Romans; (3) Jesus not only called both of them to repentance; (4) He put them on the same exact team. (5) Why? Who we are by the world's standards, either good or bad, has no relevance at the cross.

2. The Image of God Reason (2-4)

- **One of the Greatest Pleasures of My Life:** (1) Is photo bombing people at Disney. (2) Especially those who take a thousand family portraits on the main street at the expense of impeding the walking progression of every living soul behind them in route to the It's a Small World ride. (3) They are important. But not infinitely more than those who forgot their cameras behind them. (4) So my presence in their pictures across this great nation reminds them of that.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Making more of someone who can do something for you than someone who cannot deemphasizes God's image in the one who cannot.
- **Main Textual Teaching Emphasis:** (1) This is what I call the Parable of the Church Greeter; (2) The contrast is how the greeter welcomes based on appearance; (3) It's no different than the way we greet at times: "you look so nice," etc, etc. (4) But then you see someone else who doesn't quite fit, may look strange in appearance, and you look down at your shoes or play with the change in your pocket.
- **Entertaining Angels and Jesus in the Church:** Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers. For in so doing, we may be entertaining angels without knowing it. For if Jesus paid a visit, he would come in much like a straggler to test our love for one another.

3. The Standards of God Reason (9-13a)

- **Excuse Me Son, You Are in My Seat:** (1) I had a little old lady tell me that in church many moons ago. (2) It got me thinking: what if we assigned seats in church based on how we rank sins: small sinners in the front, bigger sinners in the middle, biggest sinners in the back. (3) James assigns partiality "sinners" to the back seats, not the front.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Favoritism (Partiality) is a very bad sin precisely because we don't think it is bad. But it is sin of favoritism that exposes us to judgment from the Lord.

- **Main Textual Teaching Emphasis:** (1) James' argument is based on the standards of God. (2) We tend to rank sins. But James says if you've broken one, you have broken all. (3) But then adds that it's partiality that exposes you to the type of judgment from God that you are forbidden to do to others: open their soul and shake your head no.
- **Biggest Sign We Are In Danger:** Overwhelming hostility towards something or someone in particular. It's God's way of judging you for showing partiality (that you don't prefer this person, etc). For what you judge in a condemnatory way in others is true of you (Romans 2:1-4). The other "sins" don't do that. Partiality and favoritism does.

4. The Freedom of God Reason (13b)

- **How People Don't Go About Getting Back At People:** (1) Never will we see someone who has something against another say "I think I'll drink this bottle of Clorox right here to show them how upset I am at them. (2) Withholding mercy is just like that, it's like drinking Clorox and waiting for someone else to be effected by it. (3) But the person it affects isn't the one you are upset at: it's you.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** We violate the Law of Liberty in our hearts when we withhold mercy from others.
- **Main Textual Teaching Emphasis:** When we do not withhold mercy, and dispense it as it has been dispensed to us, then God's character of being merciful shows the world that there is a heaven where a forgiving God resides.
- **Mercy Came Running:** Mercy came running. Like a prisoner set free. Past all my failures to the point of my need. When the sin that I carried. Was all I could see. And when I could not reach mercy. Mercy came running to me