

Daily Bible Study

“The Fatalism of Favoritism”

James 2:8-13

September 25–29, 2023

MONDAY –As we return to our study of James this week we take as our text, **James 2:8-13**: *“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”* In our study, **“The Fatalism of Favoritism”** we will see that some of James’s readers were failing. They were failing in the area of Christian love by treating others with partiality and favoritism. If you remember back, rich visitors were being warmly greeted in their church, while poor visitors were regarded as something of an inconvenience. The entire situation and very aim of this letter from James to persecuted and scattered Christians was ironic. James’s readers were suffering persecution because their society was playing favorites, and now they themselves were doing the very same thing when they came together for worship. In our text James continues to deal with this business of favoritism and he does so by calling the attention of his readers as well as us to three things. **Favoritism is a violation of God’s law (8-11), Favoritism will be judged by God (12), and Favoritism indicates an unmerciful spirit (13-14).** All three of these things are presented to us and explained by James for a rebuke to the genuine Christian and as a warning to the Christian in name only.

(Meditate & Apply) Do I consider myself to be a person who shows favoritism? What things in my life illustrate the answer I have given above?

(Pray): Father, teach me this week from Your Word. Let me both see and learn why favoritism is so dangerous and how it points to the status and condition of my heart. Please help me to overcome and conquer it in Your power and with the help of The Holy Spirit.

TUESDAY – **James 2:8**: *“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well;”* James starts this verse by attempting to get the undivided attention of his listeners. First thing out of the gate we see that **Favoritism**

is a violation of God’s law. James reminds his readers of God’s command given many places in the Old Testament such as **Leviticus 19:18**, when he said, “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the Lord.” In our text James interestingly calls this command from The Lord, *“the royal law”*. Some think that it is the royal law because it is supreme among all the other laws—the royal king of all God’s laws if you will. We do know that love is the perfect summation of God’s laws. Jesus himself taught that all the commandments of God can be summarized in terms of loving God and others (our neighbor) (**Matthew 22:37–40**). So we are, therefore, on solid ground when we call God’s command to love our neighbor as ourselves, “the king of laws”. There are others who think that James had something else in mind when he used the phrase *‘the royal law’*, namely, the nature of the one who gave this law. God is the sovereign ruler of this universe—the king of all. His laws, therefore, are to be taken seriously and obeyed. I have often said this is a concept very foreign to Americans who are far removed from a Monarchical form of government. A Monarchy can be merely symbolic or fully autocratic where what the King says is, is the very law of the land. In our text, both interpretations are possible and in keeping with Scripture, and it is acceptable whichever way we may lean in our interpretation. James’s readers knew full well what he was talking about, and they would have heartily agreed that the law of love is *the royal law!*

(Meditate & Apply) How important is it that I understand the principle of the royal law? Am I more concerned with other aspects of Scripture or what I read in the Bible than I am about loving God and others as myself? What actions in my life show that I get this?

(Pray): Father God, thanks for loving me in spite of my horrible sinful selfishness. Help me live thankful to You for graciously putting Your love on me and working in my life.

WEDNESDAY – **James 2:8-11**: *“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”* The point for James readers was whether they were keeping *the royal law*. They obviously thought they were. James’s catches them off guard when he says they were playing favorites. They most likely would argue that it was their very concern for the law of love that caused them to minister to the rich! And the fact that they were failing to minister to the poor was not due to lack of love but because they were tied up and busy serving the rich that they did not have any time left for anyone else. This is the reason why James uses the word *really*. He is basically saying, “If

you *really* fulfil the royal law, you must show love to all people. The royal law demands nothing else but complete and wholehearted obedience. James was warning about the danger of selective obedience. This was the great failing of the Pharisees. They would be very scrupulous and meticulous about certain laws while ignoring all the rest. **Matthew 23:23**, “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*” It is also a great danger to us today. Selective obedience fails to see the fundamental unity of the law. If we refrain from committing adultery but commit murder, we are guilty of breaking the law. To break one link in a chain is to break the chain. James is showing us here why we are sinners and in this phrase he illustrates it so well; “*but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*” He uses two different Greek words here. First, he says, *you commit sin* (**hamartia** - to miss the mark, fall short of God’s standard). Second, he says, “*and are convicted by the law as transgressors*” (**parabates** - violator). One person comes short of God’s standard and the other person goes too far beyond the prescribed limits. The law of God is a code of conduct which tells us what God wants us to do and not to do. Any failure is sin, and any sin makes us transgressors and disqualifies us from standing acceptably in God’s presence. God did not give us his laws so that we can be saved through keeping them. If that were the case, no one would be saved. Instead He gave His laws to show us how very far short we fall of his requirements and, therefore, how desperately we need the Lord Jesus as our Savior. The purpose of God’s law is to convict us so we will flee to Christ.

(Meditate & Apply) Do I understand that I have transgressed the entirety of God’s law? Do I show love to all people equally or do I have my favorites? What specific areas of my behavior illustrate both my falling short and going too far?

(Pray): Lord, help me to be equally concerned for all people and to show it in my behavior. Thank you that although I deserve punishment as a transgressor, Jesus came to stand in my place and take my place and punishment. Help me to trust and obey Him fully.

THURSDAY – James 2:12: “*So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.*” We now turn our attention to the fact that **Favoritism will be judged by God.** Wherever we turn in the Bible, we find that Judgement Day is coming. No one will escape it. The men who wrote the Scripture lived with a constant and keen awareness of the reality of that day. To live as we ought, we must do the same. James says to live as people *who will be judged by the law of liberty*. Live like a free man who understands liberty and the good news of the gospel. That he was lost and condemned but has been freed and saved by God’s grace and who will be judged on the basis of Christ’s righteousness. These two actions, *speak and so do* are present active imperatives: keep on speaking and keep on acting in the reality of the

coming judgement. The people to whom James wrote were guilty of favoritism because they were passing judgement on others. The cure for passing judgement on others is to remember that we must all face judgement ourselves. On judgement day, we will all fully realize our sins but we as believers will also fully realize that God’s law is the law of liberty which sets us free. Satan has been lying about the law of God from the very beginning of human history. He says God’s laws are designed to take the pleasure out of life and that God wants to deprive us of joy and make us miserable. But on that day all men will see Satan’s lie fully exposed and that which Scripture has been telling us all along will be abundantly and transparently clear. The laws of God were not given to bring us into a miserable bondage, but rather to bring us into glorious liberty. If we stop and look at the evidence all around us, we would see that it is actually the life of sin is that which is enslaving.

(Meditate & Apply) What comes into my mind when I consider I will be judged by The Law of God? What specifics can I point to in my actions and words that show I have understood, believed, and applied the liberty offered me through Christ?

(Pray): Father, help me be ever aware of the way You feel toward the poor. May my first thoughts and actions toward a poor person be pleasing and in line with Your mind.

FRIDAY– James 2:14 “*For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*” Inevitably sinners will all appear before God’s judgment seat and one who stands guilty before the Judge pleads for mercy. Jesus told the parable of the servant who received mercy from the king but withheld it from his neighbor in **Matthew 18**. The point is that men who have understood and received God’s mercy and forgiveness show it to others. Those truly saved cannot live as if they have never been touched by the mercy and grace of God. Those who know mercy cannot withhold it from others. Curtis Vaughan says, “By failing to show compassion to others we prove ourselves to be utterly devoid of Christian character. Christian people are the children of God. They bear His image; they copy His example. It is therefore impossible for them to fail to share in His compassion, to fail to reflect His spirit of mercy.” James is saying that those who have truly been saved are God’s children and like their Father will give evidence of the merciful character of the God who saved them. And in being like Him in this we give evidence we truly have been saved and, therefore, have nothing to fear on the Day of Judgement because, *Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

(Meditate & Apply) Have I experienced the forgiveness and mercy of God? Am I showing that mercy to others? Do I have assurance of being saved and standing in the day of Judgment?

(Pray): Father God, thank You for Your mercy and forgiveness. Help me show it to others.