



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Book of James, Favoritism, Part Two

MAY 9, 2011

Greg Beaupied / cell: (919) 710-9147 / Greg.Beaupied@capitolcom.org / 206 New Bern Place, Raleigh, NC 27601

James 2:8-13

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, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

If you really keep the royal law...

James offers up a dose of irony in his statement we are doing well if we really keep the royal law. If anyone is really keeping the royal law, he is doing that which no one else has ever done except the Savior.

The royal law means a law given to us by the King Jesus. It is the law of His kingdom and the rule for our lives.

The royal law is not a suggestion, nor is it merely a principle by which we live a happier existence while developing a better self-image. It is the Lord's command to us. To break it is to be disobedient. Of course, we know from Scripture and experience that we break this law routinely. The fact that we are disobedient does not make the law wrong.

It is noteworthy that the media are quick to point out the latest failure of some notable Christian leader, and then draw two conclusions. One, the failed leader is a hypocrite which is true. Two, the law is unreasonable which is not true.

...found in Scripture

The law has been delivered. We are not left to our own devices to make up or even re-invent the law. The Scripture tells us what to do. True, there are always issues of interpretation, but

these issues are more often smokescreens for ignoring the law than legitimate questions about what to do

“Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.

We often hear the idea expressed that first we love our self and then we are free to love our neighbor. This has been repeated so many times that it has a ring of truth, but it is really pop self-help psychology dressed up in a Christian costume. We hear and read so much about loving yourself that the whole idea of your neighbor being the object of love and ministry gets lost. If we believe we must first learn to love ourselves before helping a neighbor, we are likely never to get about the ministry of loving others—we always can find some new “necessity” to love ourselves

The correct idea is very simple. Think of all of your own needs and how you meet those needs. Now, go and do those same things for your neighbor. You need to eat so feed your neighbor who has a need. You need clothes so make sure your neighbor has clothes. You must have shelter so make sure your neighbor has shelter. You need love and friendship so...

But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

Favoritism is a sin but it does seem to beg the question, “Why is it a sin?” The first thing we may note is favoritism stands in contrast to the character of God. He loves the unlovely. He loves the poor and downcast. He has compassion on the humble. He elevated little Israel to great significance.

How is this law breaking? Using the Ten Commandments as a guide we can see many ways showing favoritism breaks the intention of the law. Coveting (the Tenth) what someone else has is obvious. Idolatry (the Second) is another easy example. It takes a sanctified imagination to see that issues like honoring parents, and the prohibition against stealing might play a part in the favoritism scenario.

The verb tense used here by James suggests an ongoing partiality that some in the church had adopted as a lifestyle.

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: MONDAYS, 5:00 PM, ROOM 1425

STAFF: MONDAYS, 12:00 NOON, CHAPEL

North Carolina

James

Playing the “favor game” was apparently one of the constant pursuits of their lives.

In order to play this game one must be focusing on his own needs and accomplishments and how they stack up in comparison to other people. Our comparison is to be to God and His Law, not where we fit into some human pecking order.

The bottom line: favoritism is a significant sin and not merely a poor way to act socially. It is a personal strategy for success that does not first recognize God as the giver of good gifts.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

We have a tendency to see the Law of God as something that can be obeyed partially. As long as we are doing pretty well, that is good enough. Just look at what so-and-so is doing!

We cannot excuse our law breaking by suggesting we have violated one little principle. Any law breaking makes us law breakers. The problem is simple to understand. Law breakers do not live in the presence of God who is sinless. The only way law breakers can have a relationship with God is to have all of their law breaking forgiven and the just displeasure of God somehow satisfied. This, of course, brings us back to the cross of Christ. Through His merits we receive that which rightfully belongs to Him, and He has taken the sins that belong to us.

For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

As people who harbor sinful hearts, we are easily convinced that we are pretty good because we can think of many points of God’s Law that we are not prone to violate. I have never killed anyone so I’m OK. Or, I am not a thief so I must be a pretty good person. James gives us the reminder that each of us has particular ways we violate the Law of God.

There are two issues behind what James has said about the Law. We are lawbreakers because we pick and choose which portion of the Law has authority over us, but all of it is authoritative. We are also law breakers because we violate the intent of the Law.

Therefore, James moves beyond the fact that one violation of the law is violating the entire law. Here we are reminded of Jesus’ teaching that lusting is adultery and anger is murder. He is forcing us to look into our darkened hearts. Is it possible we share the Pharisee’s sin of being all white-washed on the outside but full of dead men’s bones?

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

Once again James reaches back and pulls forward his earlier idea about speaking. Now he couples speaking with acting. Our speaking is an act. We are accountable for what we say as well as what we do. A cursory reading ahead tells us James will have more to say about the tongue and doing good works.

We are judged by the law that gives freedom. James repeats the phrase *law that gives freedom* and couples it with the idea of how this same law is God’s standard of judgment. Knowing we are open to judgment ought to make us merciful. We know we are lost without mercy overruling justice. James bluntly declares we will be subject to judgment without mercy if we are not merciful.

Mercy triumphs over judgment!

What a glorious hope. In the end mercy wins out over judgment. This is true for any who are covered by God’s mercy in Christ which is given to those whom He has forgiven and adopted into His family.

Points to Ponder...

1. If we are overly concerned with social favoritism or status, where does the Lord fit into our lifestyle? For instance, what might be the wrong motivation for choosing a certain church to attend?
2. Try this experiment: Think of ways favoritism can violate each of the Ten Commandments.