

**Will I Be Your Neighbor?****James 2:8-13**

In our message last week, we considered the flaws of favoritism.

From **verses 1-4** we examined our flaws by noting that our assessments are flawed, our actions are flawed, and our attitudes are flawed. We give preferential treatment to those whose appearance is what we like and demean others who don't quite make the grade.

James then explained the flaws of favoritism in **verses 5-7** noting first in **verse 5** God's plan. His modus operandi is different from ours. He shows no favoritism. On the other hand, man's problem, as seen in **verses 6-7** points out that the very people we want to elevate because of their appearance are the ones who end up using and abusing us. They do four things: they mock us, they manipulate us, they monopolize us, and they malign Christ.

We concluded last week's message by looking at three ways to eradicate favoritism.

We need to serve others willingly.

We need to love others wholeheartedly.

We need to give to others wholly.

But James isn't quite finished with the topic of favoritism and so neither are we. He continues to address the topic of favoritism in **verses 8-13**.

I have but two main points this morning. If the topic was a bit uncomfortable last week, it may be even more so today. The first thing we'll look at is the abomination of favoritism and secondly, we'll ponder the answer to favoritism. For the time being we'll skip over **vs 8** and jump into the mess in **vs. 9**.

We cannot rightly know the answer to the matter unless we know the problem and the problem stares us right in the face in these verses. So let's jump in at the root of the problem and consider the abomination of favoritism.

**I. THE ABOMINATION OF FAVORITISM – vs. 9-13**

If we think that favoritism is just a trivial matter and

nothing at all in the grand scheme of things, then we aren't looking at it in the right way. James goes right for the jugular. Favoritism leaves a stain.

**A. Favoritism Leaves A Stain – v. 9a**

**“If you show favoritism, you sin.”**

The Bible tells us plainly that sin is any transgression of the law of God. It is rebellion against Him. John says sin is lawlessness. That word congers up images of the old west or perhaps cities like Portland last summer with the rioting.

**I John 3:4 “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”**

**Deuteronomy 9:7 “Remember this and never forget how you provoked the Lord your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord.”**

Scripture speaks of three types of sin and unfortunately, we are guilty of all three.

The first type of sin is inherited sin.

**1. Inherited sin**

Sin began when Lucifer rebelled against God, which led to his being cast out of heaven. In an effort to usurp God's sovereignty over His creation, Satan incited Adam and Eve to rebel against God by disobeying His command not to eat of the forbidden fruit. Ever since sin entered mankind, it has been passed on to every person through the ages. In **Psalm 51:5**, David wrote that he was conceived in iniquity. That doesn't mean that one night in a moment of unbridled passion his mother committed an act of indiscretion which resulted in an unwanted pregnancy. It means that when he was conceived, he inherited the same sin nature that his parents had, and their parents before them all the way back to Adam and Eve. Save Jesus there are no exceptions. We read in **Romans 5:12** that through Adam sin entered the world and that every person is condemned with the same curse of death because of Adam and the penalty for sin is death (**Rom. 6:23**.)

We are sinners not because we sin; we sin because

we are sinners and I have been a sinner since birth. Among the features I inherited from my parents unfortunately includes a sin nature. I have a predisposition to rebel. They didn't have to teach me to covet or to lie or to cheat. Those things are inherent because they were inherited.

The second type of sin is imputed sin.

## 2. Imputed sin

The word imputed in the Greek is used in both financial and legal settings. It means to take something that belongs to someone and credit it to the account of someone else. Before the law was given by Moses, people were still guilty of sin because it was inherited. After the law came, people were also guilty because they violated the law, so their sins were imputed to their account. Every person is guilty and subject to death for the sin inherited by Adam **and** for their imputed sin because of their own violation of the God's law.

On the day Christ was crucified, God took the principle of imputation and applied it to Jesus. Even though He was without sin, our sin was credited to Christ. God placed our sins on His Son. Likewise, God took Christ's righteousness and credited it to us through faith. Jesus did not inherit the sin of Adam so that He could be without sin in order for Him to bare the penalty of sin. The sacrifice required the death of someone without sin and while He bore the sin of mankind, He did not then become a sinner. Through faith in Christ, His righteousness is then imputed or credited to the believer.

**II Corinthians 5:21 "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."**

We are guilty because of inherited sin and imputed sin. The third type of sin is person or individual.

## 3. Individual sin

Individual sins are what we commit every day. The Bible has quite a stockpile of them listed. They range from murder and adultery and coveting and taking the Lord's name in vain to things like lying, anger, hatred, jealousy, envy, selfishness, anxiety,

sins of the tongue, impatience, judgmentalism, and according to our passage even favoritism. Every person who is not a believer in Christ will be judged for these sins, but every believer will not be judged for them because they have been taken care of through the death of Christ. We have been freed from the penalty of sin. But Scripture is clear that even though we have been freed from their penalty doesn't mean we can continue in them.

**Romans 6:1-2 "What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"**

**Romans 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Through the indwelling, empowering Holy Spirit, we are given the power to resist sinning. For the believer, sin is a matter of choice. When we choose to sin, we can be restored to fellowship with God through repentance because God is both faithful and just to forgive us of our sin (**I John 1:9**).

We stand condemned as sinners because our sin is inherited, imputed, and individual and the penalty of sin remains on the individual until at such time he admits he is a sinner in need of a Savior, confesses and forsakes his sin putting his faith in Christ for salvation. All three types of sin were dealt with on the cross when Christ was crucified.

I hear the Savior say,  
"Thy strength indeed is small;  
Child of weakness, watch and pray,  
Find in Me thine all in all."

For nothing good have I  
Whereby Thy grace to claim;  
I'll wash my garments white  
In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb.

Jesus paid it all,  
All to Him I owe;  
Sin had left a crimson stain,  
He washed it white as snow.

little thing. James calls it what it is and so should we. Because it is a sin, it is an abomination and leaves a stain. Because it is a sin, favoritism brings a sentence.

## B. Favoritism Brings A Sentence – vs. 9b-13

James takes two very extreme sins, ones we consider to be serious social sins – murder and adultery, to illustrate the gravity of favoritism as sin. There isn't any question that we would call them sins in their own right and if committed, we would be guilty of disobeying God's law.

**Exodus 20:13 “You shall not murder.”**

**Exodus 20:14 “You shall not commit adultery.”**

Some Jewish Rabbis taught what they called detached commandments. If you committed one sin, you were only guilty of breaking one command, not the whole law. They further taught that you only needed to keep one essential law to satisfy God. Additionally, if you kept one command you got credit for keeping that command. If you broke one command you incurred a debit. In the end you stacked up the credits and debits hoping you had more credits to earn entrance into heaven for keeping the law than debits that kept you out of heaven. That's nothing more than a works-based salvation. **Ephesians 2:8-9** is very clear that we can't earn our way into heaven by hoping that the good outweighs the bad.

Essentially what James is implying is that if we are going to keep the law, we need to keep the whole law, because to break the law by only committing one sin makes us guilty of breaking all the law.

One day Jesus was confronted by a rich young man who asked the question that is on the mind of any religious person even today. What must I do to earn eternal life? Jesus told him to keep the law and gave him some examples. It wasn't a complete list because, one Jesus knew the man's heart, and two He wanted to see how the man would respond. Based on the list Jesus gave, the man said he had kept them since his youth. Jesus responded by showing him how utterly impossible it is to keep all the law without fail because we all fail in at least

one area. He told the man he lacked one thing and instructed him to go and sell everything he had. We are told the man went away sad because he was wealthy. Although he had kept the other points of the law, he harbored a greedy heart. The sad truth of the matter is that although he sincerely wanted to know how to have eternal life, he was unwilling to take the steps necessary so he could have it.

Favoritism is just as much a sin as murder or adultery and will condemn a person as a lawbreaker. If we follow the law, then complete obedience is expected, even demanded. Paul said that keeping the law was like being in bondage. James says that when we show favoritism, we don't exhibit mercy to those in need and continued by saying that if we don't show mercy to others, no mercy would be shown to us. We will instead, receive God's judgment.

Now keep in mind that James is writing to believers, so the judgment he is referring to is not about losing one's salvation. That is forever settled. The judgment referred to here is about eternal rewards. What James is saying is that our works, which includes how we treat others, will be judged. When we are judged we are judged by God's imputed righteousness. That law frees us from the law of bondage so that we are then judged by the law of freedom or liberty, something we saw back in **1:25**, referred to there as the **“perfect law”**. **“But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom.”** We are to speak and act in a way that is consistent with godly living, which includes how we treat others.

God expects that we show the same kind of mercy to others that He has shown us.

**Are we showing mercy to the least of these?**

Favoritism is an abomination that leaves a stain and brings a sentence. It is a sin. So what is the answer to favoritism? For that we go back to **verse 8**.

## II. THE ANSWER TO FAVORITISM – v. 8

**“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself;’ you**

are doing right.”

One answer to favoritism is the command to love our neighbor.

### A. The Command To Love Our Neighbor

#### John 13:34

You might be prone to think that if it's a command, then we really don't have any say in the matter, that we are obligated to love and therefore we are justified by doing so out of duty. We might think back to a time when we had a little scuffle with a sibling after which they went crying to mom because they had gotten hurt. To settle the matter your mom told you to tell the sibling you were sorry. Even though you may still be hopping mad on the inside you go through the motions because mom commanded you to apologize.

If I genuinely love the Lord, then loving others is not out of duty just because He commanded me but instead it's because I'm devoted to Him and want to please Him. When I love others because I am commanded to love them as He loved me, I do so because I have considered how He loved me by dying for me. It may be a command, but it's a command we desire to obey. The Psalmist put it this way – **“I delight to do your will, o my God; Your law is within my heart.” (Psalm 40:8)**

Let's define what is meant by the royal law. Again, in the context about favoritism, we need to remember that we have a natural propensity to treat some individuals or groups better or differently than other groups. If they act like us, smell like us, look like us, believe like us, they must be us, so we like them more than those who don't act, smell, look, or believe like us. It must have been evident to James that those with higher social status in the church were receiving preferential treatment over the poor and less fortunate, which gave him a reason to address this issue.

It was considered the royal law because it was given by a king and it was the king of all laws. The royal law wasn't about adherence to dietary restrictions, observance of sacrifices and festivals, or even

keeping the Sabbath. It was about loving others. The royal law commands believers to love others without regard to class, condition, country or creed. And so while we first see the command to love we next see the compassion in loving our neighbor.

### B. The Compassion In Loving Our Neighbor

**“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

James quotes from **Leviticus 19:18** and one quoted by Jesus in **Matthew 22:39**. It is the royal law because it is the highest law that is the basis of all the other laws that govern our relationships with others. It sums up all the other laws of how we treat others. If we love them we won't speak evil against them, lie to them, be angry with them. We'll forgive, encourage and help them.

#### Mark 12:28-31

In the verses that precede this passage, Jesus had been debating with the Sadducees about the resurrection and marriage in heaven. Hearing Jesus give a sound answer, another teacher of the law decided to chime in with his own question. Of all the commandments, which was the greatest. Jesus combined what was called by the Jews the Shema, which was Jewish confession of faith found in **Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”** with **Leviticus 19:18** to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. Essentially, He took the 10 commandments and condensed them into two. Love God, love others.

#### Luke 10:25-29

On another occasion, Jesus was asked again, this time by an expert in the law what he needed to do to have eternal life. It wasn't an uncommon question. The emphasis of course is on the effort of the person to do something. If he was truly interested, one would suppose that he already knew the answer to his own question, but perhaps he asked it in an effort to debate Jesus about the finer points of the law. It's also possible that he wasn't interested so much in the answer as he was in wanting to find out what kind of teacher Jesus really was. Did He really know the law or was He just a fly by night pseudo

teacher who knew a few things and could gather a crowd because he had a charismatic personality?

Jesus turned the inquiry around and asked the scholar to answer his own question. The law expert cited **Deuteronomy 6:5** and **Leviticus 19:18** to love God with everything we have and love one's neighbor as oneself. Jesus said he had answered well and was close to heaven.

But the man wasn't satisfied and couldn't leave well enough alone. If he had truly been interested in knowing how to have eternal life we would have expected him to ask Jesus to explain what else he needed to do to get to heaven since he was obviously lacking something. So he pressed the issue by asking Jesus to define what was meant by the term neighbor. Is it the family who lives next door to me on either side of my house or across the street from me or those in my own circle of friends or my small community? The verse says that the man wanted to justify himself. He was expecting Jesus to give an answer by which he could pat himself on the back and say my what a good neighbor I have been perhaps thinking in the back of his mind I look after my neighbor's house when he's away on vacation, I get his mail, mow his lawn, shovel off the snow. If he needs a ride to the store or to an appointment or needs to borrow my wheelbarrow for a project, I'm quite neighborly in that regard. I help him out when I can. I'm certainly a model neighbor. Everything is well between us.

Many of us have the notion of what being neighborly is like from Mr. Rogers.

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood

A beautiful day for a neighbor

Would you be mine? Could you be mine?

It's a neighborly day in this beauty wood

A neighborly day for a beauty

Would you be mine? Could you be mine?

I've always wanted to have a neighbor just like you  
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you

So let's make the most of this beautiful day

Since we're together we might as well say

Would you be mine? Could you be mine?

Won't you be my neighbor?

Won't you please, won't you please?

Please, won't you be my neighbor?

Mr. Rogers painted a friendly neighborhood with everyone being neighborly. Jesus saw what a neighbor looked like in a different way. To define who a neighbor is He told the story of the good Samaritan. A man had left Jerusalem presumably heading home. We aren't told why he was there, but sometime after leaving the city he fell into the hands of robbers who stole his money, stripped him of his clothes, beat him up and threw him in a ditch half dead. He was in no condition to help himself. Both a priest and a Levite saw the man and did nothing but move to the other side of the road. They paused long enough to see the man and notice that he was in need of urgent attention but continued without stopping to this poor guy out. It was an inconvenience, perhaps even something that would have defiled them, and they wanted nothing to do with the man. They had their reasons for not getting involved.

Last fall while driving home after running an errand I witnessed a pedestrian get hit by a vehicle. Cars continued to pass by as the person who got hit struggled to her feet. By the time I pulled over and walked to the middle of the road, she had managed to get to the other side with the help of another witness. The driver never got out of her car. She did holler out the window to see if she was okay and then drove into the parking lot and asked again if she was okay, and then drove off. I hung around to talk with the ambulance and police. After I gave my statement the officer thanked me for sticking around and told me that so few offer any help.

The people that night weren't any different than the priest or Levite. They didn't want to be bothered; they didn't want to get involved. It was an inconvenience. But Jesus wasn't done with his story. A third man came by. He was a Samaritan, people hated by the Jews. They were Jews who had married Gentiles, half-breeds, considered to be worse than Gentiles. He had every reason socially, religiously, and racially to pass by the man. But this

despised man stopped and aided the injured man. He bandaged his wounds, gave him a ride to the nearest inn, paid for his care and did so freely and fully, expecting nothing in return.

Jesus asked the scholar to identify the true neighbor. He couldn't even bring himself to say Samaritan. He could only refer to him as the one who showed mercy. The lesson Jesus wanted to drive home was to teach that our neighbor is anyone in our proximity to whom we can show and share the love of God. It isn't a matter of geography, it's a matter of opportunity. One article I read put it this way:

**“We are called not only to love those who are similar to us or with whom we are comfortable, but all whom God places in our path. On another occasion Jesus said we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.” (Matt. 5:44-46)**

Warren Wiersbe says that instead of asking who our neighbor is, we should ask to whom can I be a neighbor?

We want to love the neighbor who takes care of his yard like we do, who is kind in return, who treats us the same way we treat them.

The royal law says we are to love our neighbor regardless. Love the ones whose yard looks more like Sanford and son.

Love the ones who let their dogs dig up our flowers. Love the ones who curse and holler, who blare their music.

Love the ones who seem more like enemies.

But you say I can't do that, and I would say you are right, we can't do it alone. That's when we see the catalyst of loving our neighbor.

### C. The Catalyst In Loving Our Neighbor

**I John 4:7, 11 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God...Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”**

We are right in saying that we can't love our neighbor, not in our own power. That's why it's important to remember that the kind of love we

need to have for our neighbor comes only from God. When we show God's love to others, we show them that we belong to and know God.

When we let God's Spirit do His work in us, **Galatians 5:22** says the very first characteristic He develops in us is love. Loving our neighbor is a divinely produced trait in us that is developed no other way. We won't be able to love our neighbor without the work of God's Spirit empowering us to love unconditionally, wholeheartedly, unreservedly, without exception, without complaint and without hesitation.

When we love our neighbor in the way God intends through His Spirit at work in us it corroborates that we love our neighbor as God commands.

### D. The Corroboration By Loving Our Neighbor

**John 13:35 “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.”**

If we want to give an evidence that we are Christ's disciples, love our neighbor. In **I John 3:18**, John tells us not to just talk about loving others, act it out, live it out, prove it by your deeds. Talk is cheap. We've all hear the old adage which says *“actions speak louder than words.”* Love does.

**Romans 12:9 “Let love be sincere.”** People know when it's genuine or not. Love needs to be real, not coerced, without ulterior motive, and done without expecting anything in return. Such love corroborates that our faith is real because it doesn't show favoritism. Genuine faith loves others while favoritism shows there is a flaw in our faith. The next topic James tackles is to show that genuine faith is demonstrated by action while a faith that is not genuine is devoid of works. **Which do we have?**

**What's the answer to favoritism?** It's loving others in a non-preferential way, not showing prejudice. It's evident in what we do. Loving our neighbor demonstrates genuine faith. **So let me ask in closing, who will you be a neighbor to this week?**