

KEEP THE WHOLE LAW

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Old Testament Lesson; Isaiah 50:4-10

Gospel Lesson; Mark 8:27-35

Sermon Text; James 2:1-5

James 2:8-10

James 2:14-18

Last week, Pastor Bartels looked at the section of James, right before the one that we are going to look at today. In that section of scripture, there was a phrase that said this. “We should be quick to listen and slow to speak.” That section of scripture was talking about the use of our mouths and the use of our ears. At the very end of his sermon Pastor Bartels gave us an encouragement. He said, “You now know that your mouths, your tongue, and your ears have been justified. That means that your tongue and your ears have been declared not guilty, for Christ's sake. Jesus, when He died on the cross, paid for all of the sins that we commit with our tongue, with our mouth. He paid for all of the sins that we commit with our ears.” So, he encouraged us, as we left worship last week, with our justified ears, with our justified tongues, to live a God-pleasing life.

How did you do, this last week, with all of the words that came out of your mouth? How did you do, this last week, with everything that you heard with your ears? Was everything that you said, and everything that you heard God-pleasing?

Today, as we continue to pick up with James, chapter two, James continues to encourage us to keep the whole law, not only with our tongues and with our ears, but the whole law.

There once was a boy who was playing with some building blocks down in the basement of his house. His younger sister came to him and said, "Dad says he needs you in the garage, right now."

The young boy sarcastically and flippantly said, "Can't you see I am busy playing with my toys, right now?"

A few minutes later, his older sister came and said, "Dad said, 'You need to come to the garage!'"

Again, his response was the same. Very sarcastically, flippantly he said, "**I am busy!** If dad wants me, **he can come and get me**, if he wants to!"

That is when the boy heard footsteps coming down the stairs!

"Dad's here," his father said. That little boy's attitude changed pretty quickly from being flippant, and sarcastic. Immediately, he went out to the garage to help his father.

Let's hear what "Dad" has to say this morning. Let's hear what God, our Heavenly Father has to say to us, through James, the brother of Jesus, chapter two looking at selected verses.

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 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," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen my dear brothers: Has not God chose 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?

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For

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

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

Now, oh Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my lips be acceptable to You, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Amen

It is this section of scripture that encourages us to keep the whole law. Now, there are different functions to God's Law. One of the functions of God's Law is that it serves as a mirror, and it shows us our sin. Just as we looked in the mirror, this morning, before we came to church to see what our appearance is, so also when the mirror of God's Law is placed in front of us, it shows us our sin. It shows the wrong things that we do. But, another function of God's Law is that it serves as a guide. Particularly to Christians, God wants His Law to be used as a guide, so that now that we know what God wants us to do and not to do, He wants His Law to be a guide for believers in how we live our Christian life.

Today, in our text, there are really three particular things that come out, as God desires us to keep the whole Law.

The first thing is that He does not want us to show favoritism.

Apparently, in James' day, the members of the church were showing favoritism, as people were coming to church. And, if somebody

appeared to come in with rich clothes and a gold ring, they would get a nice spot, right up in front, so that the whole congregation could see, *“Look at who we have here in worship today.”*

But, if somebody came in appearing to look poor and wearing shabby clothes, they would be told to stand along the wall near the back, or to sit down on the floor, to make sure that the chairs were reserved for those who were rich.

James doesn't want us to show favoritism.

God doesn't want us to show favoritism.

But, how easy it is for us to fall into that mind set. For our youth, who were up here for Children's Sermon and the youth who were up here to sing with the A Cappella Choir, how easy it is for you to fall into that trap of favoritism, out at recess or Phy. Ed. If there is somebody who is able to help you, no matter what the activity is, you want to play favorites and say, *“I want this person on my team.”* But, if somebody is not able to help you out, you want to discard them and not include them on your team.

Or, for our high school youth, who are here today, (and there are many of you), how easy it is to fall into the temptation of playing favorites. How easy it is to be clicky in our relationships and say, *“You can join me in my group, because of who you are, but you can't, because you don't fit with our group.”*

All of us can fall into that trap of playing favorites, or to judging people by their mere appearances. The same thing happened to me, just a couple of weeks ago. It is not uncommon for somebody to come to the front door, here at Holy Cross and to ring the bell and ask for money. A couple of weeks ago, somebody did just that. He rang the doorbell. I came out of my office and I saw somebody standing at the front door, wearing a Chicago Bear's football jersey (Lance Briggs, number 55 to be specific). Immediately, in my mind I thought, *“How much is he going to ask for? And what is he in need of?”*

When I opened the door, he said, “I am a representative from Olan Mills. I am here to take pictures.”

I brought him downstairs and showed him where to set things up. Later, that evening I saw him, again. He was wearing a nice shirt and tie. My thought of him changed, from thinking, “*Here is a man who wanted money*” to “*Here is someone who is taking our pictures.*” That man was here to serve us by taking our pictures. Jesus says, “*Stop judging by mere appearances*”. Jesus also said on the Sermon on the Mount,

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”**

Imagine if God played favorites. Imagine if He did! I am so thankful that He doesn't. Scripture is very clear that God does not show favoritism. Rather, when He sent His Son, He sent Him for all.

“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that though He was rich,
yet for your sakes He became poor,
so that you, through His poverty, might become rich.”

Let us keep the whole law of God, first of all, by not showing favoritism.

Another thing that James brings out in our text for today,

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

James talks about this as being the royal law. We might talk about this today as being the golden rule,

“Do unto others
as you would have them do unto you.”

Certainly, this is talking about the Second Table of the law, commandments four through ten. **We are to love our neighbors.**

- That means honoring our parents.
- It means being a friend to those who are in need.
- It means husbands and wives should love and honor each other.

•It means that we should help each other out, when we are in need. But, some may say that playing favorites, or showing favoritism, is really an insignificant infraction of God's Will. It is really very minor compared to some of the other major sins that we can commit. Recently, I was visiting with a shut in, who told me that a friend of hers didn't think that she sinned, anymore. So, as we were talking about the sins that we commit, sins of thought, word, and deed, I said, "While it may be true that we can maybe try to prevent the sins that we commit with our mouths, and try not to commit the sins that we commit with our actions, our thoughts are always sinful." She said, "You are right. Even when we think that we are not sinning, we are."

So James tells us today,

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

If you cut a ring in one place, the whole ring is broken. If you break a vase, and there is just one crack in that vase, the whole vase is destroyed. If we break any one point of God's Law, James reminds us that we have broken all of it, whether it is showing favoritism, telling a white lie, being angry with our neighbor, adultery, theft, or gossip.

The last thing today that James tells us in keeping the whole law today is to **demonstrate our faith in the way that we live out our Christian lives**. This has been a controversial section of scripture, because some people, have looked at this passage and taken it out of context. They have said, "*James says you can get to Heaven by living a life of good works.*" Is that what James is saying? The answer is "NO".

Other people say, "*As you look at this section of scripture, James is contradicting what the Apostle Paul says about salvation.*" Is James contradicting the Apostle Paul? Again, the answer is "NO". Here is

what the Apostle Paul says about salvation. In Ephesians, chapter two, verses 8 – 10.

“For it is by grace you have been saved,
through faith.

It is not of yourselves.

It is a gift of God,
not by works,

so that no one can boast.

For we are God's workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus to do good works,

which God has prepared in advance for us to do.”

We are saved by God's grace, through our faith in Jesus, as our Savior. What James is telling us to do is that now that we have been saved, now that God's grace has come to us, we can't help but live a life of good to God and to others. Our good works can only flow forth, from faith. Our faith can't help but want to do good to others. That is what Luther said, as he looked at this section of scripture, tying in our faith and our good works. It is a wonderful little quote, he says. “Oh it is a living, active, energetic, mighty thing, this faith, so that it is impossible that it should not work what is good, without intermission. It does not even ask whether good works are to be done. But, before one asks, it has done them and is ever doing them. But he who does not do such good works is a man without a faith, is fumbling and looking about him for faith and good works, and knows neither the one nor the other, yet chatters and babbles many words about both.”

Our text for today has been just about all law. Almost everything that James tells us today is almost all law. But, there are eight words that I want to focus our attention on for these last few minutes. It is the very first line of our scripture reading, our sermon text for today. Here is what James says, “as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” He was addressing believers.

Dear fellow redeemed, I am addressing you as believers, today too - believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. It was Jesus, our Savior, who kept the whole law. Everything I talked about today, Jesus has done perfectly. He never played favorites. He always loved His neighbor, as Himself. And, He always demonstrated His faith. As we gather together for worship, there is always a golden thread that ties in the three scripture readings for the today. In the Old Testament Lesson, we saw a prophecy given, how the Messiah would live a perfect life and suffer. In the Gospel Lesson, we see Jesus resolutely setting out for Jerusalem and the cross to do that. Jesus has kept the whole law in your place. And when Jesus lived His perfect life and took that life to the cross for you, He made full and complete payment for all of your sins. Your sins are forgiven. The gift of everlasting life in Heaven is yours.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today as we have heard James telling us to keep the whole law, let us not only put our faith in God today, let us also demonstrate our faith in Jesus.

Amen