

James 2:1-10, 14-18

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

No Partiality

The Word of the Lord from James 2: "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

God shows no partiality. Throughout the gospels, Jesus heals Jews and Gentiles. He heals beggars and those in powerful households. He has come to redeem *the world* from sin, not just *some* of the world. Thus He bears the sins and infirmities of all to the cross, and dies for all.

God shows no partiality. He makes rain fall upon the just and the unjust; and gives daily bread to all, also to all the wicked. He has placed all under His Law, so that all are condemned for their sin. He has also sent His Son to redeem those under the Law, that whoever believes in Him might not perish, but have eternal life. There is no partiality in God, and this is a comforting truth: Jesus has died for all, so Jesus has died for you. There is no way that He hasn't died for you.

Partiality is the work of man, not God. As our epistle notes, partiality favors the wealthy over the poor. It also favors the strong over the weak, the powerful over the helpless, the smart over the slow, the fun-loving over the grieving and the beautiful over the plain.

There are different reasons for showing partiality, and different sins that lead to this one. Part of this is selfishness: by nature, we play for our own advantage. We want to be around people who can give us help. Wealthy people can give a donation or float a loan, but the poor have nothing to lend. Healthy people can help, but the unhealthy need to *be* helped. The fun-loving can lift you up, but the grieving can bring you down. The beautiful people can get you into the right groups, while the less popular can only invite you to life on the outside looking in. The powerful can get things done, but the helpless need you to do things for them. In a nutshell, the weak, the helpless, the slow, the grieving, the sick and the plain are the ones who are in need of your service, your help, your friendship. But because of sin, you'll be far more inclined to cater to those who can help you, not those whom you can help.

So selfishness might be one reason to show partiality. Fear might be another. People who have money and power can do you harm if you don't fawn. Therefore, fearful for self-preservation, it's easier to support the one in power, even when he or she is wrong. You'll be tempted to support the boss's ethics, even when they're awful, because he's the one who can fire you. This fear can take on another whole dimension: to be with those who are poor and weak and sick is to remind you of what you are and aren't, what you have and don't have, how bad things could be; so you're tempted to be partial to those who don't remind you of your own failures and mortality.

This partiality extends to partiality for sin: you'll be more tolerant of some sins than others. Some are more acceptable to society, and to your own desires. People make distinctions between "little" sins and "big" sins, "horrible" sins and "necessary" sins – whatever those may be. Now, it is true that different sins have different consequences in this world: Jesus declares that sinful anger is akin to murder in God's eyes; but all the same, if you're mad at me, I'd rather have you scream at me than run me down with your car. Different sins have different consequences in this world – but our text makes clear that there are no such distinctions on Judgment Day, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point *has become accountable for all of it...*" (James 2:10).

One more thing: faith without works is partiality. I trust that we are all agreed that good works follow faith. By the grace Jesus gives you, He sets you free from sin. He sets you free to do good works. If you're not doing the good works He's set you free to do, you're doing bad works. You're sinning again, attacking the faith God has given. You're abandoning the freedom that Jesus died to give you.

As I said, faith without works is showing partiality: and let us consider this carefully. St. James says in our text, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:8-9). Love is the fulfillment of God's Law. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will help your neighbor – and your neighbor is the one who is *in need*, not the one who can do the most in return. If you show partiality and fail to help those in need, then you are not fulfilling the Law. You're not loving your neighbor as God commands. Thus James goes on, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to him, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

To put it another way, faith without works and partiality are best friends. Partiality and dead faith go together.

The consequences of this sin might be more than you imagine. It is true that the one who goes away is still poorly clothed and lacking in daily food. Thus the 5th commandment is broken, because no one has helped and befriended this one in their bodily need. But the sin goes far deeper than that.

When the body of Christ shows partiality, it communicates the lie that Christ Himself shows partiality. It preaches the false doctrine that Jesus has different rules for those who are beautiful, rich, powerful and gifted. It teaches that He loves and favors them more than others. Now, we've already noted that that's how the world operates anyways; and, in fact, every other religion teaches that God loves some more than others, depending on their works and things. When Christians show partiality and thus imply that Jesus shows partiality, they tell the world that Jesus is just one more god like all the others – not the Son of God who died for all the sins of all the world.

Worse yet, when you show partiality, you train yourself to reject the Gospel. Remember, partiality favors the healthy, prosperous, popular and strong. You would think those adjectives go quite well with God. However, how does He save you? By His death on the cross. In other words, you have eternal life because you look at Jesus when He is anything but healthy, prosperous, popular or strong. You look at Him when He's beaten, bloodied, helpless, rejected and dead; and you say, "Truly You are the Son of God and My Savior, and I'm putting my trust in You." If you're fine with showing partiality against the weak of this world, you are training yourself to be partial against a Savior who becomes weak to die for you. Your love and care for those in trouble springs from the Savior who was troubled unto death to save you.

So examine yourselves. Partiality comes naturally enough. Consider whom you have encountered and whom you have avoided, those who you treat well and those who you would rather go away. Sometimes, there is good reason to avoid people and opportunities; but often, there is not. It's very likely that you can name some recent instances in which you've shown partiality. Such sin is an offense to your neighbor in need and to God whose name you've slandered. The one who is guilty of partiality is guilty of the whole law and deserves God's judgment and condemnation. That is what God's law declares, and I would bid you to take it seriously and repent.

This is what God's Gospel declares: Jesus still shows no partiality. He doesn't play favorites. He hasn't died for some of your sins but not for others. He isn't partial only to sinners who show no partiality. Your demonstrations of partiality demonstrate your need for Him and His grace; and as surely as He removed blindness and silence from eyes and ears, so He removes your sin from you.

Consider your Baptism, where the Lord adopted you as His own child, made you part of the body of Christ. He didn't say, "I baptize you as long as you make good in life and are nice to others." He said, "I baptize you." There were no strings attached. You're His child. Children don't always obey, but the Lord doesn't throw you out of the family: He gives you forgiveness, grace upon grace. Therefore, you don't wake up and say, "I'm probably baptized" or "mostly forgiven." You can say, "I'm baptized. Jesus shows no partiality, and thus I am sure that He has made me His own."

The Absolution, public or private, runs the same way. It does not say, "I forgive you some of your sins, but you're going to have to do better before I forgive the rest." It doesn't say, "If your DNA reveals this heritage or that, then you're completely forgiven or somewhat forgiven." It says, "I forgive you all of your sins." Jesus shows no partiality between people or sins. He died for all people, to take all sin away.

So also the Supper: the Lord shows no partiality there, either. He offers His Word to all, that all might be prepared through instruction and worthy by His grace. He gives His body and blood to all, and those who receive Him worthily are forgiven for their sin. Not just some sin, but all sin.

The Lord shows no partiality. Therefore, He shows no partiality towards you. As He went to Tyre and Sidon, the region of the Decapolis and other places full of sinners, so He comes to Orchard and Cassia, to sinners here. And He says, "I show no partiality, and I have sought you out to make you Mine and keep you Mine. For I tell you again this day that you are forgiven for all of your sins."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen