

## Sincere Faith:

*An Exposition of the Book of James*

**Sermon Eight:** Sincere Obedience [*James 2:10-13*]

July 18, 2021

**Opening ILL:** “Little White Lies and Big Fat Sins!” We are all so good at justifying our own sin. As I mentioned last week, we long to feel good about ourselves. This is all-but-universal. Even people who wrestle with a low opinion of themselves long to be freed from that opinion. In order to defend our lofty ideas about ourselves, we find ourselves doing 2 things: minimizing our faults and maximizing the faults of others.

### I. Introduction:

#### A. What was our focus last week?

1. We talked about how discrimination and discipleship are mutually exclusive.
2. In other words: We are not to try to hold a sincere faith, while at the same time showing partiality.

#### B. What will we talk about today?

1. We must be careful to be sincere in our battle against our own sin.
2. What are your favorite excuses for sin?
  - a. My sin is just a little sin.
  - b. Any sin is all sin, so don't judge me.
  - c. My good outweighs my bad.
  - d. My sin is only natural.

**Quote:** “When the will of Christ is understood and known, we have no liberty of choice, but we must be governed by it, even if the duty commanded it is very difficult, or the sin forbidden very tempting.” John Flavel.

### II. It's All or Nothing! (*James 2:10-11*)

#### A. Remember where we've been. (*James 2:9*)

1. If we show partiality, we are convicted by the law as transgressors.
  - a. Notice that it says that the law, not a single command, but the whole law convicts us when we try to hold our faith in the glorious Lord with a spirit of favoritism.

#### B. It's all or nothing—What does this mean?

1. It only takes one sin to be a sinner.
  - a. A million acts of obedience cannot erase one act of disobedience.
    - i. **Quote:** “James is quite aware that no one can completely keep every commandment in the whole law...but he does not allow anyone to pretend that it suffices to keep only most of the law.”<sup>1</sup>
  - b. When we are guilty, we are transgressors of the law as a whole, not just one part of it.

**Quote:** RWP “This is law. To be a law-breaker one does not have to violate all the laws, but he must keep all the law (ὅλον τὸν νόμον) to be a law-abiding citizen, even laws that one does not like.”

2. The whole law cries out against the sinner, not just individual commands.
  - a. **Quote:** “To violate the law at any one point is not to violate one command only; it is to violate the will of God and to contradict the character of God.”<sup>2</sup>

#### C. Why is this the case?

1. Because disobedience is punished by God.
2. Because obedience and disobedience are personal to God.
  - a. Our disobedience is more than a violation of a written code. It is a personal offense to our Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> McCartney, “James” BECNT, page 148

<sup>2</sup> Burdick, EBC, page 180

**ILL:** If your parents leave the kids alone one evening so that they can go out to dinner just the two of them, and they give only two commands: 1. Don't spill anything on the couch and 2. Don't kill each other. Now, if one of the children breaks one of these commands, and another child breaks the other command, there is a sense in which both are the same and both are different. They are the same in that they are both direct acts of defiance to the parents who gave them the 2 rules, but they are different in extent. One is worse than the other, but at the heart, both offenses are the same: they are both rebellious, heartless and disobedient violations of the loving rules given to them by the law-giver.

Transition into the next point:

#### **D. Guilty of all-What is the point that James is making?**

1. Every sin is NOT the same in terms of extent.
  - a. The point of view that argues that a minor sin and a major sin are equally bad misunderstands Jesus's teaching in Matthew 5:27-28
    - i. **Matthew 5:27-28** You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY';<sup>28</sup>but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
  - b. That is to say that this passage doesn't say every sin is equally bad.

**Point:** I hear this faulty interpretation quite a bit. People say, "I haven't killed anybody, but I have driven 55 in a 45-mph zone, and sin is sin, so I am just as bad as a murderer." This just doesn't work. Actually, I think when people say this, they may be simply faking humility. Does anyone really think that a minor speeding violation is as bad as child abuse?" No. That logic only seems to work for you if you are excusing big sins.

**Quote:** "Nevertheless, it goes beyond what can be legitimately inferred from the text to argue that no sin is any worse than any other. All sins may separate us from God, but we would still prefer someone else to tell a "white lie" than to initiate a nuclear holocaust."<sup>3</sup>

- c. Evidence for why this view is impossible.
  - i. There are degrees of punishment, so some sins must be worse than others.
    - a) This is true in the law.
      - 1) **Deuteronomy 25:1-2**
      - 2) **Numbers 35:9-29** There are levels even in murder
    - b) This is true in Hell.
      - 1) **Matthew 10:15** Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.
2. To commit any sin is NOT to commit every sin.
  - a. There is some evidence that the idea that to disobey one command was to disobey every command was taught in Rabbinic Judaism.
  - b. This same idea was certainly taught in Stoic philosophy.
  - c. Why is it wrong?
    - i. Because the same arguments as presented above would apply here.
    - ii. Because it is nonsense.
    - iii. Because it is unjust.
3. Every sin is the same in terms of essence (or nature, or character).
  - a. Every sin is a disobedience to the law.
  - b. Every sin is an offense to the law-giver.
4. Conclusion
  - a. This passage is written NOT to excuse big sins.
  - b. This passage is written to expose little sins.
    - i. Sins like
      - a) Partiality

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<sup>3</sup> Boch/Kamell, "James" ZECNT, page 119

- b) Looking lustfully even though it is all in your imagination.
- c) Hating somebody even though you are nice to them on the outside.
- ii. What point is it making about “little sins”?
  - a) We cannot simply excuse our sins, because they are little.
  - b) We cannot simply excuse our sins, because they are not as bad as others’
  - c) We simply cannot excuse our sins at all!

### **III. You Get What You Give! (James 2:12-13)**

#### **A. Live in light of the judgement!**

1. What does this mean?
  - a. Speak a certain way.
  - b. Act a certain way.

#### **B. What does this look like?**

1. Sincere obedience is merciful.
2. Sincere obedience is humbling.

### **IV. It’s Now or Never! (Conclusions)**

#### **A. What sins are you excusing?**

1. Are you convinced that since you are “mostly” obedient, that you are ok?

**ILL:** “God better let me into Heaven, with all the good things that I have done.” What about the bad things?

2. Are you convinced that your sins are minor, but your obedience is major?

**Point:** Are you putting your hope in the idea that God might not have meant what He said about the little things?

#### **B. How do you hope to escape judgement?**

**Point:** If obedience is required, and you don’t have it, what are you going to do?

- a. **Romans 7:24** Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

### **Invitation**