

HOW TO TREAT PEOPLE RIGHT

Back in the late 1800s there was a well-dressed man who entered a church in the Netherlands took a seat near the front. A few minutes later a woman walked down the aisle, saw the stranger sitting in the place she always sat, and bluntly asked him to leave. He quietly got up and moved to a section at the back reserved for the poor. When the service was over, a friend of the woman asked her if she knew the man she had ordered out of her seat. "No," she replied. Her friend then informed her, "The man you ordered out of your seat was King Oscar of Sweden! He is here visiting the Queen."

Today we are continuing our series on the book of James. Sometimes the biggest problems we face in life are people problems. It means getting along with other people. Someone once wrote, "To dwell above with those you love, that will be a glory. But to dwell below, with those we know, that's another story." In chapter 2, James starts by talking about how to get along with people.

James 2:1-13 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 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," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen 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? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? 8 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!

The Greek word for favouritism is a compound word that means "to receive" and "to face". Together it literally means "to receive somebody's face" -- to judge someone at face value, solely on the basis of how they look. It means superficial judgement. What is favouritism? It is treating a person differently solely based on outward appearances. As people we do this all the time. There are many forms of discrimination;

Appearance

We discriminate often because of appearance. Beauty is so important in our society today. We judge people on their appearance, on how they look or how they dress.

Years ago, they did an experiment with some hitchhikers. They dressed them up in different ways. The dressier and more attractive the hitchhiker was, the more likely they were to be picked up. How do you judge people? Do you judge them immediately by how they look? Whether they are too dressed up or too dressed down?

I have the Gilda Radner philosophy of dress: "I make my fashion choices based on what doesn't itch." I like that. I too dress to be comfortable, not to impress.

Ancestry

We judge people according to their race, their nationality, their ethnic background. I heard about a black man who went to a church in the south but it was full of bigots and they wouldn't let him in. He went to the pastor and told him that was wrong. The pastor said, "You just need to pray about it." About three weeks later the pastor saw the man and asked, "Did you talk to the Lord about it?" The man said, "Yes, and God said, 'Don't worry, I've been trying to get in that church for 20 years and I still can't get in either.'"

Sometimes even within mono cultural settings it is not so much about race as it is about family connections. There was a Chicago bank that asked for a letter of recommendation on a young man from Boston being considered for employment. The Boston investment house could not say enough about the young man. As a Bostonian he has impeccable heritage. His father, was a Cabot; his mother was a Lowe. Further back their family was related to other of Boston's first families. His recommendation was given without hesitation. Several days later, the Chicago bank sent a note saying the information supplied was altogether inadequate. It read: "We are not contemplating using the young man for breeding purposes. Just for work." Neither is God a respecter of persons but accepts those from every walk of life.

Age

Often we judge people by their age. Either they are too young or too old. We come to conclusions solely based on age whether a person is out of date or immature.

The first time I ever preached a sermon was at First Baptist Church in Petrolia after my first year in seminary. I arrived early so that I could find a quiet place to go through my message before the service. As the time for the service grew closer, I noticed that there was a guy running around looking for something. Finally, he came up to me and said, "the speaker for this morning has not shown up yet!" I said, "Yes he has, I am speaking this morning." He looked at me and said, "Aren't you in the youth group?"

Achievement

Our society gushes over winners and forgets the losers. One minute you're a hero and the next minute you're a zero. Success and status are keywords. I'm bothered by the increasing celebrity consciousness even in Christianity. James says, "Don't do that. Don't ask for special treatment."

When we were in Kuwait there was a famous TV evangelist who came for a visit. They were promoting their world tour and thought Kuwait would be a nice name to add to the list. They flew in on their own private jet and entourage of security and managers. They stayed in one of the most expensive hotels in the country. They gave specific instructions that when this celebrity arrived that no one was to speak with them, they would enter through the back of the church through a private entrance when it was time to speak, and then leave immediately afterward without any interaction. What a circus it was.

In contrast, one day we received a call that worship leader Graham Kendrick would be in the area and would love to visit Kuwait. We as a church had been singing his songs for years and this was at the height of his popularity. We were concerned that it would be another circus, but he came with his worship team, flying economy. They stayed in the homes of people from the church. They paid their own way, they went out of their way to be helpful and they were such a blessing to everyone.

Affluence

This is a common distinction. We judge people by their wealth -- whether they're rich or poor -- their economic status. What attitude do you have toward people who make more money than you do? What attitude do you have toward people who make less money than you do? This is the area that James picks out of all the areas we can discriminate in. He talks about economic discrimination.

In this example that James gives, two visitors come to church one day. One appears to be very rich and one appears to be very poor. James does not criticise the way the people look, he criticizes the way others react towards them.

a. Favoritism is Unchristian

James 2:1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

If you want to be like Jesus, you can't play favorites. Faith and favoritism are incompatible.

Romans 2:11 For God does not show favoritism.

Jesus treated everybody with dignity. Peter had to learn this lesson before he went to Cornelius. God loves everybody. If there is one place in the world where there shouldn't be any kind of discrimination it ought to be the church. There is discrimination everywhere else in the world. But there ought to be one place no matter who you are or what your background is that you're welcome.

b. Favoritism is Unreasonable

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen 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?

Favouritism makes no sense. He is not saying that it is good to be poor and bad to be rich. He is not saying that only the poor will be saved. Everybody in this room is rich compared to the majority of the world. What he is saying is that it does not make any difference to God. Our salvation is not based on our savings account. Wealth in itself does not deserve any special treatment.

When we lived in Kuwait, we would have very wealthy people sitting next to, by our Canadian standards, very poor people. When I first went to Kuwait to visit after Naomi and I had left the ship I was told that two families from the church had invited me to stay in their home. The one couple were Canadians from Alberta. A nice couple, but seeing the way they dressed and the car they were driving I knew they did not have a lot of money so probably they would have a small place and I didn't want to intrude. Turns out I was completely wrong. He was working in Kuwait as the head of Kuwait Petroleum. His home was huge and looked out onto the old Kuwaiti palace. They had 3 or 4 bedrooms just sitting empty that I could have used. You would have never known that just meeting them.

Your value is not based on your valuables. Don't confuse your net worth with your self-worth. I wear the cloths I wear because they are comfortable, not to impress people. The watch I wear is a \$20 Casio watch I got from Walmart. It is the same kind of watch I have worn since I was in high school. Can I afford a better watch? Probably. But I don't wear a watch to impress people, I wear a watch that tells time. It doesn't matter where you buy your clothes or how big your house is or what you drive, you're welcome here.

c. Favoritism is Unloving

James 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

Why is it called the royal law? Because if we obeyed that one, we wouldn't need all of the rest.

Galatians 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

The Bible says that how we relate to other people shows how much we really love God. How I relate to you proves how much I love God. Favoritism is unloving.

So then, how should we as Christians treat others? In a survey of 8,600 people from congregations in 39 different denominations they measured their 'love quotient'. The institute reports growing churches are more loving to each other and to visitors than declining churches. Loving churches attract more people regardless of their theology, denomination or location. Most churches that are growing today have learned how to love. A church that loves people is a church that grows. It's love that reaches people.

You don't argue people into the kingdom of heaven. You love them into the kingdom of heaven. How do you do that? Three steps:

1. Accept everyone

Have you ever been in a church of spiritual snobs? We got it and you don't. Do you know why people have a hard time accepting others? They confuse acceptance with approval. There's a big difference between acceptance and approval. You can accept somebody without approving of his lifestyle. He may be doing something totally contrary to the word of God, but you can accept him as a person without approving of the sin he's involved in.

Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

The church is a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for saints. Some people go to church to close their eyes, others go to eye their clothes. If you're perfect, you don't belong here. I pray that we see ourselves as a church that is in process, for people who don't have it all together. It doesn't matter where you've been. It matters where you are now and if you know Jesus. If you want to grow up more and more like Him every day, you're welcome here. In the essentials we have unity. Jesus is Lord. The Bible is God's word. In the non-essentials we have liberty and, in all things, we have charity.

Acceptance is the key. Not that we seek to water down the gospel so that people will not be offended. We accept people while at the same time acknowledge that what the bible calls sin is sin.

Peter Cartwright, a 19th century circuit-riding Methodist preacher, was an uncompromising man when it came to his preaching. One Sunday morning when he was getting ready to preach, he was told that General Andrew Jackson was in the congregation. He was warned not to say anything out of line lest Jackson would be offended. When Cartwright stood to preach, he said, "I understand that Andrew Jackson is here. I have been requested to be careful in my remarks, so in order to preach as I am called to do, I must make this statement before I begin the sermon. Andrew Jackson will go to hell if he doesn't repent." The congregation was shocked and wondered how the General would respond.

After service, General Jackson shook hands with Peter Cartwright and said, "Sir, if I had a regiment of men like you, I could whip the world."

2. Appreciate everyone

Appreciate everybody. Find someone you can thank, and then tell them so. Some people are very affirming. Other people just seem to have no tact whatsoever. Have you ever met a person that just never seems to say a positive thing?

The Captain called the Sergeant in. "Sarge, I just got a telegram that Private Jones' mother died yesterday. Better go tell him and send him in to see me." So, the Sergeant calls for his morning formation and lines up all the troops. "Listen up, men," says the Sergeant. "Johnson, report to the mess hall for KP. Smith, report to Personnel to sign some papers. The rest of you men report to the Motor Pool for maintenance." "Oh, by the way, Jones, your mother died, report to the commander." Later that day the Captain called the Sergeant into his office. "Hey, Sarge, that was a pretty cold way to inform Jones his mother died. Couldn't you be a bit more tactful, next time?" "Yes, sir," answered the Sarge. A few months later, the Captain called the Sergeant in again with, "Sarge, I just got a telegram that Private McGrath's mother died. You'd better go tell him and send him in to see me. This time, be more tactful." So, the Sergeant calls for his morning formation. "Ok, men, fall in and listen up." "Everybody with a mother, take two steps forward." "Not so fast, McGrath!"

Don't be like that. Accept people. Appreciate people.

3. Affirm everyone

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Be an encourager not a complainer, not a condemner, a critical person, not a judger. You can encourage people just by smiling at them. The ministry of greeters in this church is crucial and vital. Give a welcome handshake, a smile.

What is God saying in James? The church that accepts, appreciates and affirms people is the church that God blesses. Absolutely nothing can stop the church that's filled with love. Nothing. It doesn't happen accidentally. It requires an all-out effort by each of us. Everybody needs to contribute to the atmosphere of the church. Everybody here contributes to the atmosphere of the church either negatively or positively. Would people come back to this church just because of you? Are you a greeter, a smiler?

Love draws outside people in. I want our church to have a reputation for love. I believe that God is just waiting for a church that will love people unconditionally. He can use that kind of church to spark a spiritual awakening. It would change the climate of this community for Christ. Nothing can stop a loving church.

Maybe you're a visitor. Maybe this is your first time. You are as welcome as a charter member of this church. It really doesn't matter what you wear or your economic status. It doesn't matter if you speak in tongues in your prayer closet. It doesn't matter whether you disagree with me in the interpretation of the Second Coming. You are welcome here. It doesn't matter if you're tall or short, thin or fat, young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, whatever. No matter who you are, or where you are from, or what you have done, everyone has something to contribute.

Charlotte Elliot was born in 1789 in England. In her early thirties, she suffered a serious illness that left her weak and depressed. She was an invalid and was confined to her home and unable to attend church services. One day a well-known preacher named Cesar Malan from Switzerland came to visit her. He asked her if she had peace with God. Charlotte was facing many inner struggles because of her illness and the fact that she felt useless confined to her bed, and she resented the question. She refused to talk with him any more that day, so Dr. Malan apologized and left. But his question haunted Charlotte. Was she at peace with God? A week later she called for Dr. Malan. To visit again. She told him that she wanted to get right with God but did not know how. She said she wanted to clean up her life and asked what she had to do in order to become a Christian. Melan answered, "Come just as you are." She gave her life to Christ that day.

Years later her brother was raising funds for a local Christian school. Charlotte wanted to help with the fundraiser, but felt useless. What could she do, confined to her bed. She fell into deep doubt and even felt that God had rejected her. As she pondered her situation, she remembered the words of Cesar Malan, that God loved her just the way she was. So, she decided to write a song for others who were in her situation. She picked up a pen and wrote;

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou biddest me come to Thee
O, Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Later, William Bradbury composed music for her lyrics and published the song in 1849. This hymn has been translated into many languages all over the world. Tens of thousands of people have committed their lives to Christ during the playing of this hymn. Billy Graham once wrote that he always used that song at his crusades because it presented "the strongest possible Biblical basis for the call of Christ." Hymn historian Kenneth Osbeck once wrote that Just As I Am had "touched more hearts and influenced more people for Christ than any other song ever written." As one Christian writer once said "The hymn is an amazing legacy for an invalid woman who suffered from depression and felt useless to God's service."