

Unbiased

James 2:1-13

Purpose of series: The purpose of this series is to assist you in taking off the limits of God's expression through you and in your life and His blessing on your life. The book of James reveals many practical duties and activities of Christian, that is not heeded will hinder God's expression through them and blessings on them, especially during difficult seasons of our life. This series will provide us with a practical view of how to live a life of spiritual impact and personal fullness in a difficult world under pressure.

Purpose of this message: It is important that we understand our true response to those around us today. In a cynical world it is easy to pick up the offenses, suspicions and fears that so contaminate the world in which we live. This is not a message on living fearless, but it is a message on the greatest enemy of fear...love. To illuminate a biased opinion, a favoritism, a respecter of persons is in retrospect saying no to Satan's attempt to devalue every person in the world, to minimize them as a suspicious, unworthy opponent that deserves Hell for eternity. Far too often we have been tricked into believing the worst in people and losing great opportunity for the miracle of Jesus Christ's great love. You and I are a key to this and James wants us to know just how important that is.

“My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.”

James 2:1

It's Not A Gift, It's A Command

It is important to understand that James is not talking to a few gifted people who have the gifting of service and hospitality. He is talking to everyone who has escaped the persecuted Jerusalem and are scattered throughout all the surrounding areas, possibly hundreds of miles away. His letter is to help them remain focused on how to live.

I love gifts tests. They help us discover who we are and what we do best. It is a great resource for the church, but it is not a means of excusing ourselves from the basics of Christianity. So, many people have put serving and caring for others on people who are gifted at it. But this is not the case with James, he is talking to every believer. Nothing crushes your flesh more than when it needs to submit to something you do not enjoy, do not do well and something that you have never done before. Basic Christianity are like the fundamentals in sports, you might have a great team but the minute you lose the fundamentals, you cannot win.

Your biggest problems and mine are people problems -- getting along with other people. James basically writes about how we should treat and minister to people. He gives us **the principle, the problem, and the application** in this passage.

I. The Principle

In the time that Jesus lived as well as James, the ancient world was constantly categorizing people because they were a Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, male or female, or whatever.

- A significant aspect of the work of Jesus was to break down these walls that

divided humanity, and to bring forth one new race of mankind in Him.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace...”

Ephesians 2:14-15

The unity and openness of the early church was a strange and new, and I might add, an uncomfortable way of thinking for the ancient world. Like James' letter, this concept of love and acceptance as an example of Christ had to be taught to the early church. And today we are still learning from it.

Every time James says, “*My brothers,*” there's no doubt that he is about to be very direct about something. He is just about to drive home an important point and the statements that follow it are pretty cut and dry, and in this instance he follows protocol, “*as believers...don't show favoritism.*” You can't.

James is talking about favoritism, discrimination, judgmentalism, prejudice, partiality, and insulting response to others. The New English Bible calls it “snobbery”. To be a snob is someone who intentionally ignores or avoids others by turning up their nose and looking else where. It gives off the expression, “I'm better than you.”

The Greek word is a compound word that means “to receive” and “to face”. It literally means “to receive somebody's face”- to receive somebody at face value, on the basis of how they look, superficial judgment. The roots of the word mean to lift up somebody's face, to raise the face of someone, to elevate them, to lift up their face. James is telling us, “Stop doing that, you can't continue to make superficial judgments.”

- The Good News version says, “**Never treat anybody in a different way according to their outward appearance.**” This is a common social disease.

There are some common ways we judge others and then how we follow through with behavior based upon that behavior. Here are some common areas of discrimination.

- **Appearance-** The first impression we get from others is based upon their appearance. But a first impression is a judgment and can commonly become discriminate. We live in a world that adores a beautiful and fashionable appearance. Even farmers have one. I remember one said, “You have to roll your sleeves up more often, you need to loosen up.” I was being profiled by a farmer. How we look absolutely sends a message to others, “I'm still sleepy,” “I mean business,” “I'm depressed,” “I'm happy!”

But in our society, beauty is everything. If you have the looks, the door seems to open for you. If you're plain, tough luck! We judge people on their appearance-how they look, how they dress. There was an experiment with hitch-hikers and they had them dress up in different ways. The dressier the hitchhiker was, the more likely he was to be picked up.

It is true that the way you dress most often displays the way you feel, and that often sends a signal if you seem approachable or not. How you're dressed definitely influences how you relate to people and how people will probably

relate back to you.

In my high school the common trend was bluejeans, blue T-shirt and untied tennis shoes. That was most common. The blue T-shirts were issued in our sports programs and they didn't care when you wore them. It was the norm, it's just how we looked.

Most of the guys would get their hair cut when they could which was seldom by a barber. That was the days of the huge fro. We didn't think anything about it...until we crossed town. We were looked at differently and to be honest, everyone looked different to us too. It seemed people feared that difference and we didn't know how to react. We didn't know we looked different but you could feel it, so eventually we took advantage of that fear because we just didn't know how to interrelate. We didn't know that a kind gesture or a polite statement would have changed the whole atmosphere. After a while you evolve into something, something that feels safe, something that helps you handle the differences, weather good or bad, you find your equilibrium in gaining some identity. To justify that identity you make many assumptions of everyone around you,

- they are rich,
- they never had to suffer,
- they have always had money,
- they hate us,
- they are judging us,
- they don't care,
- everything comes easy for them,
- they don't deserve that,
- they wouldn't make it a day in my world,
- they are selfish,
- they live on easy street

I had one teacher who had somehow crossed these social lines. She was a true believer. She had the best reputation of a teacher in my high school, not because she was easy, but because she was fair. I remember her asking me all about my beliefs, and in return she would drop hints that she was praying for me and others in my school.

My senior year came and we had an incredible football season. Our football banquet was coming up and my teacher asked me who I was taking. She then suggested I ask her daughter and handed me a picture of her. No way! This girl was from the other side of town. She would never consider that. And she was beautiful, there is no way she would go out with me. Her name was Katina. In the next few days I considered asking her out. Actually I called her three times and never talked to her. I wish I could say her Dad got on the phone and said that I needed to stay on my side of town, but he didn't. I called and hung up before it had a chance to ring. The next time I let it ring twice before I hung up. The third time I called, I hung up after she said "Hello."

I never did ask her to the football banquet and just a week or so later someone

took her out and shot her in the head, murdered a sixteen year old cheerleader. She was a wonderful person, full of life. My teacher was incredible, I could not think of anyone deserving life to go better for than her.

My high school was in shock and especially my class. The funeral was on a Friday and she was teaching on Monday. I'll never forget as class began, not one person spoke a word. Class had started and she got up from her desk, walked over to my desk and slammed her hand on my desk and said, "You will never know what it would have meant for Katina to go to the football banquet."

I tell this story for the purpose of driving home this point, it's not always the ones who are judging who is doing the damage, it may be those who are assuming they are being judged. You may be judging others assuming they are judging you!

- They don't really want me here.
- They don't think that I'm dressed up enough
- They don't think that I deserve to be her this morning
- They don't really like me

How do you judge people? Do you judge them immediately by how they look? If somebody has long hair and a beard do you walk up to them and say, "Jesus saves and shaves". My grandmother always has a fictitious scripture that she would always quote when I had a beard, "A man is to be cleanly shaven." Of course it was nowhere in the Bible, but she was positive it existed somewhere.

Do you judge them immediately? Even Christians get caught up in this dress for power, dress for success, dress to be cool. Our first banner of our churches purposes exemplifies this idea.

Serving- "Freely giving in the love of God."

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

Romans 12:10-11

Here at Cornerstone, we feel that Serving is best characterized by three things:

A. Unselfish acts.

B. Imparting value to others.

C. Going above and beyond others' expectations.

It's not a sin to make an observation, but we enter into sin when we decide that someone isn't worthy of value, of our love, of our time, or our efforts. And worst of all, we make decisions about who is worthy of salvation based on people's face value. We determine how important they are in the kingdom of God by their outer appearance.

- **Ancestry-** We judge people according to their race, their nationality, their ethnic background. I am ashamed of hearing my pastor in the south saying why black people were never welcome in our church.

- **Age-** You're too young or too old.
- **Ability-** Sometimes we are only focused on what the person can do for us and not who they are. It is easy to get in a mode of only focusing on what we need or like. When the person has what we need or like we give them better treatment, but when our needs change or the person no longer fits the bill it's possible that we discard them as quick as we found them. This has personally happened to me. In need of leaders of certain areas of ministry in our church I had been searching for key individuals but was soon challenged by the Holy Spirit to stop looking only for leaders because I was passing up "people" in the process. I was not as attentive, my interested level was lower and didn't remember near as much about the conversations.
- **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. We have our own superstars- mostly on TV. James says, "Don't do that. Don't ask for special treatment."
- **Affluence-** the most 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?

Affluence

Affluence is the area that James chooses to talk about here, look in verse 2-4:

"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?"

James 2:4

Look at all the discrimination going on, the wealthy man and the poor man.

Rich Man, Poor Man

Guy King calls this the "case of the nearsighted usher."

Here we have two total strangers. They get at the church at the same time. We know they are strangers because they didn't know where to sit. The first guy walks in and he is dripping with wealth. It says he has gold rings -- literally, in the Greek, "he is gold fingered". In New Testament times, you could rent rings to prove how wealthy you were. They wore them on every finger (except the middle) & usually more than one on each finger.

Political candidates even wore a brighter white by rubbing their garment w/chalk. They would cut jewels and sew them onto their clothes. And speaking of clothes, the normal toga of the Romans was white, as was the robe of the Jews. James doesn't criticize the guy for being wealthy; he criticizes the members for being partial to him. He doesn't say there's anything wrong with having the wealth. It says he has "fine clothes". In the Greek, it literally meant the Roman toga the politicians would wear when they were

running for reelection. This is Rich Goldfinger.

Then comes the guy who is poverty stricken. His name is Bum Poorboy. He is not much to look at. He has holes in his Levis and doesn't have his shoes on. He doesn't have any deodorant on which is obvious to everyone around him. His hair is unkempt. He looks really bad.

This is a poor man, a real poor man, *tokos* means he's so poor he has to beg. This is a beggar. He's at the lowest level of social strata. He is probably filthy, smelly, dirty, shabby, any of those terms. He probably sleeps in his clothes, he sweats in it, he works in it, he lives in it. And now he comes to church in it. Actually nobody stops him at the door and says go home and get a tie or you can't be here.

The usher has to make a decision. Where will he seat him? The usher takes the rich guy to the front row and seats him. "Take this nice place. We want everybody to know you're here. We want to take care of every one of your needs." Then he says to the bum, "You can stand over there in a corner or you can sit on the floor." Literally, in the Greek it's "under my footstool." It's the ultimate discrimination. He treats him with the least amount of respect.

II. The Problem

1. **Favoritism Is Un-Christlike**

Jesus doesn't play favorites and neither can we.

"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism."

James 2:1

The Old Testament Law spoke strongly against favoritism. In Leviticus we read,

'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.'

Leviticus 19:15

James challenges us with the incompatibility of faith residing beside favoritism, it's impossible. The word "favoritism" is used only four times in the Bible. Every other time it's referring to God and it says,

"There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons."

2 Chronicles 19:7

"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes."

Deuteronomy 10:17

"I also made you contemptible and base before all the people because you have not kept My ways but have been partial."

Malachi 2:9

"But in every nation he that fears Him and works righteousness is accepted with Him because God is no respecter of persons."

God is not respecter of persons, nor should we be.

James wants us to examine ourselves to see if we're for real. He wants us to examine ourselves to see if we're genuinely saved, redeemed, born again. If the life of God really beats in our heart then we will see people the way that God sees people.

Bill Hybels, (Willow Creek Community Church) was busted by one of the churches maintenance staff for parking in a "No Parking place". He said "I'm not the exception to church rules, nor am I the exception to sexual rules or financial rules or any of God's rules. As a leader, I am not an exception; I'm to be the example. According to Scripture, I am to live in such a way that I can say, "Follow me. Park where I park. Live as I live."

What is your reaction to the poor are you a respecter of persons? Would there be enough evidence to convict you for unselfish acts, for imparting value to others and going above and beyond others' expectation?

"If God so loved us, we ought to also to love one another. And if we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us."

I John 4:11

"God does not show favoritism."

Romans 2:11

When he was a student, the famous Indian leader, **Mahatma Gandhi**, considered becoming a Christian. He read the Gospels and was moved by them. It seemed to him that Christianity offered a solution to the caste system that plagued the people of India. One Sunday, he went to a local church. He had decided to see the pastor and ask for instruction on the way of salvation. But when he entered the church, which consisted of white people, the ushers refused to give him a seat. They told him to go and worship with his own people. He left and never went back "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu" (from "Our Daily Bread," [Feb., 1979]).

This story illustrates the sin of showing favoritism to the rich and despising the poor, but his words apply to all types of prejudice, whether it is based on economic status, race, or anything else. To favor some people and to disregard others based on outward factors is a terrible sin that plagued the early church in James' day. It has plagued the church in every generation, because it stems from pride, which is endemic to our fallen hearts.

Jesus was truly consistent in how He treated everybody. He valued people with great dignity. 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.

One of the saddest statements I've ever heard as a pastor was made by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He said America's most segregated major institution is the church.

“At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation,” King said in 1963. “This is tragic. Nobody of honesty can overlook this.”

What an honest review of our nation. And one of the challenges may not be that we all try to imitate each other to make each other feel “accepted,” but that we give the dignity needed that everyone is equal in God's eyes. That we were all made fearfully and wonderfully made. Valuing others is an incredible act of Christ's compassion and love.

Favoritism Is Un-Christlike

2. Favoritism Is Unreasonable

“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? 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? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?”

James 2:5-7

Team God

Imagine with me that God looks over a group of potential team players. Captain God and Captain world are choosing teams. God is team captain, picking those that will be on His team and the world is captain of the other team. God chooses only one kind of person according to this scripture, **those who are poor...in the eyes of the world.**

Oh, you have got to see this. Picture with me twenty young kids from all over the neighborhood who want to desperately play baseball. God gets first choice. The world captain is obviously frustrated because of the wait. But God looks over the field and He picks Frank. There are a few laughs and a sigh of relief from the World captain. He obviously thinks that captain God absolutely blew it because Frank was the number one person he would not pick.

It's important to see here that the reason that God has employed you into His Kingdom work was not because He could really use you because of the hidden talents you have. It's because you looked poor to the world. You showed no qualities that were attractive there. But God chose you, not out of pity, but out of spite to the world. He picks you and under His breath He says, **“Just watch what I will do with this guy, the World team will not see what hit them.”** **Here are two things James says will happen to those He chooses:**

- 1. Rich in Faith-** God wants to put in all of us a can do attitude. To be rich in faith is to have an absolute confidence that God can do great things and use us in the process. That is rich in faith.
- 2. Inherit The Kingdom of God-** In other words, God wants you to be a conduit of His will here on this earth. Can you imagine the power of God

that wants to work through you?

Paul's Three Questions Concerning Three Wrongs

James is saying that it's illogical to look at the wealth of others and treat them differently. It simply doesn't make sense. **He's not saying that it's good to be poor and bad to be rich. He's not saying that only the poor will be saved. Everybody in this room is rich compared to the majority of the world. But obviously, James has observed that there was a strange, unhealthy attraction toward the rich. James asks three questions describing the three common offenses against them:**

1. **The rich were exploiting them-** (oppressing or dominating) them. This Greek word/verb *katadynasteuo*, occurs only one other time in the New Testament. His point was that if you show favoritism toward the rich it is the same as joining sides with those who constantly cause oppression.
2. **The rich were dragging them into court-** The exploitation of the poor is being carried out through formal legal action against them.
3. **The rich are blaspheming the name of Christ-** There was constant religious persecution toward those who bear the name of Christ. This is implied in the concluding words of 2:7, where the rich are said to be blaspheming the name that, literally translated, "has been called upon you." The modifier for name is stronger than *agathos* "good"; it is *kalos* "noble, beautiful, excellent."

Aren't you glad that it doesn't make any difference to God where you were born. Aren't you glad God doesn't check your wallet before He saves you? Aren't you glad your salvation isn't based on your savings account? Those who have wealth does not deserve any special treatment but should offer special treatment to all. **It is so important that you don't confuse your net worth with your self-worth.**

I'm not real concerned with what I drive as long as it helps on gas and it gets me where I'm going. I probably could get something nicer but all I want is transportation...not an image. I don't wear a watch to impress people, I wear a watch to tell the time. **My net worth and my self-worth have nothing to do with each other. I don't get my strokes by impressing you by wearing certain kinds of clothes or driving a certain kind of car. It doesn't matter where you buy your clothes or what you drive, you're welcome here.**

James is telling us that it's illogical and unreasonable. God chooses the poor. He doesn't expect them to be wealthy in order to be saved. The body of Jesus Christ is going to be made up of mostly common and a few uncommon people.

"Is it not the rich exploiting you." **In New Testament times it was the Roman nobility who were feeding the Christians to the lions. It was the upper crust (a bunch of crumbs held together by their own dough) that were persecuting the Christians, judging the Christians, insulting the Christians, throwing the Christians to the lions. James says, "Why are you worried about impressing them. They're certainly not worried about**

impressing you. They're doing the opposite."

Do you know why we like to kiss up to people who are affluent? Why we like to cater to and get close to people who are celebrities? Because we hope they'll do something for us. You don't have to know the key men if you know the Man who holds the keys. He has a way of opening and closing doors regardless of your network or your contacts. James says, "Don't show favoritism. It's unchristian, and unreasonable. It's illogical, it doesn't make sense."

**Favoritism Is Un-Christlike
Favoritism Is Unreasonable**

3. **Favoritism Is Unloving.** That's why you shouldn't do it.

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

James 2:8

Why is it called the royal law? **Because if we obeyed that one we wouldn't need all of the rest.** "Love your neighbor as yourself."

"All the law is summed up in one sentence, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Galatians 5:14

If I play favorites I'm being unloving. Jesus said the greatest commandment in the Law is,

"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 22:37-40

So, if you love God and love people, then you are fulfilling the requirements of the Law. And perfect love does not show partiality. If we are discriminating against people for whatever reason, we are not loving as Christ loved. If that is the case, we are sinning, for we are falling short of God's standard, breaking the two greatest commandments of the Law. And James is going on to show us just how serious it is to violate the Law of God.

"Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen"

I John 4:20

We don't know how to love unconditionally. All we really know what to do is how to show favoritism. We are good at it. We are accustomed to it.

"But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers."

James 2:9

How many laws do you have to break to be a lawbreaker? One. How many crimes do you have to commit to become a criminal? One. How many links do you have to break to break a chain? One. James is saying that people think favoritism is such a small sin. But, he says, if you break God's rule, you break God's rule. Be careful it's serious business.

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 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."
James 2:10-11

Here James is illustrating his point about being unloving. Many people read this and only see legalism, how can I possibly live for God, I blow one simple thing and it's all over. This is not the case. This is not a simple situation, to show partiality is no simple little sin, it is huge, it is the same as one of the ten commandments. James is not talking about how perfect we have to live, he is talking about how significant it is to recognize this a sin. It is sin in God's eyes. It is unloving and it does not represent your God!

"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!"
James 2:12-13

Love treats people with mercy. Love gives people what they need, not what they deserve. James is probably thinking about his half-brother Jesus who said in the Sermon on the Mount, **"Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."** That's the problem. **It's unchristian, it's unreasonable, it's unloving to show favoritism -- to be a snob.** How do you treat people?

III. The Prescription

So, how do we have a loving church? There was an article in the paper that said, "A loving connection in church growth. More people are drawn to caring facilities scholarly studies says." It's talking about how the **churches that love grow.** "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.**" They surveyed them and gave them a quotient of 1 to 100. **Of the 12 denominations scoring below 65 all of them except 2 were declining. Of the 13 denominations scoring above 65 all of them were growing in the past 10 years. Most churches that are growing today have learned how to love. A church that loves people is a church that grows.**

Typically, in analyzing reasons for growth in a church the focus in the past has been on such factors as **pastoral leadership, attractiveness of facilities, location, liberal or conservative theology, evangelical fervor.** But there is increasing evidence that none of these influences a church's growth or decline as significantly as how much

love and acceptance people experience when they attend." 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 we do that? Three steps:

1. **Accept Everybody.**

Have you ever been in a church of spiritual snobs? Here's 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.

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

Romans 15:7

I have a statement that I have made several times and will continue to do so. Many churches function on these terms, "If you believe right and behave right we will let you belong." But the true statement that I believe should set the course of our church is, "You belong here, we will help you learn what to believe and we know that will affect the way you behave."

Here at Cornerstone Church, we are trying to cultivate an attitude of acceptance. That this would be a safe place for those who do not know Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior to walk in and rest. It is a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for the saints! Sunday morning is not a day to parade your best clothes, it is a day to be adored with His covering of grace. If you are perfect, you should probably go somewhere else to church. This is a place where people are learning about Jesus, failing at times but getting closer each and every day. We've got about ever denomination, religion and cult represented in our church.

See, it doesn't matter where you've been. It matters where you are now and if you know Jesus and where you are headed for eternity. 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 love.** Acceptance is the key.

Some of you are not going to like Heaven because it's not exclusive enough. If we can't learn to get along together here on the earth, what makes us think we'll get along together in heaven? Accept everybody.

2. **Appreciate everybody.**

This goes a little bit further than acceptance.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Philippians 2:3-4

Appreciate everybody. Find something you can like, not just accept. Tell them so. With some people this may require a little creativity. You may have to look a little while. Maybe you just need to value them for their uniqueness. **God places “value” on the man whom the world says is “valueless”!**

3. Affirm everybody.

Give everybody a lift whenever you can.

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

I Thessalonians 5:11

When people stumble, don't criticize, sympathize. Be an encourager not a complainer, not a condemner, a critical person, not a judge. You can encourage people just by smiling at them. The ministry of greeters in this church is crucial and vital. It's not uncommon to have several new visitors in our church on a weekly basis. You only have one chance to make a first impression. I would like to cover this campus with 15 to 20 people every Sunday who love the Lord and who show it in their faces. 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?

Together we need to make a commitment that this church will receive people unconditionally. We don't expect people to act like believers until they are believers. 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 in this city and surrounding area that all the forces of hell couldn't stop. 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 our guest in this church. It really doesn't matter what you wear or your economic status or whether you've been once married, never married, or married ten times. 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 what color or race you are. Acceptance.

It was said of the New Testament church, "See how they love one another." "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples that you love each other." You accept, affirm, appreciate. Jesus Christ breaks down all barriers and the ground

is level at the foot of the cross. We are all equal in God's eyes. God wants you to know Him.

"For now we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. We are no longer Jew or Greek or slave or freemen or even men or women."

Galatians 3:26-27

We're all the same. There is no distinction in the body of Christ. We are Christians. We are one in Christ Jesus."

Conclusion:

"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

Mercy triumphs over judgment!"

James 2:12-13

As we heard Jesus say already, love is the fulfillment of the Law. Love is the perfect law of liberty. Jesus said that our actions will all be judged. When your Christian life is reviewed, will it show a person that loved others? Will it show a person that showed no partiality? Will it show a person who was always merciful?

In Matthew 20:30-34, Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho and a huge crowd followed them. Two blind men were sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, and they cried out, saying,

"Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

And the multitude sternly told them to be quiet; but they cried out all the more, saying, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Lord, {we want} our eyes to be opened." And Jesus was moved with compassion, He was not put out by their need. Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

When the blind men cried out for mercy, they received two responses: the crowd sternly told them to keep their mouths shut. But Jesus reached out mercifully. Which response would I, you, we, have given? Mercy triumphs over judgment.

"If I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

1 Corinthians 13:2