

HOW TO TREAT PEOPLE RIGHT
Developing a Faith That Works - Part 6 of 15
James 2:1-13
Rick Warren

James 2:1-13

"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right," (vs. 8)

I. THE PRINCIPLE: _____ (vs. 1)

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

DEF: "Favoritism"

Areas of Discrimination

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Illustration (vs. 2-4)

II. THE PROBLEM

1. FAVORITISM IS _____ (vs. 1)

"For God does not show favoritism." Rom. 2:11

Acts 10:34, Eph. 6:9, Col. 3:25

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Sam. 16:7

2. FAVORITISM IS _____ (vs. 5-7)

"... Has not God chosen those who are poor ... to be rich in faith ... and inherit the kingdom ...?"

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"Is it not the rich who are exploiting you ...?"

3. FAVORITISM IS _____ (vs. 8-9)

"Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" 1 John 4:20

The seriousness of it (vs. 10-13)

III. THE PRESCRIPTION: HOW TO TREAT PEOPLE RIGHT
(And How To Have A Loving Church)

1. _____ Rom. 15:7
"Accept one another just as Christ accepted you ..."

2. _____ Phil. 2:3-5
"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others."

3. _____ 1 Thess. 5:11
"Encourage one another and build each other up ..."

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I want us to look at what James has to say about "How to Treat People Right." Your biggest problems and mine are people problems -- getting along with other people. "To dwell above with those you love, that will be a glory. But to dwell below, with those we know, that's another story." James talks about "How do you get along with people? He gives us the principle, the problem, and the application in this passage.

v. 1 *"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism."* Whenever James starts a sentence "my brothers" he's getting ready to nail you. Count on it! He's talking about prejudice, partiality, favoritism. The New English Bible calls it "snobbery". Don't be a snob. A snob is somebody whose nose turns up when their eyes look down, somebody who always thinks they're better than everybody else. 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 judgement. James says, "Don't do that. Don't accept people just on superficial judgements." The Good News says, *"Never treat anybody in a different way according to their outward appearance."* It's a common social disease.

This morning, in order to deal with it, we need to look at some common areas of discrimination.

Appearance -- We discriminate often because of appearance. Beauty is everything in our world. If you're a cute kid you've got it made. If you're plain, tough luck! We judge people on their appearance -- how they look, how they dress. I heard about an experiment with some hitchhikers. They dressed them up in different ways. The dressier the hitchhiker was, the more likely he was to be picked up. How you're dressed definitely influences how you relate to people.

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". Do you judge them immediately? Even Christians get caught up in this dress for power, dress for success, dress to be cool. We're so concerned with what's in and what's out, what's hot and what's not. I have the Gilda Radner philosophy of dress: "I make my fashion choices based on what doesn't itch." That's why I don't wear a coat on Sunday morning -- it's just more comfortable. I dress to be comfortable.

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 and was trying to get in. It was full of bigots and they wouldn't let him in. He went to the pastor and told him. The pastor said, "You just need to pray about it." About three weeks later the pastor saw him 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 20 years and I still can't get in.'"

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Age -- You're too young or too old.

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?

This is the area that James picks out of all the areas we can discriminate in. He talks about economic distinction. v. 2 *"Suppose a man comes to your meeting wearing gold rings 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 over there' or 'Sit on the floor at my feet', have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"* Guy King calls this the "case of the nearsighted usher."

Two guys are strangers. They arrive 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. Everybody knows he doesn't fit because in the New Testament times all of the Christians were poor. Most of them were slaves. 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 would cut jewels and sew them onto their clothes. Real gaudy. 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 povertystricken. This is Bum Poorboy. He is destitute and shabby. He has holes in his Levis and doesn't have his shoes on. He doesn't have any deodorant so he has B.O. and his hair is unkempt. He looks bad. 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 putdown. He treats him carelessly.

James says there are three problems with favoritism.

1. Favoritism is unchristian. If you want to be like Jesus you can't play favorites. *"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism."* Faith and favoritism are incompatible -- we're a family. This word "favoritism" is used only four times in the Bible. Every other time it's referring to God and it says, "God does not play favorites." Romans 2:11 *"God does not*

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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.

2. Favoritism is unreasonable. In v. 5-7 he says it's illogical, it doesn't make sense. "In the first place," he says, "God has chosen the poor." *"Has not God chosen the poor to be rich in faith and inherit the kingdom?"* 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. It doesn't make any difference to God. 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? Wealth in itself does not deserve any special treatment. Maybe the person got it dishonestly. Your value is not based on your valuables. Don't confuse your net worth with your self-worth. Big difference. I drive a 1974 Buick with a rusty hood. I could afford a better car but I happen to believe you drive cars for transportation, not for status. I have a \$4 watch. It tells me the same time it tells you on your Rolex. I don't wear a watch to impress people, I wear a watch that tells time. I could afford a lot of neat things, but that's not my priority. 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.

"It's illogical," he says. Don't confuse where you get your self-worth from. God chooses the poor. He doesn't expect them to be wealthy in order to be saved. "On top of this," he says, "the rich could care less about you". Why worry about catering to them. *"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."

Then he gives his primary reason in v. 8. 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're doing right."* 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."* Galatians 5:14 *"All the law is summed up in one sentence, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" If I play favorites I'm being unloving.*

The Bible says that how we relate to other people shows how much we really love God. I John 4:20 *"If a man says he loves God and hates his brother he's lying. How can you love God whom you*

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haven't seen if you don't love your brother whom you have seen?" How I relate to you proves how much I love God. Favoritism is unloving.

Few of us know how to love unconditionally. Most of us are like this poem:

Paul's girl is rich and haughty
My girl is poor as clay
Paul's girl is young and pretty
Mine looks like a bale of hay.
Paul's girl is smart and clever
My girl is dumb but good
Would I trade my girl for Paul's?
You bet your life I would!

We don't know how to love unconditionally. All we know is how to show favoritism.

v. 9 *"If you show favoritism you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."* 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. Have you ever been in a china shop that has the sign "You break it, you've bought it." They don't care if it's broken in one place or into a thousand pieces, if you broke it you bought it.

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.

v. 11 *"For who said, 'Do not commit adultery' also said 'Do not murder'. If you don't commit adultery but you do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker."* What is he saying? He's illustrating his point about being unloving. If I come to your house and say, "I really respect you a whole lot. The way I'm going to prove how much I love you is I'm not going to commit adultery with your wife. However, if you tick me off I reserve the right to murder you." Are you going to thank me for that? Will you appreciate my love? How absurd! It's ridiculous! "I don't drink, smoke, cuss, chew or run around with girls that do. What does God care if I'm partial to certain kinds of people?" God says it's all the same! It's all important.

v. 12 *"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom because judgement without mercy will not be shown to anyone who has been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement."* 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?

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III. THE PRESCRIPTION: HOW TO TREAT PEOPLE RIGHT

How do you 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." The number one denomination -- the most loving denomination, was the Southern Baptist Convention "the largest Protestant denomination scoring 74, the highest love quotient, with a growth rate of 16% a year."

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 everybody.

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.

"Accept one another just as Christ accepted you." Romans 15:7. That's a start -- acceptance. At Saddleback we are trying to cultivate an attitude of acceptance. The church is a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for saints where they dress up for dress parade. Some people go to church to close their eyes, others go to eye their clothes. If you're perfect, you don't belong here. This is a church where people are growing. This is a church for people who don't have it all together. We have every kind of background you can imagine in this church. We've got Catholics, Charismatics, Jews, Buddhists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Assembly of God, Pentecostal, Evangelical Free, nothing and atheists. 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.

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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. Philippians 2:35 *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interest but also the interest of others."* 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. Like Baskin-Robbins -- 31 Flavors. What if we were all vanilla? What a boring church we would be! God has 31 flavors of personality and more than that.

3. Affirm everybody.

Give everybody a lift whenever you can. I Thess. 5:11 *"Encourage one another and build each other up."* 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 50-100 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 30 or 40 people 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? There's two kinds of pillars in the church: one that holds the church up and caterpillars that walk in and out. 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 valley 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 a charter member of 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

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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.

Galatians 3:26-27 *"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."* We're all the same. There is no distinction in the body of Christ. We are Christians. We are one in Christ Jesus."

Prayer:

"Heavenly Father, I know in a place like Orange County this is a message we need to hear. Lord, it is so easy to become smug and presumptuous, to look down on others who have less. Lord, I pray that there may be an outstretched hand and a warm hug and a loving smile for every person who worships here. Lord, forgive us for making judgements about people based on outward appearance. Help us to realize that favoritism and faith do not match, they don't mix, they are incompatible. Help us to realize that it is unchristian, unreasonable, unloving. I pray that each of us would commit ourselves to accepting people, appreciating them, and affirming them because You have accepted us. Lord, if there is somebody here that has not made that step of accepting You into their lives I pray that they would do it, that they would realize that You care about them, how much You want them to know You. I pray that today they would say in their heart "Jesus, come in." Help them to realize that You accept them and that now they need to accept You. Lord, I pray that even now as I pray they would open their hearts. I sense that even now some are saying, "Jesus Christ, make me a believer." If you prayed that in your heart God heard you. Lord, thank You for Your word. Thank You that it pierces our heart. Help us to be loving. More than anything else help us to have a reputation that we love You and that we love other people. In Jesus' name. Amen.