

This Is What We Do

James 2:1-13; It's one of 3 passages I'm going to ask you to turn to, so I trust you've come ready to learn, and dig in, and search the Scriptures in this new year

➤ But before we do, let me just say a few things about our giving

1. God bless you for your faithfulness last year

So many of you *tithe* so faithfully to our church; Both out of *obedience* to the Lord, and *love* for the Lord; It's really exemplary on your part

And one of the reasons we can fulfill our mission, to glorify God by making disciples

Your tithe enables that; God bless you for that

2. Thank you for your generosity at the *end* of the year

We finished ahead of budget for the year b/c of it, and we praise God for his provision

It enables us to not only pay our bills and disciple the saints, but *extend* our reach, and respond to *other* opportunities from time to time

So thank you; God is doing a work, and your generosity and faithfulness are a significant part of it

➤ That said (**Intro**), I want to talk to you about our church this weekend

We'll get back to our study of Galatians *next* week, but this week I want to talk about us; Who we are and what we do; What defines us; What characterizes us

There's no better time than at the beginning of a new year, when some people are *looking* for a church, others are wondering if they should *invite* people to church . . .

And most would benefit from a *refresher* about our church; Hence the title

And it starts with this . . .

We welcome without judgment (James 2:1-13)

James 2:1-4 – *My brothers* [as in, my brothers and sisters in Christ; it's an all-encompassing term], *show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory*. James wastes no time in stating his point . . .

And it's the first *reason* we welcome without judgment – **God commands it**

Show no partiality he says; No bias; No prejudice; No favoritism

When somebody walks in the door, we ought to *welcome* them, without *judging* them;

Without sizing them up; Without putting them in a box; W/out freezing them in time

Without *condemning* them to the *fringes* of our church

Red, brown, yellow, black, or white – they are *precious* in his sight

Made in his image, whether living in sin or pride-fully pious; No more unworthy of

God's grace than you are; And no more *separated* fr God's *presence*, than you *were*

So we welcome without judgment; Everybody; It's what we do

➤ And while we could start and stop right there, James goes on to explain exactly what he means, and why; Giving us 2 *more* reasons

[2] *For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, [3] and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," [4] have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

We have; On both fronts

Whether we judge someone and *welcome* them, or judge someone and *ignore* them, it's wrong; Do you see it?

Both decisions and *both* actions make unnecessary *distinctions*, and render our thoughts evil

IOW we can welcome people perfectly well, and still be wrong

Just like we can ignore people, and be wrong

B/c in both cases, we're judging by appearances

So we don't; We welcome without judgment; B/c **doing otherwise is wrong**; It's wrong

➤ And just to make sure we get it, v9 is explicit; Starting in v8

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. [9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law [the law of God] as transgressors.

Judging people who you don't know, is wrong

Catering to some and slighting others b/c of their socio-economic standing – is wrong

Shunning people b/c of their immodest dress, dirty clothes, or sinful lifestyle – is wrong

Avoiding people b/c of their foreign accent, Ebonic slang, or poor grammar – is wrong

Ignoring people b/c of their skin color, ethnic background, or culture – is wrong

And when we do those things, whether blatantly or subtly, consciously/subconsciously . . .

We walk in the *counsel of the wicked*, stand in the way of *sinner*s, and sit in the *seat of scoffers*; Literally; Forfeiting the blessing of God (Ps 1:1)

We *must* give the benefit of the doubt, and welcome without judgment

B/c to do otherwise is wrong

➤ And if that's not reason enough, consider the consequences – they're dire

The consequences are dire; V13

Welcome without judgment – *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy*. That's dire

If we fail to show mercy in how we welcome people to our church, we *will* reap the consequences; From God; Without mercy; That's dire

And that's how important mercy is to him

That's how important compassion, kindness, and understanding are

Especially in his church (**Summary**)

So we welcome without judgment, and extend the *same* mercy to *others* that God extends to us; Demonstrating that mercy triumphs over judgment, It's what we do

2nd . . .

We love without condition (Mt 5:43-48)

Mt 5:43-48; Jesus is speaking here, in his famous Sermon on the Mount, and says . . .

[43] *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* [Evidently a common perversion of the Old Testament in that day] [44] *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and*

on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Like he *often* does, Jesus cites an *extreme*, to set forth the norm; Namely, to love without condition; If it's true for our enemies, it's true for everyone
We ought to love *everyone* without condition; For 5 reasons

1. It's how God loves us (45b)

V45b – For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

B/c God loves all without condition, b/c God extends grace and favor and blessing to everyone, we ought to do the same

2. It identifies us as God's children (45a)

V44 – Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

Now, if you were to ignore the *rest* of Scripture when reading this verse, you might think that the way to be a part of God's family, is to love *others*
But we know that *can't* be the case, b/c the Bible is overwhelmingly clear that we are justified by *faith*; Adopted into his family when we love *Jesus*

So this verse *can't* mean that loving people *makes* us a child of God, but *identifies* us as children of God; So we do; We love without condition

3. It's what God blesses (46)

V46 – For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?

If you're *conditional* with your love, what good is *that*?
Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Those who scratch the backs of those who scratch theirs? Who fudge the tax bill of those who throw in a bribe? They do
They love those who love them

And Jesus says there's no blessing, no reward in doing so; None
God blesses *un*-conditional love; Loving people *without* condition

4. It sets us apart (47)

V47 – If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Everybody loves their own; Their peeps; Their buddies; Their friends
Everybody loves those who are *like* them
But God expects more of us; He expects us to be set apart; By loving *everyone*

5. It's what God commands (48)

V48 – You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

IOW we need to love without condition just like God does; Just like him
Both individually *and* as a church (**Summary**)

It's the 2nd characteristic that describes us; Not that we're perfect, but striving

3rd . . .

We preach without apology (2 Tim 4:1-4)

2 Tim 4:1-4

[1] I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: [2] preach the word
IOW I urge you, I order you, I'm telling you – with all the weight and intensity I can call to mind and bring to bear . . .
Herald the truth; Proclaim the things of God; Teach the Bible; And then he says . . .
Be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Preaching the word is one of the pillars of our church, and definitely something we do;
Whether from me up front, another pastor in a *ministry* . . .

Or one of *you* over coffee with somebody; We preach the Word
We tell people what it says, what it means, and how it applies to their life; Urging them to accept it and change, in the power of the Holy Spirit; That's preaching

➤ And we do it w/out *apology*, b/c once again, **it's what God commands**; Broken record
We don't *withhold* it just b/c it's hard to hear; Or minimize it b/c it's hard to grasp; Or compromise it b/c it's hard to apply
We preach the authority of God's Word *without* apology; Period
In season or not; As in *popular* or not; Politically *correct* or not
After all, why would we apologize for something God so clearly *tells* us to do?

➤ It's what he commands, and **it's desperately needed**
Otherwise we wouldn't need to *reprove, rebuke, and exhort* like it says in v2
We wouldn't need to expose someone's sin for the purpose of conviction
We wouldn't need to tell them to stop for the purpose of holiness
We wouldn't need to urge them toward righteousness for the glory of God
But we do, b/c it's desperately needed

Don't get me wrong – we speak the truth in *love*; And do so with complete *patience*
But we speak it; B/c to *withhold* the truth, would be *un*-loving

➤ And 3rd here, we preach without apology b/c **the time is short**
Not the time of Christ's return, but the point at which people will take their ball and bat, and leave; *Stop* listening; Go somewhere else; It's short
[3] For the time is coming [and I would argue it's here to a great extent] *when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears* [a desire for something more comfortable] *they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions* [their own thoughts, their own ideas], [4] *and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*
They just won't *tolerate* the preached Word

Especially when it gets too close to home; Too close to their heart; Too close to their behavior; Too close to their lifestyle; Too close to their worldview
They won't tolerate it, and therefore leave

And the funny thing is, they're usually the same people who are all *about* the truth; At least initially; If I've seen it once, I've seen it a thousand times

“Oh Pastor, I love how you preach the truth; I love that you say it like it is.”
Until I say it; Until it applies to them; Until it pierces their veneer; Or cuts too deep; Or
contradicts their thinking; Or offends their friend
Then they’re gone; Just gone; Usually without warning (**Summary**)

So we preach without the apology b/c the time is short, that people will tolerate it

And then last . . .

We forgive without limit (Mt 18:21-22)

IOW we don’t hold people’s sins *against* them, and we don’t take vengeance on them

That doesn’t mean there are no *consequences* for sin in our church; There are
Sometimes consequences are *necessary* as Scripture indicates; Necessary to protect or
purify our church; Like church discipline for *unrepentant* sin
Or dismissal of leaders for *disqualifying* sins
Sometimes tangible consequences are necessary; And we need to act wisely in that
respect
But even then, on a personal basis, we forgive; And do so without limit

➤ It’s just like Jesus said in Mt 18 (**Mt 18:21-22**); Where . . .
[21] *Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me,
and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”* [22] *Jesus said to him, “I do not say to
you seven times, but seventy-seven times.*
Or seventy times seven it’s sometimes translated
Either way, the point is the same – Forgive without limit
It’s what God commands; Again

➤ And, **it’s what God does**
We forgive without limit, b/c *God* forgives without limit
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins (1 Jn 1:9)
No limit, no cap, and no caveat; Just forgiveness
So we do the same

➤ And perhaps most compelling of all, we forgive without limit b/c **failure is terrifying**
As in, God won’t forgive us; **Mt 6:14-15**
[14] *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive
you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father
forgive your trespasses.*

That’s terrifying; Resulting in short term *discipline* as a *believer* (Heb 12:10b-11a), to
bring you to a *place* of forgiveness . . .
Or long-term *punishment* as an *unbeliever*, to give you what you deserve (Mt 18:33-34)
Either way, it’s terrifying*****

So we forgive; Over and over for the *same* offense if necessary, or time and again for
different ones; It’s what we do (**Summary**)
Along with welcoming without judgment, loving without condition, and preaching
without apology

➤ If you’re here looking for a church, I trust that helps you
And if you’re already a part, I trust it encourages you
And maybe even challenges you to *greater* love and good deeds; Let’s do this

Prayer – Lord, forgive us for a lack thereof; A *lack* of forgiveness; And impress these
things on our heart and mind, so that they become part of what we do; For your glory, in
our lives and in our church

We give now of our tithes and offerings, for the same reason; Thanking you for your
faithful provision, and trusting you for the future