

July 29 2018am – Becoming a Welcoming Church

SLIDE: Undivided theme

SLIDE: Becoming a Welcoming Church

Galatians 3:26-28...²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

SLIDE: Undivided – Climate Change

SLIDE: Spiritual Climate

Romans 15:1,2,5-7...¹ We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.... ⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

"Christian hospitality refers to the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ."

"Andy Stanley, the lead minister from Northpoint Community Church has a famous quote - "The sermon begins in the parking lot." And He is right because words will always be heard in the context of actions... Christians, will be the first sermon people see, hear, and experience".

"Whatever you do...whether it's with your conversation...or whether it's with your actions...do it all for Jesus...do it with a thankful heart to God."

Because our first responsibility isn't to get the cars parked, or bulletin handed out, or get to our class.

Our first responsibility is honor and reflect Jesus... in our words and actions that exhibit thankfulness that's the primary goal... **"Whatever we do, whatever we say."**

Most people who visit churches or take the risk to do something out of their zone for themselves and their families will be impacted for good or bad....way before the preacher gets up to speak. And whether we like it or not that first bite of the sandwich will determine if we really want to take a second bite. If you show up at a restaurant and the valet grabs your keys with a snarl and the maitre d doesn't acknowledge you because they're too busy talking about last week with the hostess, and says "Just sit over there...I'll be with you when I'm free." And the waiter ignores you. It could be the greatest meal ever...but you'll never ever be back. In fact you might not even stick around to find out...because your assumption is...if the food's as bad as the people serving me...I don't want anything to do with it. The good news of Jesus Christ will be experienced in the context of the people who serve it up".

IF WORDS DON'T BECOME ACTIONS THEY'RE MEANINGLESS

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/Sermons/Print?sermonId=205925>

Rich Mullins said this..."I am a Christian because I have seen the love of God lived out in the lives of people who know Him. The Word has become flesh and I have encountered God in the people who have manifested (in many "unreasonable" ways) His Presence; a Presence that is more than convincing - it is a Presence that is compelling. I am a Christian, not because someone explained the nuts and bolts of Christianity to me, but because there were people who were willing to be nuts and bolts, who through their explanation of it, held it together so that I could experience it and be compelled by it to obey." - Rich Mullins, *The World as I Remember It: Through the Eyes of a Ragamuffin*

Listen to what the Apostle Paul reminds us in Colossians 3

Colossians 3:12-17...¹² *Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,* ¹³ *bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.* ¹⁴ *Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.* ¹⁵ *And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful.* ¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.* ¹⁷ *And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

ILLUSTRATION: (Thomas Jefferson & river crossing. A YES Face) [The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, p. 3]

ACCEPTANCE

(Also see *Forgiveness, Self-esteem*)

DURING HIS DAYS AS PRESIDENT, Thomas Jefferson and a group of companions were traveling across the country on horseback. They came to a river which had left its banks because of a recent downpour. The swollen river had washed the bridge away. Each rider was forced to ford the river on horseback, fighting for his life against the rapid currents. The very real possibility of death threatened each rider, which caused a traveler who was not part of their group to step aside and watch. After several had plunged in and made it to the other side, the stranger asked President Jefferson if he would ferry him across the river. The president agreed without hesitation. The man climbed on, and shortly thereafter the two of them made it safely to the other side. As the stranger slid off the back of the saddle onto dry ground, one in the group asked him, "Tell me, why did you select the president to ask this favor of?" The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the president who had helped him. "All I know," he said, "is that on some of your faces was written the answer 'No' and on some of them was the answer 'Yes.' His was a 'Yes' face."

—R. Lofton Hudson, *Grace Is Not a Blue-Eyed Blond*

Do each one of us here at FBC Broussard have a "Yes" face....or not.

The people who make up the Church, should be a place and people that is welcoming, loving and accepting.

Let's look at a story in the book of James chapter 2 about acceptance, welcoming and the bottom line:

"Don't Play Favorites."

The church should be a place where "everybody is somebody and Jesus Christ is Lord."

James 2:1-10...*My brothers, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.* ² *For example, a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor man dressed in dirty clothes also comes in.* ³ *If you look with favor on the man wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor man, "Stand over there," or, "Sit here on the floor by my footstool,"* ⁴ *haven't you discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?* ⁵ *Listen, my dear brothers: Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him?* ⁶ *Yet you dishonored that poor man. Don't the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?* ⁷ *Don't they blaspheme the noble name that was pronounced over you at your baptism?* ⁸ *Indeed, if you keep the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well.* ⁹ *But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.* ¹⁰ *For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all.*

I. The Prohibition of Prejudice

The first point is the prohibition of prejudice in James 2:1... *My brothers, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.*

Now, this phrase “*do not show favoritism*” is actually a combination of a noun and a verb in the Greek, and what it means, if we were to translate it literally is, “**don’t lay hold of a person’s face.**” Now, what does that mean? It means that **don’t judge a person by their appearance.** “...

1 Samuel 16:7...*for man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart*”.

There is nothing that can hurt the Kingdom of Christ and the work of our Lord more than snobbishness in a church. Where we look on a certain person who, because of his economic status, or the way he is dressed, or the way he looks, we look upon him and judge him to be thus and so of a person, and treat him accordingly.

Now, it may be that we treat him with flattery because he tends to be very affluent looking, and very intelligent, or very witty, or very charming or whatever it is. And, we may flatter the person. Or, it may be that we treat him with snobbishness, and that we repudiate him, and that we reject him, also because of his appearance, because there’s something about the way he appears that we do not like. And, we don’t do it because of any rational reason, we just simply lay hold of a person’s face. We jump at conclusions.

Now, people are known to just simply look at something and say, “I like it,” or “I don’t like it.” This man is good, that man is bad, and it’s all just simply due to appearances. And, when we do that we have what the Bible calls “respect of persons.” And, when we have respect of persons, we may be flattering some people and gossiping about, or criticizing, other people, not because of anything inherently good, or anything inherently bad in that person, but because of simply how they appear.

Now, you know the difference between gossip and flattery? Flattery is where we say to someone’s face what we don’t say behind their back, and gossip is where we say behind someone’s back what we don’t say to their face. And, both are wrong. And, whether you’re in the business of flattering and fawning over the rich and the cultured, or whether you’re in the business of criticizing and gossiping about the poor and the down and out, you are wrong in the sight of God—and what damage it does to the Kingdom of God.

The cure for prejudice is Kissing Frogs (p. 5 – The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart)

YOU EVER FEEL LIKE A FROG? Frogs feel slow, low, ugly, puffy, drooped, pooped. I know. One told me. The frog feeling comes when you want to be bright but feel dumb, when you want to share but are selfish, when you want to be thankful but feel resentment, when you want to be great but are small, when you want to care but are indifferent. Yes, at one time or another each of us has found himself on a lily pad, floating down the great river of life. Frightened and disgusted, we’re too froggish to budge.

Once upon a time there was a frog, only he wasn’t really a frog, he was a prince who looked and felt like a frog. The wicked witch had cast a spell on him and only the kiss of a beautiful maiden could save him. But since when do cute chicks kiss frogs? So there he sat, an unloved prince in frog form. One day a beautiful maiden gathered him up and gave him a big smack! Zap!! There he was, a frog turned handsome prince and they lived happily after. So what’s the task of the Christian? Kissing frogs, of course!

—Bruce Larson, *Ask Me to Dance*

The church should be a place where "everybody is somebody and Jesus Christ is Lord."

II. The Problem of Partiality

Now, I want you to notice not only the prohibition of prejudice in chapter 2 verse 1. But, I want you to notice further the problem of partiality in **James 2:1-4**...² *For example, a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor man dressed in dirty clothes also comes in.* ³ *If you look with favor on the man wearing the fine clothes and say, “Sit here in a good place,” and yet you say to the poor man, “Stand over there,” or, “Sit here on the floor by my footstool,”* ⁴ *haven’t you discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

A. The Appearance of People

“Now, as we’re talking here about the problem of partiality, I want you to notice these things.

First of all, the appearance of the men who come to church. First of all, there comes in Mr. Goldfingers. Now, he actually—that’s what this word “with a gold ring,” literally means in the Greek a “golden fingered man,” Mr. Goldfingers. He has a gem at every joint. He has a nugget at every knuckle. He’s just very wealthy, and you can just see that he’s wearing a Hart Schaffner and Marx, and that he is just a person who has arrived. You say, “Wow, who is he? Look at that man. I can tell he’s somebody important. Move way and make way for the gentlemen, and give him a good seat.” And, so he comes in, and he has a seat, and the usher shows a lot of respect to him. Did you know **Mahatma Gandhi**, the great leader of India, was searching for a philosophy, searching for a way, searching for some way to reach the people of India for whom he had a burden? And, he studied the different faiths, and the different ideologies and religions of the world, and he studied Christianity. And, he said, “I believe that’s it. I believe that Christianity is what the people of India need,” so he went to a church to learn more. And, an usher met him at the church, and when the usher saw him and saw who he was, the usher said, “I’m sorry, sir, this church is for Europeans only.” And, Mahatma Gandhi went away and became the Hindu leader of India, a man that could have reached multiplied millions of souls for Jesus Christ. But, someone looked at him, and someone laid hold of his face rather than looking at his heart.” (Rogers)

ILLUSTRATION: I am the Jesus you say you love. (p. 6,7 Tale of the Tardy Oxcart)

TONY CAMPOLO TELLS a true story of a Jewish boy who suffered under the Nazis in World War II. He was living in a small Polish village when he and all the other Jews of the vicinity were rounded up by Nazi SS troops and sentenced to death. This boy joined his neighbors in digging a shallow ditch for their graves, then faced the firing squad with his parents. Sprayed with machine-gun fire, bodies fell into the ditch and the Nazis covered the crumpled bodies with dirt. But none of the bullets hit the little boy. He was splattered with the blood of his parents and when they fell into the ditch, he pretended to be dead and fell on top of them. The grave was so shallow that the thin covering of dirt did not prevent air from getting through to him so that he could breathe.

Several hours later, when darkness fell, he clawed his way out of the grave. With blood and dirt caked to his little body, he made his way to the nearest house and begged for help. Recognizing him as one of the Jewish boys marked for death, he was turned away at house after house as people feared getting into trouble with the SS troops. Then something inside seemed to guide him to say something that was very strange for a Jewish boy to say. When the next family responded to his timid knocking in the still of the night, they heard him cry, “Don’t you recognize me? I am the Jesus you say you love.” After a poignant pause, the woman who stood in the doorway swept him into her arms and kissed him. From that day on, the members of that family cared for that boy as though he was one of their own.

—Anthony Campolo, *Who Switched the Price Tags?*

B. The Attitude of the Usher

There was, first of all, the appearance of the men and then there was the attitude of the usher in verse 3:

³ *If you look with favor on the man wearing the fine clothes and say, “Sit here in a good place,” and yet you say to the poor man, “Stand over there,” or, “Sit here on the floor by my footstool,”*

The usher made the **mistake, that so many make in so many churches** across America, and it is **indulgence of the rich and indifference to the poor.**

C. The Appraisal of the Lord

Well, after you see the appearance of the men, and the attitude of the usher, I want you to notice the appraisal of the Lord. I want you to see what the Lord said, “Are ye not then partial in yourselves”—verse 4—

⁴ *haven’t you discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

Now, look at that phrase “partial in yourselves.” It literally means, “have you not made distinctions among yourselves,” that’s what it means. You have made distinctions, you have set one person in one category and another person in another category. You cannot do that, my friend. The ground around the cross is level. All people are precious in the sight of God, and if you haven’t learned that, you have not learned anything, not even the rudiments about Christianity.

Now, notice the Bible does not say there is not seniority. There is seniority in a church. The Bible speaks of those who have labored long in doctrine. The Bible speaks of those who have proven their lives by living the right kind of life. And, the Bible says in **Rom. 13:7** to give “...*honour to whom honour is due*”. It is not to say there’s not to be authority in the church. There is to be authority in the church. God has set some in authority, and don’t you think that in any assembly that there is no spiritual authority? **There is seniority, and there is authority, but there is no superiority.**

Now, get that down. No superiority. We may be different as to calling, and different as to appointment, and different as to job, but in the sight of God—in a New Testament church—everybody is somebody when Jesus Christ is Lord.

The church should be a place where "everybody is somebody and Jesus Christ is Lord."

III. The Precepts for Proper Practice

James 1:2... *“But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*

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James 2:8,9...⁸ *Indeed, if you keep the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well.* ⁹ *But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.* ¹⁰ *For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all.*

Why does the Bible call this the royal law? Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Because it’s the king of all laws. It’s the king of all laws. It’s the royal law. You see, friend, when you have love in your heart, you’re not going to be partial among yourselves. And, there’s something so contagious about that love.

James 2:18... *But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”*

Colossians 3:23-24... *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”*

Conclusion

A little fellow left his home and walked for miles to get to a certain church. He walked past many churches. Someone asked him, “Why do you go so far to go to church, to that one particular church?” He said, “Because they love a fellow over there.”

Another little boy was talking about a friend that he met. He was telling his mama, “I just think he’s such a neat guy.” And, his mama said, “What is it that you like so much about him?” And, the little fellow said, “He treats me like I’m a people.”

Oh, listen, we need to learn that **everybody is somebody because Jesus is Lord**”.

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