

The Problem with Prejudice

Isaiah 5:20-21 HCSB Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. (21) Woe to those who are wise in their own opinion and clever in their own sight.

Let's talk about prejudice, shall we? Prejudice - not just racial bigotry - but prejudice in general. If you are prejudiced, you "pre-judge" others without data, based on your suppositions about all people of a certain group. All black people are lazy, all Jews are greedy, all Arabs are terrorists, or all white people are racists.

Racism is not the same thing as prejudice. It is a subset of that larger group. Racism means *supporting or being actively invested in the continuation of a racial hierarchy in which one's own group dominates*.

By this definition, anyone and any member of any group can be prejudiced. Consider the following four people. George Jefferson and Fred Sanford were extremely prejudiced, to use fictional examples. It could be argued that Malcolm X was actively prejudiced for many years, ML King was not. However, those individuals technically could not be described as racists; only someone who traditionally benefited from being at the top of the social structure could do that. Archie Bunker was working class, barely qualifying as lower middle class, and didn't have a lot of leverage in society; still, he was racist. This is because, as a white man of his generation, he was taught to believe that simply being white made him superior to anyone who was not, and that was the natural order of things- he was invested in this belief, and felt threatened when liberals chopped away at how things had always been, because if that lifelong belief were challenged he would be losing the only thing in his life that made him feel naturally special, and which he had come to expect society in general to back up.

Racism is against just race. Prejudice can be anything: age, appearance, disability, education, gender, group membership, income, intelligence, marital status, nationality, occupation, personal habits, race, region, religion, social class... wealthy people of any particular race may be prejudiced against poor people of the same race, and poor people of that race may be resentful of wealthy ones of the same race.

This prejudicial tendency we all have can, in one of its most blatant forms, quickly *evolves* into rampant racism. One of my goals therefore, as the one tasked with pastoring you, is to nip this in the bud. I want to go to the very root of the matter and show what the Lord has to say on the matter. After all,

- **Hebrews 4:12-13 HCSB** ...the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints, and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart. (13) No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

The Scriptures speak against any kind of prejudice.

- **James 2:9-10 HCSB** 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*.

Note that James warns that if we keep all the other commands, and yet show favoritism we are guilty of breaking the entire law. I think this stems from the sheer irrationality of prejudice. Prejudice is a preconceived opinion, usually unfavorable, that is formed without sufficient knowledge or just grounds. It is an irrational attitude based on an overgeneralized belief that is directed toward and individual, group, or race. As Isaiah put it,

- **Isaiah 5:20-21 HCSB** Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. (21) Woe to those who are wise in their own opinion and clever in their own sight.

It is that irrationality, that resistance to the truth, that unwillingness to yield to the power of facts that leads us eventually to break the rest of the laws.

Paul gives the following advice if we are to be a united congregation, without taint from the sin of prejudice.

- **Romans 15:5-7 HCSB** Now may the God of endurance and encouragement grant you agreement with one another, according to Christ Jesus, (6) so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice. (7) Therefore accept one another, just as the Messiah also accepted you, to the glory of God.

He tells us we are to:

1. Practice endurance (call on the God of endurance)
2. Encourage (call on the God of encouragement)
3. Agree according to Jesus (have our values and priorities identified and measured by Him)
4. Glorify the Lord together (vv6a and 7b)
5. Vocalize our unity (see point 4; how will you glorify Him silently?)
6. Accept one another in the same manner as we were accepted by the Messiah (v.7)

Let's quickly run through some Dos and Don'ts of acceptance.

Don't judge the heart of another without evidence. (Matthew 7:1 cp vv.5-6)

Ask God to search your heart. (Matthew 7:3-4 cp Psalm 139:23-24)

Don't judge by only outward appearances. (1 Samuel 16:7)

Do see and serve the needs of others. (Philippians 2:4)

Don't assume you can't change your attitudes. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Assume personal responsibility for changing your thinking. (Romans 12:2)

Don't use derogatory language. (Titus 3:1-2)

Ask God to express His love for mankind through you. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

Don't go along with the crowd's prejudicial sin. (Exodus 23:1-3)

Treat others the way you wish you or your children to be treated. (Matthew 7:12)

Don't mock the differences in others. (Proverbs 11:12)

Learn to value the factor that unifies our differences. (Malachi 2:10)

Don't react vengefully when experiencing prejudice. (1 Peter 3:8-9)

Fight for others who experience prejudice (Proverbs 24:10-12)

Because God does not show favoritism toward anyone, when we have a prejudiced heart, we are placing ourselves as a judge higher than God Himself! Our needs for significance and security can only be met through a personal relationship and reliance on the Messiah, who loves us, died for us, and accepts us. We have neither the need nor the right to feel superior to anyone or be prejudiced toward anyone.

- **Romans 15:7 HCSB** Therefore accept one another, just as the Messiah also accepted you, to the glory of God.