

Ethics and Racism

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Introduction

Are you a “face looker”? Do you look upon the outward appearance and “prejudge” an individual based on some outward characteristic? – race, religion, culture, financial standing, occupation? MANY in the world and sadly even in the church do.

The fact is that God has an ethic (determination of right or wrong and application of that principle to our lives) for us regarding our thought and interaction with those around us. To do other than this “ethic” is to “prejudge” ... be prejudiced – the most common act of which is racism.

The Problem Exemplified

The problem is prevalent in our world. I can remember growing up in North Texas and seeing and hearing things that attested to the sad condition regarding race relationships. Several times I heard police talk about how to use their flashlight in controlling unruly suspects. It was noted that the normal use was to hold the flashlight in the middle and use it carefully as a club to subdue the individual if needed. But then matter of factly it was added that if the suspect were a black man the procedure was a bit different – the flashlight was to be held by the very end so as to gain more leverage and hitting power... “after all, the skulls of these _____ are much thicker since they are less evolved.” Even going to the local Sears brought forth the prejudice. Water fountains were provided, but clearly marked for either “whites only” or “colored.” Some may be saying that things have changed and thankfully they have, but sadly racism is still alive and well, though not as outright as it once was. Racial slurs still abound for whites, blacks, hispanic, or any other race you care to mention! (Such slurs enable those filled with hate to view their foes as something less than human, thus the prejudice seems justified). Hatred and suspicion are apparent when one even drives through a part of town “not for their kind of people.” Yes, our society still abounds with racism ... and not many are shocked by its presence. After all the world is a wicked place!

But the problem does not stop at the world. One would have to be very naive to deny the existence of racism in the religious world, and even within the church of our Lord. Notice a few quotes from our brethren:

Segregation against Negroes in our churches and colleges was strongly denounced by Abilene Christian College Bible professor Carl Spain in one of the main speeches of the annual ACC Bible Lectureship which closed January[sic] 25.

He asked the crowd in Sewell Auditorium, "Are we moral cowards on this issue?"

Spain cited the case of a Negro Church of Christ evangelist in Abilene who was forced to attend McMurry College (a Methodist institution) across town because Abilene Christian College would not give him credit for Bible work." (Christian Chronicle 17 (8 March 1960): 1,4.)

During the sixties it was clearly a huge issue facing the church. But what of the current situation? Have we left this horrible blight behind? One need only pick up books that will help us find a church of Christ in any given community to see the problem is still very much alive. Notice how many congregations would be marked "predominantly black." Each of us is probably aware of the distinction given in most every community regarding a congregation being "black", "white", "hispanic" and the like. It is not uncommon to hear people make statements that one of another race "would be better of with his own people"! I have even heard those in the overseas mission fields deride those of a given race by negative stereotypes.

The Sin Exposed – Racism (Prejudice) is Sin Because...

It is in conflict with the "law of love".

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. (1 John 4:7-11)

... all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10)

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40)

It is in conflict with the Lord's prohibition of respect of persons

What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. (Acts 10:15)

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. (Acts 10:34-35)

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. (James 2:1)

It is in conflict with the New Testament idea of the unity of the church

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17:20-21)

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

It denies the one blood:

God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26)

It denies the Bible lineages:

Genesis 1 – Adam and Eve; Genesis 6-9 – Noah and his family

Answering Some of the "What Abouts" and "What Ifs"

How does the Bible explain the various races?

This really gets to the crux of the problem! There are some prevalent ideas that seemingly shape the mindset of many "christians" more than we would like to admit. For example, are you aware of the tenets of evolution set forth by Darwin? Most think of his famous book as *The Origin of Species*, but that is only a part of the title. The complete title is *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. The full title sets for the premise that sadly has pervaded our society, that there are "favoured races." I remember well hearing as I grew up that in the "evolutionary scheme" that the white man was the most advanced, while the other races were not so far removed from their evolutionary roots.

Following this popular (but erroneous) theory can be life changing and in fact world changing. One very famous individual who was much swayed by this premise was Adolph Hitler! And oh, how he changed the world with his "evolutionary" thinking! But how many, even within the church, actually give heed to the idea of the "white man" being more

evolved than “they” are? It is a frightening thought. Of course evolution has no support in the Word of God. One must choose either the Bible (Exodus 20:11) or evolution. The fact is that there is no support either Biblical or scientific for the foolishness of evolution.

Others look to the various races as having come about as a result of a punishment. These ignorantly seek to find the source of a different color of skin in Cain’s “mark” of Genesis 5! Of course the Bible sets forth that Cain’s curse was that he would be a fugitive and a vagabond (12). And the “mark” set upon Cain in verse 14 prevented persecution and death ... not caused it! Others look to the “curse of Ham” in Genesis 9. But the Bible student finds that this was actually a curse upon Canaan, Ham’s son and it was that he would be a servant to Seth (26-27), nothing about skin color!

Of course the truth of God’s Word – one blood, one genealogy forever puts to rest the idea of “superior” races. The origin of the different genetic makeups that have resulted in a diversity of skin color and other features can be traced likely to the events of Genesis 11. Here the “segregation” due to the confounding of the languages by God would clearly explain the variations of the nations due to genetic pooling.

“What about God forbidding certain relationships, isn’t that prejudice and racism.”

Israelite was forbidden to mix with the Gentiles, but again a study of God’s Word dispels any idea of racism being set forth as a pattern. The demanded separation was not due to “racial prejudice” but was rather a matter of bringing forth the “seed”. The Bible fact is that a perversion of this did become a problem once the “Seed” had come. One need only read of the confrontation of Peter by Paul in Galatians 2 for his act of prejudice in refusing to be seen with the Gentiles to see that such distinctions were to be ceased.

Of course God still demands separation of His children from some. Ephesians 5:11 forbids fellowship, but note that it has nothing to do with race. Rather it is a separation based on the refusal to fellowship SIN. Nothing is said of race in such passages.

“What if your daughter married ‘one of them’”

Given the situation in our society, it may in fact be wise to count the cost of entering into a “mixed marriage”, but there is NO Biblical reason to oppose such unions! The sad fact is that the very statement to which we respond shows the tragedy of reverting to the degrading language of “one of them” again! It truly exposes more than most desire. Such emotional pleas really emphasize the lack of Bible or reason in upholding the foolishness of racism.

The Tragedy of Racism

Racism sinful and thus causes the loss of one's soul. "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:8-9).

Racism divides, and thus makes the Christ and His Cross of none effect (Ephesians 2).

Racism destroys true fellowship and its benefits. Those who engage in racism lose many benefits from their brothers and sisters whom they refuse to fellowship fully:

Romans 15:14 - able to admonish one another

Galatians 5:13 - serve one another

1 Thessalonians 4:18 - comfort one another

1 Thessalonians 5:11 - edify one another

Hebrews 3:13 - exhort one another daily...

Hebrews 10:23-25 - provoke unto love and good works... exhort one another in the assembly

It destroys the unity that Jesus prayed for that would cause the world to believe that Jesus was sent of the Father (John 17:21)

Do We See The Color God Sees?

Remember my original question? ... "Are you a face looker?" In Acts 10:34-35 we read: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." The term "respecter of persons" is from the Greek word PROSOPOLEMPTES which is a compound word from "PROSON, a face or person" and "LAMBANO, to lay hold of" (Vine's 851). You see God IS NOT a "face looker" and neither should we be! James warns about this very thing when he says, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons" (2:1). Here a form of that same word is used of which Vine's says: "the fault of one who, when responsible to give judgment, has respect to the position, rank, popularity, or circumstances of men, instead of their intrinsic conditions" (851).

God doesn't see skin color, nor does He see the person's social standing, financial situation... *What color does He see?*

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

To God the world is not "black and white", but "red and white!" ... sinful or saved!

When God sent Samuel to select His chosen to be king, Samuel went to Jesse's house. Jesse's son Eliab was brought before Samuel and he thought this must surely be the Lord's anointed because of his stature and countenance, ...

"But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

We must strive to be godly (Titus 2:11) – and if we do so we too will learn to see the colors He does instead of the skin or any other outward mark. If that is godliness (and it is) then to do otherwise is to be *ungodly!*

Conclusion

Do you realize that the Bible does not even mention race? (In fact our society never used it as it does today until the 1800's with the popularization of Darwin's works!) The Bible does mention nations and languages and emphasizes that God loves them all (John 3:16), wants all to be one (John 17) and desires they be in one body (Ephesians 2). Isn't it time that we started being ethical in this matter and having the same goal?

The fact is that when the judgment comes "all nations" will be gathered before Him (Matthew 25). *If you don't want to be with "them" on this earth, I can assure you that the Father will not force you to be with "them" in heaven.*