

Neither Jew nor Greek...

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” Gal.3:28

Would they accept me? I wondered as I entered the hotel’s hot tub in which a few Orthodox Jews were already relaxing. Traveling around Israel, the Orthodox Jews seemed to avoid us non-Jewish American tourists. But soon my doubts about them as normal people disappeared as a heart to heart conversation began. Our common humanity came forth as we discussed our different lifestyles, cultures, and even religions. It struck me that the child of God cannot predetermine who might be open to hearing about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our own fears, prejudices, or negative attitudes can be obstacles to sharing the precious gift of living faith.

All People Have Undying Souls

Paul’s letter, from which our theme is taken, reminds us of God’s impartiality and love towards all humankind. God’s love is seen in His Son: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth upon him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God created us in his own image (Gen. 1:27) and gave each person the gift of an undying soul (Gen. 2:7).

In God’s infinite wisdom, all people were created equal, yet they are different, each an individual. No two people are exactly alike. Each of us here has our own inward and outward characteristics. These consist of various ages, sizes and shapes, differing facial features, voices, color of hair, eyes, and skin. There is a wide range of physical and mental abilities as well as

degrees of wellness and so on. This variety is the spice of life, which makes for a rich and interesting society and world.

Racism Dwells in the Flesh

To look down on God's created man on the basis of the characteristics God designed for him is wrong. It belittles the work of our Maker, who does not err. "And God saw everything that He made and behold, it was very good" (Gen.1:31). God saw the goodness of His undefiled creation *before* Adam and Eve fell into sin. When the Fall happened everything changed: All went astray, there is not one that is good, no not one (Ps. 53:3; Rom. 3:10,12). As a result of the Fall, racist tendencies also exist in our flesh. But we have to stop to think, that we degrade and insult God's creative work, and His Word—the power with which He made us all—when we think of, treat, or refer to those of other races or circumstances of birth as inferior. Racism is a corrupt tendency in us, just like greed, inordinate lust, jealousy, and the like. Thus, the behaviors that arise from racism are sin. This, too, we must fight against and put away.

Racist behavior reflects on the person displaying such behavior. And if we as believers are overtaken by this sin, the resultant behavior, by association, reflects on the kingdom of God. Thus, this sin can become an obstacle to believing for those who might know that we are believers. Our attitudes and demeanor all help to define us and give others a perspective on us. We know that we are faulty, made of corruptible material, so we are susceptible to this sin. "But by the grace of God, I am what I am," apostle Paul said. It is true; we are God's children by His grace, not because any of us are of any superior design or creation.

Scripture also teaches that God does not judge us on our outward appearance, but He looks at the heart: “For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1Sam.16:7).

In addition to racism, there other forms of prejudice not covered in depth in this presentation. Examples include our attitudes toward those of other nationalities, ethnicities, and cultures. If desired, these areas of prejudice could be covered in the discussion period.

Respecting Differences

Differences, more or less, are first experienced in our homes among the family. We learn to accept each other for who we are. If taught to treat others in a respectful way, then we will more likely have a healthy attitude of being open and accepting others. The “golden rule” still applies to all of us and is the “gold standard” in every human relationship. It teaches us to treat others how we ourselves want to be treated (Luke 6:31).

Even with all of our differences we are alike. We all have the same basic essential needs: food, water, shelter, family, and friends. We also have the needs of being wanted and loved, of having a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and self-worth. Regardless of our race, nationality, ethnic background, strengths, or weaknesses, Jesus loves and cares for us. He also instructed us to do likewise. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). This applies also to the ultimate love, love for undying souls of all people.

Our Melting Pot

America, sometimes called the “melting pot,” is a country of immigrants. People from all over the world have wanted to come here to seek a better life. Our forefathers immigrated in times past, and the immigration process continues today. Our many ethnic groups, and nationalities have helped to shape this country into what it is today. Not only did they contribute their skills, talents, and energy for the good of society, many have made the ultimate sacrifice fighting to defend freedom and liberty for all. To have such a mixture of people, who wish to contribute to the good of our country, is a positive asset.

The Latin motto *E Pluribus Unum* found on the Great Seal of the United States, means “out of many, one.” Originally suggesting that out of many colonies or states emerges a single nation. It has come to suggest in our times that out of many people, races, and ancestries has emerged a single people and nation, thus illustrating the concept of the “melting pot.”

It seems unavoidable that with a mixture of people there is the phenomenon of class and division. People often tend to congregate with like people. This tendency, however, can result in exclusion of others, intentionally or unintentionally. Not only do groups often discriminate against others for the wrong reasons (race, appearance, economic status, etc.) individuals do as well, and none of us is immune to falling into such behavior. It’s true that we need to discriminate on the basis of right and wrong activities, between those who would have a bad influence on us that would endanger our faith or safety, but we still want to show love to all people.

Scripture Exhorts Us

The Bible gives many examples of negative behavior as James writes of how the poor experience discrimination and the rich are treated favorably: When a rich man enters wearing fine apparel he

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is invited to sit in a good place, but the poor man, in vile garments, is commanded to stand or sit under the footstool (James 2:2–6). He further says, “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well (James 2:8, Matt. 22:39). Who is our neighbor? Is it not everyone of our fellowmen? Scripture further instructs, “as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

This image of doing “good” to all men is in stark contrast to what some people have endured, even in our own land. A memory from childhood brings this home to me. Sitting in the dim room I was fascinated by the old neighbor man’s stories and his experiences in the Deep South. Blacks were not allowed in many places and restricted from certain activities. “Tell some more, granddaddy!” exclaimed my friend. “I done told you enuff for now, you’ all best be gettin on outside and play some ball,” he replied.

The struggles this old man endured due to the color of his skin were unfair and unjust. Why was it so? The reason: prejudices, greed, biases, and fears of others due to color, race, nationality, social status, etc. can run deep in a society. This kind of mentality undermines what is best about America; a society marked by generosity, liberty, and freedom. Racism can take guarded or less noticeable forms. Perhaps one may think that name-calling is not such a big deal—especially if they are not said in front of the person—but degrading terms such as; “nigger,” “spic,” “honky,” “chink,” etc. have no place in a child of God’s vocabulary. They don’t do anyone any good. On the contrary, they are hurtful and damaging. As God calls more people

of different backgrounds into His kingdom, we see the blessings and joy it brings. These terms and attitudes cause offenses which we strive to avoid.

The Battle Starts on a Personal Level

This striving begins on a personal level. I also have needed to battle such attitudes arising from my own flesh. September 11th, 2001 was bewildering and surreal as the day's events unfolded. Planes were hijacked and flown into buildings by terrorists who were Islamic extremists. It affected people's perceptions—mine too. Upon entering the University of Minnesota's computer lab, I became highly suspicious of a certain individual. He was of Middle-Eastern descent and wore traditional Muslim attire. I watched him carefully. From out of my flesh, came forth evil thoughts toward him and others. Nevertheless, we soon came to know and appreciate each other. Just like me, he was studying in hopes of getting a job in order to support his family. Just as we don't judge all Muslims as terrorists, neither do we want to classify races, nationalities, and ethnicities—"Blacks are lazy," "Jews are tightwads," etc. Individual behavior, or that of some, should not label a whole race. I needed to see my Muslim classmate as an individual. The concept of God meant something different to each of us, and while I wanted to remember apostle Paul's reminder to keep separate from those in darkness to avoid sin (2 Cor. 6:14–17), I still needed to recognize that we believers live in and are sent forth to participate in society. Scripture exhorts us away from prejudice; James writes, "My brethren have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons" (James 2:1).

Christ Calls through His Own

We endeavor to keep peace with all people, even though we do not share the fellowship of spirit with them. Some who have repented and come into God's kingdom have related how caring the

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believers were to them when they were yet outside of God's kingdom. When believers show love and friendliness to unbelieving people and remember them with the mind of Christ, the goodness of God may draw them to His kingdom and the gospel of forgiveness. Friendliness is a fruit of faith, not a work. Scripture further exhorts us, "be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32.)

The richness of God's creation, in all its variety, is a gift from God. What we think and say and how we treat others require watchfulness on our part. We carry flesh and blood and are prone to err. The gospel is our means of forgiveness and is readily preached to the sinful. Dear brothers and sisters you have permission to believe all sins forgiven in Jesus name and precious blood.

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