

No Room for Racism

Introduction

For the purposes of this study, race is defined primarily by the color of people. I remember singing the Sunday school song in my youth that Jesus loves the little children—red, brown, yellow, black, and white. In America, classification of its citizens boils down to white people (primarily of European descent) and people of color according to their ancestral origin. In the 2020 United States census there were five racial categories: 1) White American, 2) Black or African American, 3) Native American and Alaska Native, 4) Asian American, and 5) Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. The census form also allowed responders to indicate whether they are of two or more races, as well as identifying themselves as “Hispanic or Latino” ethnicity. Perhaps this categorization actually promotes racism. Wouldn't it be amazing if the census just counted people?

Racism may be defined as the belief that people possess different behavioral traits directly associated with their color and ancestral origin, and that racial groups can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another. Racist ideology is exhibited through prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against other people (by means of thoughts, words, or actions) because they are of a different race or ethnicity. Bigotry may be defined as one's obstinate, unreasonable, or conceited (superior) attachment to a belief, opinion, or faction. Specifically, bigotry is expressed as a prejudice against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular group. Although bigotry doesn't necessarily involve prejudice against another race (it can be directed toward people of different age, gender, religion, level of education, type of job, financial status, physical differences, political affiliation, sexual orientation, etc.), racism is a form of bigotry.

An honest appraisal of our own history shows that racism and bigotry are part of the American fabric. Perhaps this is true of most countries. From the very beginning our Declaration of Independence and Constitution did not consider that men and women had equal rights or that people of all races were equal. The Constitution has gradually become more inclusive through hard-fought and often controversial amendments since that time, but racism and bigotry continue to plague our country throughout American society. As individual believers—members of the body of Christ—we need to examine ourselves and ask ourselves at least the following questions:

- Is there any reason or justification at all for me to be racist or bigoted?
- Am I racist or bigoted in any way?

Personal Experience

I am a white person who grew up in a white home. The elementary school I attended in Lafayette, Indiana, did not have any African-American (black) kids; in fact, all of the students were white. My family moved to Tallahassee, Florida, for one year when I was in the second grade (after which we returned to Lafayette). My elementary school integrated by law that year (1963). It complied by busing one black girl across town to my school. I never met her, but I distinctly remember feeling very sorry for her. I attended junior high school and high school in Fort Collins, Colorado. There were no black students in my junior high, and I remember there being only one black student in my high school (as well as some

Hispanic and a few Asian Americans). Even during six years of college (Colorado State University), only a handful of my classes had any students of color, and most of them were foreign students. During nearly 40 years of work for engineering consulting companies in Wyoming and Colorado I worked with only a few people of color. Therefore, I have lived as a white person in a predominantly white world. I learned about America and the world from a white person's perspective.

Am I a racist? For much of my life I didn't think so. I had family members who were overtly racist and bigots (although this may not have been apparent to those outside our home), but if asked I doubt that they would have considered themselves as such. I considered myself different, but don't recall ever discussing the issue at home. My family traveled by car from Indiana to Florida every year in the early 1960s to visit relatives, and we often went by different routes to visit all of the southeast states. I remember seeing signs for segregated use of drinking fountains, restrooms, and laundromats in the towns we passed through. It made an impression on me because it wasn't what I was used to seeing; however, again, I don't recall it being discussed by my family.

It wasn't until later in life that I realized that I, too, was racist. I would catch my myself wondering how a black or Hispanic person could afford the same things I had, or even better things than I had. I had probably wondered those same things most of my life without ever thinking why I did. Finally, at some point, I realized how deplorable—*racist*—those thoughts were. Deep down I must have thought that they were inferior to white people (including me). Perhaps the realization occurred through a combination of influences from my wife, my daughters and their friends, historical books that I was reading, ongoing issues in sports and society, and studying and teaching the Bible. Ultimately, I believe the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to the reality of my life. What I saw in myself was different than what I had always thought about myself. I admit that I am still learning.

Race in Scripture

Although people are often quick to differentiate other people by their color, and associate personal or cultural differences based on color, there are no references to people based on their color in Scripture. There are many references indicating where people lived or where they were from (cities, nations, and regions), but not what they looked like. God did not differentiate people by their color, so why should we?

Much of the Bible deals with the people and nation of Israel. God raised up a nation for Himself (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 14:2; 16:16-19; Psalms 135:4) through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (also named Israel—Genesis 35:9-12) because of the sinfulness of all the other nations. Through His prophet Moses, God gave the people of Israel His law and ordinances, also referred to as the *Law of Moses* or simply as *the Law* in Scripture (Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 2:22-24; Romans 3:19-26). The Law, of which the ten commandments comprise only the first part, not only told the people how to live and how to worship God, but it also defined what God considered to be sin and the consequences associated with those sins. As it turned out, the people of Israel proved to be just as sinful as all of the other nations, confirming that all people sin and are separated from God (Romans 3:23). They rejected the testimony

of God the Father by killing His prophets, God the Son by demanding His crucifixion, and God the Holy Spirit by stoning the disciple Stephen (Acts 7:51-60).¹

People genetically related to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were called Jews in the Bible (Matthew 2:1-2). Additionally, unrelated people who believed in their God (the Almighty God) and adhered to the Law of Moses were considered to be Jews (or Jewish proselytes) and of the people of Israel (Acts 2:5-12, 14, 22-23). Although some people think otherwise, Jews do not fall under the definition of a race because a person born as a non-Jew could become a Jew.²

Some people consider that Jesus was a racist because He ministered only to the Jews. In fact, He came to earth born as a Jew and He came only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and even more specifically to the people of Judea (Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24; Acts 5:31). According to the perspective in this study, however, the Jews weren't a race. This was all part of God's eternal plan to provide a means of salvation to Jews and Gentiles (therefore, everyone) without distinction. God had given mankind over to sin because they (we) chose to worship the creation rather than the Creator (Romans 1:18-32). God then raised up a people for Himself (the Jews) but they, too, rejected Him and His word. This rejection was summarized by Stephen, and was confirmed through their refusal to believe the Apostle Paul's message concerning Christ (Acts 13:44-48; 18:5-6; 28:23-28).

Because of Israel's rejection of God, and according to His eternal plan, God temporarily blinded (hardened) Israel so that they could not understand the things of God—He has set them aside (Romans 11:25). At the same time God ushered in this dispensation of grace through the Apostle Paul, who was chosen by God to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Romans 11:13; Ephesians 3:1-2). This dispensation continues to this day. When God finishes His work in this dispensation of grace, He will restore Israel as His chosen nation and fulfill all of His promises to them (Romans 11:25-29).³

There are many aspects of the dispensation of grace, which is part of what Paul referred to as *the mystery*, or God's secret plan (Ephesians 3:1-11). The major aspect of the mystery is that God's message for today is the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24; Romans 6:14; Ephesians 2:8-9), and that the gospel (good news) of salvation is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up three days later (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14). Furthermore, salvation is not to the Jew first as it was prior to this dispensation. In fact, because all people are considered to be sinful and separated from God, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, male and female, or slave and free (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:27-28). Nor does God show any national preference—He deals with us on an individual basis without regard to nationality (or ancestral origin) and with no national promises. Therefore, God does not consider any race to be better than another.

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also

¹ As he spoke before the Jewish religious council, Stephen was obviously under the control of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:15; 7:54-56). Therefore, by stoning Stephen, the Jewish leaders were rejecting the witness of the Holy Spirit.

² Abraham would have been considered to be Gentile along with the rest of mankind prior to being chosen by God to be the first patriarch of the people and nation of Israel. Furthermore, individuals of one race cannot become or convert to another race.

³ See the author's **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** for more information on this dispensation of grace and the current blindness of Israel.

received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:1-4)⁴

For all of you who were baptized into Christ⁵ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek [*Gentile*], there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28)

No Room for Racism or Bigotry

The Bible has much to say about boasting and, except for boasting in the Lord (giving Him the praise for all that He has done for us), it is almost always in a negative sense (I Corinthians 1:26-31; Romans 3:27-28; II Timothy 3:1-5). Brethren, we need to humbly remember who we were prior to our salvation. Did we, or any believer, deserve to be saved from the consequences of our sins? No. Among other things, the following points describe our spiritual condition prior to salvation:

- Everyone is sinful and separated from God—no one seeks for Him (Romans 3:10-12, 23).
- Everyone is an enemy of God (Romans 5:6-10).
- Everyone is dead in sin and by nature are children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3).
- The wages (earned payment) of sin is spiritual death—eternal judgment and separation from God (Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15).

Because everyone is sinful and no one deserves or can earn salvation, there is no room for boasting in ourselves for anything. Salvation is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 4:4-5). No one is better than anyone else. It is true that as believers we are spiritually different from unbelievers, but only by the grace and working of God. Brethren, there is no room for racism or bigotry.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

What Does God Expect of Us?

In our natural condition prior to salvation, everyone actually lives according to their sin nature, referred to as the *natural man* and our *old man* or *old self* (I Corinthians 2:14; Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22). Racism and bigotry are just two of our sinful traits; therefore, it is natural for us to judge others as inferior to ourselves. Unbelievers who aren't racist or bigoted is testament that God is working through His grace and love even among the lost to accomplish His purpose. If He wasn't doing so, the world would be chaos.

As believers, we have two natures. We retain our old sin nature and will continue to sin until the day we die or are caught up to be with our Lord. What spiritually separates us from unbelievers is that upon believing the gospel of salvation we automatically and miraculously obtain a new nature—the nature of Christ (Romans 8:9-11; Colossians 1:25-27). These two natures are in constant battle with each other as

⁴ All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1996). Words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* (KJV) or, if in italics, were added by the author for clarification.

⁵ See the author's **Should We Be Baptized?** that discusses our spiritual baptism into Christ.

testified by the Apostle Paul and in his exhortations to us (Romans 7:14-25; Ephesians 4:20-24; Colossians 3:9-11). Unfortunately, many of us live our lives more in accordance with the old sin nature, such that we are often indistinguishable from unbelievers. Consequently, many (most or even perhaps all?) brethren exhibit racism and bigotry to some extent, and some to such a degree that it is utterly shameful and horrific.

What does God expect of us? How does He want us to think and live? God has not left these answers to our imagination—He has revealed His will for our daily lives through Scripture.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching [doctrine], for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate [complete and proficient], equipped for every good work. (II Timothy 3:16-17)

Among many other things, God has given us the ability to do, and expects us to do, the following things as His children:

- We are to live as ambassadors for Christ because we are His representatives on earth (II Corinthians 5:20).
- We are to humble ourselves and regard others as more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-8).
- We are not to think too highly of ourselves (Romans 12:3, 16).
- If possible, we are to be at peace with all men (Romans 12:17-19).
- We are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Romans 13:8-10; 15:1-3; Galatians 5:13-15).

These and many other exhortations fall under the heading of walking worthy of our salvation (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12; I Thessalonians 2:10-12). Brethren, if we think and live as God desires us to do, then racism and bigotry will have no place in our daily lives.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called [i.e., our salvation], with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

Do We Have a Social Gospel?

Some Christian denominations and individual churches devote much of their effort to social change. Social injustice is certainly a hallmark of our society and the world, but is striving for social justice what we, as members of the body of Christ and as His ambassadors, are called to preach and do? During His earthly ministry, Jesus did not preach against the injustices toward His people at the hands of the king of Judea or of the Romans who ruled Israel as a colony. He did, however, have much to say about the sin of His people (Matthew 5:21-47), the hypocrisy of the spiritual leaders of His people (Matthew 23), and about the coming and conditions of His prophesied kingdom (Matthew 4:17, 23; 5:1 – 7:29). It is absolutely true that Jesus healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, and raised the dead. He did so out of love

and compassion for His own people, but also to prove to His people that He was the Son of God and the prophesied Messiah of Israel (Matthew 14:28-33; Mark 2:3-12; Acts 2:22-23).

What about us, today? Brethren we are in the dispensation of grace, and we have been entrusted with the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24; Ephesians 3:8-12; 4:11-16; Colossians 1:9-12; 3:12-17). Our gospel is not that we can or should try to solve the world's problems and ensure that everyone is treated equally, but to live according to the gospel of grace and share the gospel of salvation. Does that mean we are to disregard social injustices, pretending that they are not a problem or don't exist? We need to remind ourselves that:

- All people are sinners and need salvation.
- We are to love our neighbors as ourselves.
- We are to think more highly of others than ourselves.
- We are to do good to all people, even to our enemies (Galatians 6:9-10; Romans 12:19-21).

Therefore, even though we cannot change the world, we ought to live according to the love that God poured out upon us when He sent His own Son to die for our sins and then raised Him up for our justification and salvation (Romans 5:6-11; Ephesians 1:18-21; 4:1-3). This includes loving our neighbors as ourselves. Consider who our neighbors are. Our neighbors include our family members, our friends and acquaintances, our children's friends, people in our neighborhood, our classmates or coworkers, people with whom we do business, the checkout person at the store, people we sit next to at events or on public transportation, our mailman, our plumber, our garbage collector, etc. Our neighbors can also be people we don't know who we see are in need. We are surrounded by neighbors every day. What kind of example are we to our neighbors and how do we treat them?

Brethren, there is so much we can do to demonstrate the love of God and our Lord Jesus Christ. How do we behave toward, and talk to or around, our neighbors? Based on what we do, would our neighbors think about us in a positive or negative way—does our new nature in Christ shine through, or do they see and experience our sin nature? One never knows when an act of kindness might open the door for a person's salvation. On the other hand, a thoughtless, rude, racist, or bigoted word or act can cause a person to blaspheme God just as the Gentile nations did because of Israel's sinfulness (Romans 2:17-24; Ephesians 4:25 – 5:4). Furthermore, there is something else each of us should think about: are we willing and ready to stand with or defend a neighbor who is the object of a racist or bigoted word or act regardless of the consequences?

Examine Ourselves

I think perhaps too many of us just live our lives each day without thinking how we are living. We don't seem to regularly evaluate our thoughts and actions; we just do things as we have always done them. How are our words affecting other people? How are our actions perceived by and impacting other people? We are ambassadors for Christ; that is, we are His representatives on this earth. Can other people see Christ in us, or do we behave and live as those who do not have Christ in them? We are exhorted to examine ourselves to evaluate how we think and act (I Corinthians 11:27-32; II Corinthians 13:5-9).

Brethren, we need to remember our condition before we were saved, and the incredible list of blessings we received by the grace of God when we believed the gospel of salvation. Then, we need to consciously and actively try to walk worthy of our salvation—we should live our lives each and every day in response to what God has done and is doing for us through Christ (Ephesians 5:15-21; Philippians 2:12-15; Colossians 3:17, 23).⁶ If we truly endeavor to do this, then we will love our neighbors as ourselves more consistently and will be less likely to think and act according to the sins of racism and bigotry.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. (Galatians 6:10)

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⁶ See the author's study **Walk Worthy** that describes the blessings of our salvation and how God expects us to live in response to what He has done, and is doing, for us.