

What Does the Bible Teach About Prejudice and Judgment?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

I. WHAT IS PREJUDICE?

- A. What is ignorance mistaken for reason?
1. The first enemy of information and progress?
 2. Intellectual blurred vision?
 3. The perfect combination of conceit and ignorance?
 4. The defense of the Devil?
 5. The shield of the petrified mind?
 6. And the upper limit of understanding?
 7. Ladies and Gentlemen, let me introduce to you: PREJUDICE!
- B. Prejudice is defined as “1) a judgment or opinion formed before the facts are known; a preconceived idea; 2) a judgment or opinion held in disregard of the facts that contradict it; unreasonable bias; 3) suspicion, intolerance or hatred of other races, creeds, regions, occupations, etc.” (Webster's New World Dictionary, p. 1122)
1. Paul used a similar word in 1 Timothy 5:21: “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.”
 2. Vines gives the meaning of “partiality” translated from the word *prokrima* as, “pre-judging; preferring one person, another being put aside, by unfavorable judgment due to partiality” (p. 204).
 3. Thayer defines it as, “an opinion formed before the facts are known, a pre-judgment, a prejudice” (#4299).
- C. Prejudice has existed for most of human history. It has destroyed families, started wars, taken many innocent lives, hindered the spread of the Gospel, and condemned many souls.
1. It is at the root of many of the conflicts currently in existence all over the world. Eastern Europe has Serbians, Muslims, Croats, etc. killing one another in the name of “ethnic cleansing.”
 2. Prejudice is alive and well in South Africa, Sudan, Ethiopia, Zaire, Cambodia, South America, Iran, Iraq, Syria, et al.
 3. Prejudice is fueling both sides of the civil rights debate in this country. It has generated the embedded speech patterns of the Us and Them jargon. It is at the core of the current civil unrest experienced in the US on both sides of the debate.
 4. And appallingly, it has found a welcome home in many local churches of Christ. Richard T. Hughes in his book *Reviving the Ancient Faith* devotes nearly an entire chapter to recounting the absence of minorities in mainstream, digressive churches of Christ.
 5. While preaching in Arkansas, I had the good fortune to study with a black man who had left a large liberal church. He was told by the elders that there was a church of Christ for Blacks across town and it would be better if he attended there.
- D. It would be helpful for us to understand that prejudice is not limited to differences in race and color alone. It is not unusual to see Blacks and

Whites, Hispanics and Asians worshiping together harmoniously in the same congregation. God bless them for their brotherly love.

1. However, prejudice can also take the form of division based on income, education, background, perceived intellectual level, and social status.
2. These kinds of prejudices are no less sinful than bigotry over color. In fact, it is possible that they are far more dangerous forms of partiality because they are easier to hide and rationalize while they work their evil cancer of malice and hatred.
3. Prejudice over income and social status seems to be the primary form that afflicted the church in the first century - James 2:1-4
4. It was a sin to judge based on income in the Law of Moses
 - a. Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17
5. It is wrong in the New Testament to judge based on another's moral background - Rom. 2:11, 17-25
6. The proud know God only at a distance, but the humble are respected by the Lord - Psalm 138:6; Prov. 24:23
7. James calls prejudice a sin - James 2:9
8. Apostle Peter was rebuked for bigoted behavior - Gal. 2:11-13
9. Jesus died on the cross to do away with distinctions between Jews and Gentiles - Eph. 2:13-18; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:10-11; Acts 10:34-35
 - a. Would He be pleased with Christians today who revive differences between brethren over race, background, income, education or status?

E. Prejudice is condemnation without investigation.

1. It is a great time-saver; it allows us to develop convictions without gathering the facts.
2. Prejudice is a witness to witlessness. One writer records: "light travels at extraordinary speed until it reaches the human mind."
3. I do not have a right to hold any prejudice in my heart; not only will it condemn my soul, but sooner or later it will hurt someone else.
4. The story is told of a close-minded judge who complained of noise in his courtroom. He banged his gavel shouting, "We are going to have more quiet in here. I have had to condemn the last five men without hearing one word of their testimony."
5. The Scots have a tongue-in-cheek prayer they use to illustrate the locked nature of the prejudiced mind: "Oh Lord, may we always be right, for Thou knowest that we will never change."

F. How can the love of God abide in our hearts if we are respecters of persons?

1. 1John 4:16, 19-21

II. IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PREJUDICE AND JUDGMENT?

A. We have been conditioned all of our lives not to judge others; yet, seems to be a reflex action.

1. It is not wrong to make a judgment.
2. How, why, when, and what we make as judgments can be.

B. Confusing? At first glance, the scriptures seem to be of no help.

1. Matt. 7:1-2; John 7:24; 1Cor. 6:5, 14:29; Col. 2:16
2. Like plucking petals from a daisy: "He judge me; he judge me not."

- C. What is right? - Ecc. 3:1-11; 1Sam. 16:7; John 7:24
1. Prejudice is judging out of season. It is making judgments and distinction when and where we are not authorized.
 2. Like hunting out of season on posted ground: illegal and dangerous.

III. WHY IS THERE SO MUCH CONFUSION OVER THIS?

- A. "Don't judge me!" Sorry, I am going to anyway. Unless one is catatonically apathetic, they will form an opinion eventually.
1. Actually what they are saying is "Don't condemn me for what I chosen" or "Don't form an adverse opinion of me."
 2. It is based on the perceived American right to be as lowdown as we want without anyone making us feel bad about it with a question.
- B. Matt. 7:1-2 - What does it mean?
1. Don't make judgments believing that no judgments will be made of you
 2. We will be treated according to the way in which we treat others
 3. Treating others with suspicion hides a guilty conscience
 4. Treating others with harshness hides hypocrisy
 5. Treating others without mercy means we get no mercy from God
 - a. James 2:13
 6. Treating others with mercy means we will receive mercy from God
 - a. Matt. 5:7
 7. There is nothing in this text that forbids judgment.
- C. John 7:24 - Is it contradictory?
1. It is not a ban against making judgments, but a command to make righteous judgments.
 2. How does one judge with righteous judgment?
 - a. James 2:1-4 - It requires impartiality.
 - b. Matt. 7:3-5 - It mandates righteous living.
 3. We are not at liberty to judge at random.
 4. Nothing in this text forbids judgment.
- D. 1Cor. 6:5 - Instruction to judge legal matters between brethren.
1. The least brother is more qualified to do this than worldly judges.
- E. 1Cor. 14:29 - Instruction to judge in matters of doctrine between brethren based on revealed truth - Gal. 1:8-9
- F. Col. 2:16 - Instruction not to judge one another over scruples of individual conscience.
1. I have found this to be a weakness of many so called strong brethren.
 2. How do we co-exist with brethren who have a scruple of conscience?
 - a. Patiently!
 - b. Rom. 14:1 - Receive them.
 - c. Isa. 35:3-4 - Strengthen them.
 - d. Rom. 14:1 - Do not cause trouble with disputes.
 - e. Rom. 14:3 - Tolerate their scruple of conscience until such time as they outgrow it.
 - f. Rom. 14:4,10 - Do not isolate him for his scruple of conscience.
 - g. Rom. 14:15; 1Cor. 8, 9:13, 10:33 - Surrender your liberty for the weak one's sake.

3. This is quite different than disagreement over a matter of doctrine. We do not judge them over a matter of conscience
4. There is nothing in this passage that forbids making judgments over error in doctrine.

IV. WHAT IF?

- A. Ananias' prejudgment of Saul had held? - Acts 9:11-15 - "Saul is just too dangerous to risk fellowship with him."
 1. How many people have I allowed to go on to perdition because I judged them a risk to me and my own? - 1Cor. 15:9-10
- B. Jonah's prejudgment of Nineveh held? - Jonah 3:10 - 4:3
 1. The entire city repented. Can the good even be measured?!
 2. How many have I turned away from because I judged them too wicked to be interested in the Gospel? What gives me the right?!
 3. We often become angry when our judgments turn out to be unjustified.
 4. Some care more for the gourds of their opinions than for the souls of the lost - Jonah 4:5-11
 - a. I was told in Arkansas that I was spending too much time with black brethren
 - b. I was told in Ohio that I needed to move my focus away from teaching in the projects and focus on the more affluent areas
- C. Reckon what kind of judgment will we receive for this presumption?

V. HOW CAN I AVOID PREJUDICE?

- A. Give others the benefit of the doubt for sincerity until they prove otherwise
 1. Stop second guessing, questioning motives, etc., unless hard evidence is given to justify mistrust - 1Cor. 13:4-7
- B. Try to see life from their point of view.
 1. God thought that was important enough that He sent Jesus to live as a man to see what it was like.
 2. It will teach us mercy without sacrificing truth.
 3. Actions may stem from reparable causes.
 4. "Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity." Or ignorance, weakness, thoughtlessness, accident
 5. Remember, the things we hate the most in others are most often the things we hate in ourselves.
- C. Stop using confirmation bias.
 1. Assimilate all of the facts, not just the ones that confirm what you already believe.
 2. Learn to separate the facts from your conclusions on the facts.
- D. Pray for your brother's weakness.
 1. Pray that you will learn to love others more and judge them less.

Conclusion:

- A. "If you look for the good in someone, you will find it." (Abraham Lincoln)
- B. Let's leave prejudgment to the prejudiced, and judge as the Lord does: in righteousness with mercy. There will be a day in which we will face the judge.