

DO YOU AGREE WITH ST. PETER? REALLY?

Suppose I was to announce that everyone with blonde hair, natural or otherwise, was to stand up and walk to the overflow area and stay there for the duration of the service. In fact, at all future worship services that was as far as you could enter the sanctuary. No, you did not do anything wrong. In reality, you just happened to be born with blonde hair. But based on this difference over which you had no control, the rest of us just do not want you to be with us. Guess what, you have just been the victim of prejudice and discrimination.

Sadly this happens a lot in our world. People are singled out and discriminated against over criteria they have no control: nationality, skin color, language, sex, age, race, and religion. It is truly one of the worst, most painful and helpless experiences in life. Have you ever experienced being the target of prejudice and discrimination?

Why are people so cruel as to act with prejudice towards others? Sins like prejudice and discrimination most likely happen because people are afraid, ignorant, or misinformed to the facts; or because the Spirit of God does not rule their hearts. How senseless it is to decide to mistreat someone solely because her skin is different from yours or he speaks with an accent?

Sadly sins of prejudice and discrimination have been around almost since the beginning of time. In *Genesis* we read of the Egyptians discriminating against shepherds, and in *Exodus*, they discriminated against the descendants of Abraham. In *Esther* the Persian king's advisor was prejudice against the Jews. In *Nehemiah* the Israelites discriminate against the Arabs. In Jesus day the Pharisaic Jews of the first century discriminated against others on the basis of sex, nationality, and social status. The early Christians were also guilty of prejudice as they discriminated against the Gentile Christians.

Unfortunately, discrimination against people continues to this day. We discriminate against others on the basis of race, national origin, political party, income and economic status, religion, age and sex. It happens so often, people have almost become immune to it.

What if God were prejudice? What if He discriminated? What if God decided not to send rain on anyone whose features were dark? What if God

decided not to allow anyone in Europe to hear the Gospel because their skin was so fair, or to keep the message of the resurrection from sub Sahara Africa unless they had blue eyes? What if God kept the call of repentance and offer of forgiveness of sins from everyone in North America who was right handed? Everyone thinks that God favors him and will discriminate against everyone else. During the Civil War, when asked which side God favored, Lincoln replied, “(It is not important) if God is our side, but rather am I on God’s side.” The Good News, as Peter tells us in today’s text, is that God does not discriminate. God welcomes all people!

Peter had been so use to discriminating against Gentiles that he never gave it a second thought as being wrong. In fact, he might have even thought he had God’s blessings when he acted with prejudice against Gentiles. But Peter could not have been further from the truth! God does not discriminate; God is not prejudice. And in the preceding verses to our text, Peter learned that lesson in a very illustrative way.

Peter was praying. He had spent so much time in prayer that he had become very hungry. While his host prepared his meal, Peter began to yawn and rub his eyes. He was tired and about to fall asleep. Instead, he fell into a trance and had the following vision in which God demonstrated to Peter that He does not show favoritism! Peter envisioned a sheet filled with all kinds of foods flow down to earth. There were all of kinds of meats; clean and unclean. The LORD told Peter to eat all of them. But Peter, on the basis of Leviticus 11, refused. He insisted, “**I can’t eat anything unclean.**” Then the Word of the LORD spoke to him, “**Do not call anything God has made unclean!**” God does not make unclean things. Everyone is important to God. God loves all people. Shouldn’t we?!!!

Consider how the following verses show us from a different perspective that God is not prejudice towards any group of people. Matthew 5:45 shows us that God makes it rain on the just and the unjust. God is concerned for the physical needs of all people, not just some. In Romans 10:13 Paul proclaims that everyone who calls on God in faith will be saved. The prophet Isaiah writes in his book, chapter 49:5-6, that God sent the Messiah to bring salvation to the Gentiles, too. The messiah is not for just the Jews, but God sends the Savior for all people. And in Athens Paul reminded the Greeks in Acts 17:24 that God is the creator of all; we all come from common ancestors. One nation is no greater or important than another to God.

On Judgment Day, God will not condemn anyone because of his or her sex, age, skin color, nationality, or race. Anyone who will be sent to hell will be sent because he personally rejected Jesus Christ as his LORD and Savior who died for his sins and rose again. God does not show favoritism.

When you and I believe that God has washed away our sins with the precious, innocent blood of His Son Jesus, without any merit or worthiness on our part, we become a child of God. Our becoming part of God's family has nothing to do with us: it's by God grace through faith alone. As a member of God's family it is "like father like son or... daughter." Our Heavenly Father shows no prejudice, neither should we! If we are truly like our Father, we will not discriminate or show favoritism.

When we believe the Gospel message of God's love for us, we are free to resist the temptations of prejudice and discrimination. According to St. Paul in Galatians 3:26-29, through faith in Jesus we realize He is the Savior of all people and all believers are one. **"There is neither Jew or Greek, male or female, free or slave. We are all one through faith in Jesus."** Now if we are one through Jesus, how can we treat a fellow believer with prejudice because his skin color, language, nation of origin, sex, age, or race is different?

The temptation to discriminate and treat others with prejudice will assault us throughout our lives. But there is a sure way to resist it and overcome it. Do you know the best way to defend ourselves against sins of prejudice? Be in the Word and walk with Jesus. Read the Word daily. Everyday ask God in prayer to give you the strength, wisdom, courage, and love to accept all people, to love all people, to forgive all people, to rid yourself of resentment, grudges, and feelings of contempt, and to be free from temptations to stereotype others. Ask God to teach you to love and treat others as Jesus loved and treated others. Strive to imitate Jesus in your treatment of others, especially those who may look or talk differently than you.

Remember prejudice and discrimination hurt; they are painful and can crush one's self-image and sense of self-worth. For a Christian to be prejudice, there is an even bigger risk. Our acts of prejudice just might put up barrier that prevents an unbeliever from accepting the Gospel's message that Jesus Christ died for his sins; or destroy the new faith of someone who was born different from us, resulting in his being lost on Judgment Day. Would you

like to explain to God on judgment how your act of discrimination killed the faith of a new, a struggling, or a fellow Christian!

Perhaps no one knows the pain of racial prejudice more clearly than Caucasian sociologist John Howard Griffin. In 1959 John shaved his head and took a medically approved drug that darkened his skin pigmentation so that he looked like an Afro-American. He learned to speak in a black southern dialect and disguised himself as a Black American. He then lived in a black neighborhood, hung around with Black Americans. But when he went to white establishments where he was formerly accepted and welcomed, he experienced mistreatment and discrimination from his fellow white Americans solely because they thought he was black. He wrote about his first hand painful experiences of racial prejudice in a book entitled, *Black Like Me*.

Praise God for men like Martin Luther King who worked tirelessly to open the eyes of all Americans and lead us to work for equality for all people regardless of their race, sex, age, or nation of origin. Let us keep that momentum going and not show discrimination towards others. Let's show God's love for all men in our love for others. Let us strive to fulfill our Lord's command to love one another.

Remember, brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus did not just die for people of European descent, rich people, people with straight hair, Americans, or Lutherans; Jesus died for the sins of all people. If we have been prejudice in the past, let us repent and live a new life. Peter teaches us that with God there is no favoritism, no discrimination, or no prejudice. Do your believe this. Your life will tell if you **really** do! May our lives truly give glory to God! Amen.