

PREJUDICE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

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Introduction

Most folks have an understanding of the word prejudice. Those of us who were around during the civil rights era can remember some of the intense issues, conflicts and emotions of that time and how they have changed and shaped our culture and society, even today. We continue to see prejudice in various intensities and manifestations against Jews, Arabs, blacks, whites, Christians, social classes, educational backgrounds, etc., etc. The fallen world in which we live is full of prejudice, and this prejudice lives on in spite of efforts to educate, motivate and manipulate the minds of the masses. The racial prejudice of the civil rights era may have changed, but the core issues are still present. Human differences still fuel prejudice.

My concern is related to another type of prejudice . . . one which is more subtle and in my estimation, more dangerous and far reaching than the other. Where the first type is primarily concerned with natural differences and is largely on a fleshly level, the second is on a spiritual plane and has a broader effect on the lives and welfare of entire cultures and nations of people. This is the area of prejudice in the body of Christ.

The body of Christ is riddled with denominations, sects, philosophies and doctrines that espouse separation and isolation from other believers who are “in error.” I’ve heard of churches splitting because of a disagreement about the fellowship lunch menu or other equally trivial reasons. I know Pentecostals who think Baptists are unspiritual, Charismatics are fleshly, Methodists are dead, etc. Then consider what these others say about those silly Pentecostals. If you’ve been a Christian for more than a day you know what I’m talking about. The body of Christ has literally torn itself apart in the name of God. Prejudice has taken and continues to take its toll.

Definition of prejudice: (1) preconceived judgment or opinion, (2) an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge, (3) an instance of such judgment or opinion, (4) an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics.

Everyone knows that the devil is the “accuser of our brethren” according to NT scripture (Rev. 12:10). That passage shows the devil standing before God and bringing criminal charges against the saints day and night. Then the devil is thrown out and down from his seat of accusation to the earth, where he attacks the children of the woman who had given birth to the man child. I’ve leaned on this scripture for years, using it to explain that the devil is accusing brethren with other brethren, so it’s because of this demonic attack that the body is in the shape it’s in. Sounds good, but it’s not scriptural. Rev. 12:10 is the only NT scripture that defines the devil as the accuser of our brethren, and it is talking about the devils’ accusation of the saints before God. Paul states in I Cor. that the strife and enmity in the body of Christ (in Corinth) is the result of immaturity and fleshly carnality. It’s easy to blame the devil, but it’s harder to take responsibility and agree that the divisions among us are because of our own envy, lust and immaturity.

I’d like to add one more thought to this. Proverbs 29:18 says “When there is no vision, the people perish.” I believe that our culture and tradition (and, of course, the devil) has erased the real vision of God’s church from the minds of God’s people. When it is right

in our own eyes and our Christian culture to slander, suspect, doubt, separate from, or demonize any person or group who differs even slightly from ourselves, even though they claim Christ, it becomes apparent that we have veered far from the scriptural premise of the church. When we consider a building, meeting, ministry or leadership to be the church, again, we have missed it. The scriptural church is simply the family of believers in a given local area. This family loves one another, supports one another, shares life together and stands together as one unit as it demonstrates the person and precepts of Jesus to the surrounding world.

Many of us moved away from the traditional form of church structure with its obligation based form of service. We found that there was life after “church” and that we could have strong, life-giving fellowship together without the religious “form and ceremony.” We had moved a step toward “being the church” rather than “going to church” and it was (and is) life changing to many. However, I noticed that many of us had rallied around the fact that we were different and distinct from the traditional church and part of our “vision” was to oppose and perhaps bring correction to the thing we had come out of. It was easy to rally together because we had a purpose.

We were the people who were against the traditional church. Just as Hitler successfully rallied the German nation against the Jews, we were a group of Christians who were standing against the evil traditional church. Much of our conversation and energy was directed toward espousing the evils of the tradition and much of our unity was based on this “cause.” Of course, this only worked for a season and then we had to find out what we stood *for* as well as what we were *against*. Unfortunately, the hatred for the religious man-made system remained in the form of prejudice against the people who were still part of that system. Some would disagree with this statement, but let me explain how I reached the conclusion.

I don't listen too much to what people say. I look at what they do. This is a much more accurate gauge of what is really going on. Most Christians have been trained to answer the questions correctly. So have other religions and cultures. We are no different. So . . . if people say that they love their brothers and sisters, but never have any association with them . . . Hmm. If they say they want to build the body of Christ and glorify God by standing in unity together, but have suspicion and criticism of others who may have a different vision . . . Hmm. Anytime you hear a statement like “I appreciate those brothers, BUT . . .,” listen carefully and you may discern some of the reasons for the dysfunction in His body.

Please understand what I'm saying. There are serious problems in Jesus' church in America. They need to be addressed and not swept under the rug. You may need to speak out about things that are paralyzing and destroying life among God's people. But please make the distinction between the traditions and religious structures and God's precious saints. Jesus' prayer in John 17 is that they (His people) may be one as We (the Father and Jesus) are one. This is the Lord's prayer right before His death at Calvary. He is revealing the passion of His heart for his bride in this prayer. I believe it breaks His heart when he hears His people bickering, accusing, suspecting, slandering, envying, destroying one another, in His name.

This is the time of the “shaking of everything that can be shaken” and not a time to shrink back from the issues. The church in general is weak and torn, and has little relevance to society (according to secular polls.) But there is a proper way to address these very real issues in the church without increasing the dysfunction by accusing and denigrating God’s people.

I believe it gets back to the statement I made earlier about not listening to the words, but listening to the actions. If we want to make a statement that screams to be heard, it must be more than our words. It must include more than a detailed thesis on the problems. It must include something that can be seen, touched, experienced in a real demonstration in the natural realm as well as the spiritual. It is the body of Christ. Living, loving, caring, touching. Not merely theory or theology, but the literal physical and spiritual body of Jesus living out its destiny on the earth.

I’ve heard the statement “it’s not what we do, but who we are that counts.” This is part of a really needed revelation in the body that has brought release to many captives of the system of works that Christianity (or at least much of “church”) has become. It is life-changing to realize that you don’t have to do things in order to please or satisfy Him or earn His love. And that your identity is based on who you were made to be by your Father. However, once you have received this revelation, then you are free to serve, to love, to bring glory to Him. And I believe the scripture in Matthew 25 is addressed to those who walk in this revelation.

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

"All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink?

'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?

'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

"The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.'

Prejudice is based on fear and pride. Son-ship is based on knowing that you are accepted and loved totally and unconditionally by your Father. You are a son. You are free to walk in the unconditional love of God, of your brothers, of the people of the world. This is the demonstration of the Kingdom of God that is greater than any doctrinal statement. This is His heart. This is your heritage..