

## **Prejudice**

**By Paul R. Blake**

What is ignorance mistaken for reason, the first enemy of information and progress, intellectual blurred vision, the perfect combination of conceit and ignorance, the defense of the Devil, the shield of the petrified mind, the upper limit of understanding? Let me introduce you to: PREJUDICE!

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). Paul used a similar word in 1Timothy 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.” 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). Thayer defines it as, “an opinion formed before the facts are known, a pre-judgment, a prejudice” (#4299).

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. 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.” Prejudice is alive and well in South Africa, Sudan, Ethiopia, Zaire, Cambodia, South America, Iran, Iraq, Syria, et al. Prejudice is fueling BOTH sides of the civil rights debate in this country. And appallingly, it is creeping into 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. 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. But, does prejudice exist in sound churches today?

It would be helpful for us to understand that prejudice is not limited to differences in race and color alone. Lately, I have seen little racial bigotry among professed believers. 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. However, prejudice can also take the form of division based upon income, education, background, perceived intellectual level, and visible social status. These kinds of prejudices are no less sinful than bigotry over race and 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. Prejudice over income and social status seems to be the primary form that afflicted the church in the first century. In James 2:1-4: *“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, You sit here in a good place, and say to the poor man, You stand there, or, Sit here at my footstool, have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?”*

It was wrong to judge based on income in the Law of Moses. Leviticus 19:15: “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”

It was wrong to judge based on social status in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 1:17: *“You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment is God’s...”*

It is wrong in the New Testament to judge based on another's moral background. Paul told the Romans that there is no respect of persons with God (2:11), and then went on to rebuke the Jews for boasting about the Law and looking down on the Gentiles for their former spiritual condition (2:17-25).

In fact, the Psalmist uses the example of God to teach us that the high minded know God only at a distance, and the humble are respected by the Lord. Psalm 138:6: *"Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar."* Solomon said in Proverbs 24:23: *"These things also belong to the wise: It is not good to show partiality in judgment."*

James calls prejudice a sin. *"But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors"* (2:9). Understand that one can live an exemplary life in all points except that he loves half of his brethren and turns up his nose at the other half, and he will go to Perdition for it. Peter's apostleship did not exempt him from condemnation for his bigoted behavior. *"Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy"* (Gal. 2:11-13).

Gentle Reader, our Lord 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). Would He be pleased with Christians today who revive differences between brethren over race, background, income, education or status?

Prejudice is condemnation without investigation. It is a great time-saver; it allows us to develop convictions without gathering the facts. Prejudice is a witness to witlessness. One writer records: "light travels at extraordinary speed until it reaches the human mind." 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.

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." 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." How can the love of God abide in our hearts if we are respecters of persons? 1John 4:16, 19-21: *"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."*