

Accept One Another 06-21-20

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 15:7

Unfair discrimination was a problem in the early church. In Acts 6:1 we read of a “*complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists*”; in Acts 11:2 Peter had baptized the Gentile Cornelius, and other Christians “contended with Peter.....saying *“You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!”*. Years after Pentecost the issue of race caused “*no small dissention and dispute*” as to whether Gentiles needed to live as Jews in Acts 15:2.

The issue of prejudice was a significant problem in the New Testament church, and remains a problem among the world and even among brethren to this day. To this end Christians are given the commandment in James 2:1 : “do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism”. James goes on to describe a situation where a man is treated favorably for his wealth, and another unfavorably for his poverty. James summarizes the situation with this condemnation: “have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?”

Is discrimination itself a sin? No, it is not of itself sinful. In fact we are repeatedly commanded to discriminate based on spiritual factors. Christians are commanded to “*examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). But in that discrimination we are forbidden to make judgments based on irrelevant factors; Jesus commanded His disciples: “*do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment*” (John 7:24). There we see that there are two types of discrimination: worldly discernments and spiritual judgments. One is sinful, and one is required of disciples of Christ.

Discrimination based on superficial distinction is a work of the flesh. Consider what this means; prejudice like racism is just like lust or covetousness. It is based in a fleshly desire. As Christians we constantly war against the flesh; one battles this by spiritual inclinations (Galatians 5:14-17). This is important; we must accept that as a work of the flesh, we all battle it (again, just like lust or covetousness). None can say “not I” when it comes to prejudice; all of us are susceptible to this temptation (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Once we acknowledge that prejudice is a work of the flesh, it becomes clear that it absolutely infects our society at all levels (lust or covetousness). People who are not spiritual are going to be affected by unlawful discrimination, and the resulting consequences of worldliness. James tells us that worldly wisdom creates strife and envy.

This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. James 3:15-16

Galatians 5:19-21 teaches on the works of the flesh. There we read that these works include “*enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions*”, all of which are present when sinful prejudice is present.

At the root of the issue of things like racism, classism and other forms of sinful discrimination is that root of almost all evil: **selfism**. It is part of the natural man (the one who is not spiritual) to want to be surrounded by similar things. We want a church like us, friends like us, and a world that is like us. Some even make God in their image, imagining that God reasons all things as they do.

Jesus said that His disciples need to watch (self-examine) and pray not to fall into temptation from worldly things (Mark 14:38). Scriptures tell us repeatedly that we need to consider others (Hebrews 10:24) and work on the ways we might not offend others (1 Corinthians 10:32). Finally, we must teach the only solution to the root of the problem is the Gospel, which is God's work to unify all men in Him (Romans 1:16, John 17:22).