

Prejudice and Peace

Prejudice: an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge

an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (Ephesians 4)

Since time began, we have had to live with the poisonous practice of prejudice. Most wars in our history have been started because of prejudice and hatred. The Holocaust came from this same poison and so did slavery. Some women look back and decide to hate all men because women were treated unfairly in the past. Whites and First Nations peoples often have similar negative reactions to one another, not based on what has been done by someone today but rather based on their race and what happened years ago. We see how someone from Asia drives and we have a negative reaction about all Chinese people. We dislike certain government decisions and we judge all those in power as being corrupt and uncaring. We smell certain unfamiliar smells and we turn up our noses as though we are superior and what is familiar to us is therefore better. We see something on television about an ethnic group such as the Sikhs or Spanish and we immediately respond with some thought or comment that makes that whole group of people less than or worse than us. Since September 11 members of the Muslim community have suffered many injustices because a small minority of individuals carried out horrible crimes. The poor judge the rich and the rich judge the poor. People from the East Side have opinions about those who live in other neighborhoods and vice versa. If someone at one drop-in center treats us in a way that feels unfair we judge the entire group and say angry things about them or go somewhere else. The list is endless.

You and I may not agree with everything another person believes or does, but we have no right to hate him because of it, and we certainly shouldn't mistreat him. God never told us we have to approve of everyone's beliefs, choices, and actions, but we are commanded to love everyone. God hates sin, but He loves every sinner. He hates stubbornness and rebellion, but He loves the person who is stubborn and rebellious.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5)

One reason for prejudice is past injustice done to us or to someone we love. None of us are 100 percent correct. None of us can go back and undo the past. No matter how much we would like to, it's impossible to correct the great wrongs of history. Only God can redeem the past. Only God can bring the healing and restoration we need. We have to stop taking inventory of all we or our ancestors have lost and stop blaming other people groups for taking away our way of life. Injustice has been a part of our sinful world from very early on and that's unlikely to change. The one true source of healing and help for anger and bitterness and prejudice is seeing our own sinfulness and God's unending forgiveness. Just because someone sins in a way that is different from us or done to us does not make their crime worse. We all stand guilty and God accepts all of us, offering forgiveness and healing and restoration to all.

Examine yourself in this area...and be honest. Are you prejudiced? Are there areas in your life where you've allowed hatred to rule? Pray sincerely and ask God to remove those feelings. We all need to realize that we are no better than anyone else. We are all equal in God's eyes. We've all done

wrong and God stands willing to forgive us our sins as we forgive others who have sinned against us.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6)

A second reason for prejudice is our fear and insecurity around difference. God delights in diversity and the many expressions of life that each culture demonstrates. We often respond with fear and anger and prejudice because we fear change or don't know what to do with something new. We respond with insecurity and fear that uses words of judgement and prejudice. We make opinions and assumptions based on the limited information we have in our own culture and don't realize that there is so much more of God's goodness to express than any one culture can contain. Unfamiliar is not inferior it's simply different. If we can celebrate our own life as a gift from God, then we can celebrate God's life that is also expressed in cultures that are quite different from ours. It's not "either/or" with God, it's "both/and." Can we widen our arms to accept and love all God's children?

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. (1 John 3)

A third source of fear that gets expressed in prejudice is the false assumption we carry that others can give or take away our quality of life. Our life comes from God. God is the source of who we are and the quality of life we enjoy. It is God who offers us life and who sustains our life. Much of our anger and hatred is directed at people who seem to threaten our way of life as though they have power to give or take away our life. The problem is not the decision of others who seem to have power over us but our own co-dependent way of trying to trust and find what we need from someone other than God. The Bible talks about idols and they are not simply images of

stone that we worship. Idols are anything in which we place our hope and trust rather than turning to God for help and living securely in God's promised care for us.

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." (Job 1)

But seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6)

Every person is created by God, and God said that everything He made was good. Remember, our enemy is not other people. The enemy we face is hatred, prejudice, and the evil that causes them. We need to be determined to walk in love, waging war against hatred. Love is always the best way to fight back. We do not have to wait for someone else to change their behaviours before we can live in peace. God has the healing and the forgiveness we need so we can walk in love and acceptance and can truly be people who bless and release love and healing into our world rather than continuing the cycle of anger, hatred and violence.