

The Roots of Prejudice

If we want to unlearn our prejudice we need to understand its roots and its impact. This is what we will do this week and then next week we will explore the solutions.

Acts 6:1

NIV In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

NLT But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

Prejudice and discrimination was something the early church had to deal with. This was a time of revival yet there was still discrimination.

Multiple causes of prejudice can occur at the same time. This happens at an individual level and also at a societal level. (Gordon Allport in his landmark book, *The Nature of Prejudice*). In fact, many societies have multiple prejudices, such as gender prejudice against female members, racial prejudice against people of colour, and religious prejudice against Catholics or Jews.

There are different types of racism. There is structural racism which is to do with the way in which society is structured. There is institutional racism which involves the placing of ethnic minorities at a lower level through systemic policies along with economic and political structures. There is also covert racism which is very subtle. You can be a citizen in your nation but feel like a second class citizen. All prejudice involves lies. The enemy can whisper a lie to someone and this spreads to a nation. The term micro aggressions was coined in 1970 speaking of insults that are continuously used against minorities.

This prejudice manifests differently ranging from discrimination to continuous teasing and aggressive hostility, to genocides. There is a link between the spirit of racism and the spirit of death.

Extreme forms of discrimination include genocide, the deliberate killing off of a racial, religious, political, or cultural group. More subtle forms include exclusion from social activities and consistently biased media portrayals in newspapers, movies, television programs, and radio talk shows.

Useful archetypes or generalisations. Not all generalisation is bad. Clothing stores take this into consideration e.g. men and height. E.g. me being asked about Pork when booking a venue for a couples breakfast e.g. Vietnamese using warm water near child birth. This becomes useful information. Ask questions but DO NOT to assume.

What did Jesus do? Jesus challenged racial mindsets (Samaritan, Centurion, Kids etc)

He treated children differently.

Luke 18:15-17 Now people were even bringing their babies to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them. And when the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, if anyone does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child, he will never enter it."...

Jesus didn't get into a war of words but rather modelled the correct behaviour. He affirmed the children who had been rejected and they became the standard for entering the kingdom. He did the same thing when it came to the Centurion. The Jews felt hard done by the Romans yet that was the person Jesus praised the most. Are you willing to praise an MP from another political party? Are you willing to acknowledge the brilliance of a soccer player who is from a team you don't like?

Mt 8:5-13 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. 6 "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly." 7 Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?" 8 The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that moment.

Key Words and Questions. Examine yourself with regards to these key words. Is your heart pure and Godly toward others? What is Jesus' heart in these areas and how is it different to the prevailing culture?

Attitude: A mental position regarding a particular fact or topic.

Bias: A personal judgment, often unreasoned and prejudiced outlook.

Discrimination: Unfair treatment based on arbitrary standards or criteria.

Emotion: A strong mental reaction to something, often causing sudden behavioural changes.

Prejudice: An adverse opinion, often accompanied by irrational suspicion or hatred, formed towards a particular ethnicity, religion, or group.

Socialization: The process by which a culture is learned, usually through the influences a youth experiences while growing up.

Roots of racism, stereotyping and prejudice

When we understand how a problem was created then it is easier to find the solution. When we know how we learnt something it becomes easier to unlearn it.

1. Evolutionary and biological myths

Shiao Chong in article on a biblical view of diversity said *Race is an artificial pseudo-scientific category used to describe people who share biologically transmitted traits that are defined as socially significant. Although it is commonly believed to be a scientific 'fact', there is actually no scientific evidence to support the categorization of humanity into biological 'races' based on physical traits such as skin color, eye color and nose width. But what is even more important is that these rather insignificant physical traits are given social significance by ideology. The physical 'racial' traits only have social significance because we give them significance – they are artificial.*

2. **Collectivist Pride** – I am better than you. Pecking order. Hierarchical food chain mindset. This often results in positive stereotyping and prejudice. Some prejudices are favourable toward others, such as voting for people with similar backgrounds without knowing much about the individual person. Remember that people are not all good or all bad. In collectivist society we exaggerate our goodness and the badness of the outsider. Sadly it allows us to do bad things to outsiders and justify it e.g. its ok to steal from white people. This is a dangerous perceptual distortion. As collectivists we tend to hire people from our own families based on a positive bias that they will ever steal from us. In the USA research has found that voters consider the height of a president when choosing. This resulted in two thirds of the popular vote going to the taller president. There is the perception that the taller ones are better communicators and good in times of war. This of course is a perceptual bias. Sometimes as parents we can't believe that our child would steal. We feel we need to protect our children from the world but our kids can also influence other negatively.

Positive stereotyping - There are positive stereotypes due to ethnicity, academic qualifications or wealth. Research has shown how clever women have had to sometimes dumb down themselves (Columbia University) to be more attractive to men. This research focused on speed dating and found that women were turned on by men's intelligence or good looks but men on the other hand were turned on by women's looks but if they were clever their intelligence had to be matched by their beauty. These are all examples of irrational perceptual biases.

Only in the 1960s, though, did psychological research reveal the sad truth: basically, we persuade ourselves of their greatness, projecting virtues onto the beautiful without the slightest knowledge of whether they possess them. Study after study has since shown we assume them to be smarter, kinder, more generous and more trustworthy than their less comely counterparts—even when we have nothing more to go on than pictures of their faces. This tendency, referred to as the “what’s beautiful is good” stereotype, affects men and women; adults and children; people of every race, religion and ethnicity. It applies whether the target of our gaze is a potential mate or a prospective head of government.

Dumb blonde myth. This was disproven by Jay Zargortsky's study (Ohio State University). Another one is if you are rich you won't steal and if you are poor you will steal (but in India there are lots of poor people that don't steal. A lot of rich people steal from the poor in sophisticated ways. E.g. of another positive stereotype is that If you are educated then you won't be violent. You can be endangered by positive stereotypes. All men and women are depraved and capable of doing evil despite the glasses they wear. E.g. white people in gym kit stealing from cars outside the gym. Sometimes we have a mindset that says a man with a PHD can never do that! Collectivism can also lead to ethnocentrism (an environment in which a social group shares certain traits, such as a unique culture, common national origin, or ancestral history, and feels superior to other ethnic groups). This results in prejudice when the ingroup fears loss of status. Sadly, this fear often is the anticipation of pain and due to a scarcity mentality. We see this with the Xenophobia in SA today. This is not a new thing. In the 19th Century in America White protestant Americans hated the Chinese, Irish, Jews, and Catholics because they saw them as a threat to their livelihood and familiar way of life. Often there is fear of banishment from ones in group if one shows affiliation with the outsiders. This could come in the form of ridicule or excommunication.

3. **Fear** – Essentially this is the fear of strangers. You will fear what you don't understand. You will also avoid that which you fear. This increases the distance. Self-protective mechanism. Better the devil you know.

4. Laziness – when we are mentally and socially lazy we develop stereotypes that cause prejudice. It's easier to deal with categories and labels when we don't want to process too much information. Is this person safe or not? Well let me just group them. Safe and unsafe people and put a colour and gender to it.
5. Stress - stress causes people to view things simplistically in order to cope with the situation and seek attainable solutions. For example, in a border war between two nations, the people of one nation will view members of the other nation as strongly possessing negative traits in order to go into combat and try to kill them.
6. Transference
 "Inappropriate repetition in the present of a relationship that was important in a person's childhood."
 "Redirection of feelings and desires onto an object, particularly those unconsciously retained from childhood."
 So transference involves an Initial trauma that is projected onto the present moment
7. Economic causes – greed is a major factor in justifying prejudice. Some economists believe that this outweighs other causes. E.g. examine the growth of the British Empire. In Australia there was the desire to exterminate the Aborigines partly by integrating their children into foster homes. Benevolent authoritarianism. Today people who are greedy for tenders will quite happily create laws to protect their wealth and discriminate against others.
8. Immigration - Immigrants are frequently used as scapegoats when unemployment rises, crime increases, or the quality of education declines. Often politicians take strong anti-immigrant positions to distract voters from real political or economic problems facing society. Immigrants tend to group together and become an easier target for stereotypes. In USA last Century there was prejudice against the Irish and Italians, that gave way to prejudice against the Asians then the Hispanics and the Arabs.
9. Justification of our own hatred
10. Propaganda – this was there in liberation struggles but still there today e.g. ballet is for girls, soccer is for black people etc the consequences are not good. Do you watch FOX NEWS or CNN? Do you watch SABC or ENCA? In Zimbabwe some people call ZBC, Dead BC. Opposition politicians want to also advertise their parties. Former journalist, Donna Halpar, speaking of the American News channels, said, *By and large, what they all have in common is they are corporate— owned by major conglomerates that expect regular increases in readership, listenership, or viewership. Thus, each outlet creates what it believes will be popular and what network executives believe will get a sizable audience, as well as lots of advertising revenue.* CNN was created in 1980 by Ted Turner to be the biggest. Fox was created in the mid 90s to support republican perspectives as its media arm. The median age of those who watch it is 68 years old. It is popular amongst this group. Reporters may communicate facts but commentators might have a particular leaning.
11. Rationalisation - Rationalization means making something seem reasonable even when it is not to most people. A person persuades himself that discriminating against some group is for the good of society. E.g. Nazi Germany believing that the world and Germany would be better if it

were not contaminated by the Jews. This was the same in Southern Africa (anti communist propaganda).

12. Generationally passed on by observation (E.g. my kids asking me about guy who asked for petrol money). This also comes from teachers. We are taught who to fear. Socially learned prejudice commonly results from a young person forming ideas of other groups of people with which he has no real immediate contact. What are you passing on to your children. They are watching and seeing who you hug and who you don't; who you help and who you don't. E.g. me and Samuel (giving fuel money).
13. Media – e.g. teenagers are continuously stereotyped by adults and this is reinforced when they converse and compare notes with each other (war stories). Seen in how they are characterised in movies and book titles.
14. Relational Ease - Socialising along the lines of least resistance. We tend to migrate towards those who look, act, and think like us. Its less stressful and we assume they are more likely to accept us. We have a basic need for certainty so we do this. Unfortunately we use value equivalents based on surface level superficial factors. God is more interested in our character than our comfort.
15. Exaggeration of real localised differences - This truth provides a starting point for the specific attribute to become exaggerated and eventually leads to a prejudice. For example, we sometimes think people are so different and strange because of the food they eat in their culture. French people eating frogs or others in Africa eating intestines and tripe.
16. Psychological factors - Psychological factors related to prejudice may include fear of the unknown, of something different, or the use of others to blame for one's own misfortunes. We need to help our kids to take responsibility when they fail instead of passing the buck. Often this can result in scapegoating. Some people with authoritarian personalities tend toward prejudice. These people struggle to tolerate ambiguity or uncertainty. This explains how two people can be raised in the same family but not both end up with strong prejudices.

Acknowledgements and Recommended Reading:

"Causes of Prejudice." Prejudice in the Modern World Reference Library. . Encyclopedia.com. 18 Apr. 2018 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>.

Allport, Gordon W. The Nature of Prejudice. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1979.

Baird, Robert M., and Stuart E. Rosenbaum, eds. Bigotry, Prejudice, and Hatred: Definitions, Causes and Solutions. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1992.

Brown, Rupert. Prejudice: Its Social Psychology. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995.

Dovidio, John F., Peter Glick, and Laurie A. Rudman, eds. On the Nature of Prejudice: Fifty Years after Allport. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

<http://www.macleans.ca/society/science/the-mysterious-power-of-attractive-people/>