

The Tragedy of Prejudice . . .

Missionary James E. McEldowney writes of meeting Mahatma Gandhi in Sevagram, India, a few years before his assassination: “We sat with him on the floor in his little house. We felt very humble in the presence of such a great man. We asked him many questions about the future of India and as he replied we could see he had great plans for the country. Then we were surprised when he said, ‘I have a great respect for Christianity. I often read the Sermon on the Mount and have gained much from it. I know of no one who has done more for humanity than Jesus. In fact, there is nothing wrong with Christianity, but the trouble is with you Christians. You do not begin to live up to your own teachings.’”¹

Gandhi spoke from firsthand experience, as he had seen atrocious racism in South Africa. For instance, when Evangelist C. F. Andrews came to speak there, Gandhi attempted to go hear him—and was barred from the building because of his skin color. Regarding this incident, E. Stanley Jones commented, “Racialism has had many sins to bear, but perhaps the worst sin was the obscuring of Christ in an hour when one of the greatest souls born of a woman was making his decision.”²

*“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing his opinion.”
(Proverbs 18:2)*

The Prejudiced Personality³

Some characteristics are being . . .

- Extremely rigid
- Highly structured
- Fearful of change
- Authoritative
- Self-righteous
- Controlling
- Mistrustful
- Cynical
- Closed-minded
- Legalistic

*“We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.”
(Titus 3:3)*

Causes of Prejudice

- You may, without realizing it, attribute your own ideas, feelings, or characteristics to other people.
- You may condemn others because of regarding them as having feelings or characteristics you yourself have neither acknowledged nor resolved.
- You may be . . .
 - projecting inferior status onto others because of low personal self-worth
 - projecting selfish motives onto others because of impure personal motives
 - projecting inappropriate behavior onto others because of personal inner rebellion
 - projecting sexist attitudes onto others because of personal identity conflict
 - projecting blame onto others because of a personal need for a scapegoat
 - projecting unjust punishment onto others because of personal inner anger
 - projecting boundaries onto others because of personal loneliness and isolation

“As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man.”
(Proverbs 27:19)

Do’s and Don’ts of Acceptance

- **Don’t** judge the heart of another. (Matthew 7:1)
Do . . . Ask God to search your own heart. (Psalm 139:23–24)
- **Don’t** judge by outward appearances. (1 Samuel 16:7)
Do . . . See and seek to meet the needs of others. (Philippians 2:4)
- **Don’t** assume you can’t change your attitudes. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
Do . . . Assume the responsibility to change your thinking. (Romans 12:2)
- **Don’t** react when others are prejudiced against you. (1 Peter 3:8–9)
Do . . . Be prepared to suffer the painful effects of prejudice for the cause of Christ. (Matthew 5:11–12)

Key Verse to Memorize

“He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”
(Ephesians 2:14)

Key Passage to Read and Reread

2 Corinthians 5:16–19

Pulling Up the Roots of Prejudice

Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict the heart of your prejudiced friend or loved one.

Prepare to challenge prejudice when it occurs.

Persist in correcting false generalities made about others.

Purpose to keep the conversation based on facts rather than on emotions.

Point out only factual information.

Profess the fact that you are not knowledgeable in certain areas and be willing to be vulnerable.

Present God’s perspective on the intrinsic value of all people.

Promote fellowship with others who are not prejudiced.

Perceive the unmet needs that prejudicial attitudes are feeding.

Plant the seeds of Christ’s love and His ability to meet all our needs.

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”
(Hebrews 12:14–15)

Have a Heart of Equality

Express God's perspective on the equality of all people. (Galatians 3:28)

Quit the tendency to stereotype any persons different from yourself.⁴ (James 2:1)

Understand the God-given worth of all human beings. (Genesis 1:27)

Accept your personal God-given worth based on your position in Christ. (Ephesians 1:7–8)

Learn that prejudice is a product of irrational stereotypes and emotionalism, not a result of rational reasoning. (1 John 2:9)

Invest in others by having a servant's heart toward everyone.⁵ (Mark 10:45)

Turn from judging others to self-examination. (Matthew 7:4)

Yield in obedience to the nature of Christ living within you. (2 Peter 1:3–4)

Related Topics . . .

- Anger:
Controlling the Fire Within
- Forgiveness:
How to Forgive . . . When You Don't Feel Like It
- Pride & Humility:
The Prescription for "I" Strain
- Reconciliation:
Restoring Broken Relationships
- Rejection:
Healing a Wounded Heart
- Victimization:
Victory Over the Victim Mentality

1. Quoted in James McEldowney, "My Visit with Mahatma Gandhi," in *Gateway to India: Children's Stories* (Bradenton, FL: n.p., 1997), <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~pm9k/jem/words/gandhi.html>.

2. Quoted in Jim Conway, *Making Real Friends in a Phony World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 72.

3. For this section see James E. Dittes, "Prejudice," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, ed. Rodney J. Hunter, H. Newton Malony, Liston O. Mills and John Patton (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 946.

4. For this section see Conway, *Making Real Friends in a Phony World*, 71.

5. For this section see Dolphus Weary and William Hendricks, *"I Ain't Comin' Back"* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 134.

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