

6. Ethnicity and Discipleship

Biblical material: Matt. 15:21-28; Luke 7:1-11; John 1:3; Acts 10:28, 34, 35; 11:25-30.

Quotes

- Capitalism knows only one color: that color is green; all else is necessarily subservient to it, hence, race, gender and ethnicity cannot be considered within it. *Thomas Sowell*
- Do not ghettoize society by putting people into legal categories of gender, race, ethnicity, language, or other such characteristics. *Preston Manning*
- Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war and until there are no longer first-class and second-class citizens of any nation, until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes. And until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race, there is war. And until that day, the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship, rule of international morality, will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained... now everywhere is war. *Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia*

Questions

How are we to treat issues of ethnicity as disciples of Jesus? Why is this such an important issue in today's world? Why is race such an important tool in the hands of the Enemy? How does the example of Jesus help us relate to such questions? How much do we as disciples of Jesus become involved in the political aspects of ethnicity?

Discussion/ Comment

On the Canaanite Woman (Mt. 15:21-28): "Despite coming from a despised nation that had a long history of enmity with Israel, despite being ignored at first by Jesus, despite the attitude of the disciples, even despite Christ's own words to her at first, she knew that Jesus was her only hope. Perhaps it was a tenacity born out of desperation. Who knows? But in the end, we are all just as dependent upon Christ, whether we acknowledge it or not." *Tuesday's lesson.*

How does it seem for Jesus to apparently imply the Canaanites were "dogs"? This seemingly harsh statement that has a basis in ethnicity is a challenge. Yet the woman, perhaps used to the perspective, is not "fazed" by this, and insists that even the dogs can eat up the crumbs that fall from the table. Jesus' response makes it clear that his challenge was to see how much the Canaanite woman was herself prejudiced! Her answer is a convincing example of winsome acceptance of others who are "different." She receives what she requests because of persistence, despite an appearance of resistance on the part of Jesus. Note this from DA 400-1:

"Christ did not immediately reply to the woman's request. He received this representative of a despised race as the Jews would have done. In this He designed that His disciples should be impressed with the cold and heartless manner in which the Jews would treat such a case, as evinced by His reception of the woman, and the compassionate manner in which He would have them deal with such distress, as manifested by His subsequent granting of her petition.... She was looked upon as a dog, and had she not then a dog's claim to a crumb from His bounty?"

Similarly in the case of the centurion who sought healing for his servant, Jesus expresses his astonishment at such faith. This confident trust shown in Jesus by foreigners is a continuing gospel theme. As the "chosen people," this was a challenge to the Jews, and brought much

antagonism. Yet even though Jesus came first to his own people, he made it clear that ethnic superiority was offensive to God. And in the end, Jesus had to tell his own, who had not received him, that their house was left to them “desolate.” What a tragedy for those who were supposed to represent God truly to the rest of the world. Peter with his vision of the sheet with unclean beasts needed to learn the lesson that God does not have favorites, and that he wishes all to come to him for healing salvation.

When it comes to representing the truth about God and his character, does it seem that some nations are more accepting? Are their national traits that lead to general attitudes and decisions? If so, how do we combat such “traits” so that each one can make an informed decision about God? How do we best represent God to the *whole* world?

We all have discriminatory tendencies, and we reflect the ideas of our own societies. Yet the Bible tells us that there is no Jew nor Greek. In the context of the great controversy we see that racial hatred is just another of the Deceivers lies, another way to sow tares among the wheat are create conflict and chaos. Our role is to demonstrate these fundamental truths that rise above such distractions, and reveal the God who is the creator of all, and father of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Only as the truth of God prevails can we have true unity and harmony, only by this God-given love for each other with all people know we really are God’s disciples.

Ellen White Comments

For many years I have borne a heavy burden in behalf of the Negro race. My heart has ached as I have seen the feeling against this race growing stronger and still stronger, and as I have seen that many Seventh-day Adventists are apparently unable to understand the necessity for an earnest work being done quickly. Years are passing into eternity with apparently little done to help those who were recently a race of slaves.

One of the difficulties attending the work is that many of the white people living where the colored people are numerous are not willing that special efforts should be put forth to uplift them. When they see schools established for them, when they see them being taught to be self-supporting, to follow trades, to provide themselves with comfortable homes instead of continuing to live in hovels, they see the possibility that selfish plans will be interfered with--that they will no longer be able to hire the Negro for a mere pittance; and their enmity is aroused. They feel that they are injured and abused. Some act as if slavery had never been abolished. This spirit is growing stronger as the Spirit of God is being withdrawn from the world, and in many places it is impossible now to do that work which could have been done for the colored people in past years.

Much might have been accomplished by the people of America if adequate efforts in behalf of the freedmen had been put forth by the Government and by the Christian churches immediately after the emancipation of the slaves. Money should have been used freely to care for and educate them at the time they were so greatly in need of help. But the Government, after a little effort, left the Negro to struggle, unaided, with his burden of difficulties. Some of the strong Christian churches began a good work, but sadly failed to reach more than a comparatively few; and the Seventh-day Adventist Church has failed to act its part. Some persevering efforts have been put forth by individuals and by societies to uplift the colored people, and a noble work has been done. But how few have had a part in this work which should have had the sympathy and help of all! {9T 204-5}