

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/30/2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, May 31 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, ask God to bring unity to our world. Pray that the Holy Spirit might show us how to break down divisions in ways that raise up commonality. Ask that all might find oneness in the love of God that overshadows any separations that exists today.*

In John 8:32, Jesus says, “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” What He didn’t say, but what every Christian should know is that first it will make you angry. The truth, when it is different from our personal beliefs, will upset us as we try to rationalize those beliefs that we hold dear. These may be things that we learned from parents or are just part of our culture, but when the truth of God’s word confronts us, Christians may find themselves having to make a choice—cling to dearly-held teachings or let go and accept the truth of what the Bible really tells us.

The late Bob Jones, who founded the conservative Bob Jones University in South Carolina, once said in a 1960 radio talk title “Is Segregation is Scriptural?” that “God is the author of segregation,” and that segregation was part of “God’s established order.” The Jews in Biblical times seemed to support this idea in their actions. Indeed, there are places in the Old Testament that forbid Jewish men from marrying foreign women (Nehemiah 13:23-30). Samaria in the Bible was a region assigned to those who were the descendants of mixed racial heritage. Jews believed that Samaritans were unclean and did all that they could to avoid contact with them. There are many Christians today who continue to advocate the separation of races and cultures.

Jesus, however, ignored that racial discrimination, though it often got Him into trouble with the Jewish religious leadership. Jesus met with a Samaritan woman at a well and, through her, invited an entire Samaritan village into faith in Him. One of Jesus’ parables made a Samaritan the hero or exemplary model to be followed, in contrast to Jewish characters in the stories. The Parable of the Good Samaritan tells of a Samaritan who helped an injured man who was ignored by both a Jewish Pharisee and a Jewish priest. When Jesus healed ten lepers, Jesus praised the one who returned to give thanks Jesus and praise to God, noting that of the ten, he was a Samaritan. The truth is that Jesus did not observe and even broke down the societal restrictions between cultures.

Paul also challenged the divisions between Jews and Gentiles, inviting all to become part of the Body of Christ which is the Church. In several of his writings, Paul states that “there is not distinction between Jew and Greek (Gentile)” (Romans 10:12-13), and that “there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gentile)” (Galatians 3:28) in God’s eyes. Paul makes it clear that for Christians, all that matters is that a person has faith in Jesus Christ and that all believers are one in Christ Jesus.

Such teachings from scripture are likely to make some Christians angry. They may seek to somehow prove or at least hold on to the belief that some races or cultures are superior to others. Therefore, they believe, there should be separation between them, with the “inferior” ones held back, isolated, and controlled. Yet the truth is that God made all the races and loves all of them equally. Jesus died, not just for some, but for all, and prayed that “they may all be one” (John 17:21). The truth that can anger, but might ultimately set us free from the kinds of divisions and fear that seem to so control our world is, as Paul says in Romans 2:11, “God shows now partiality.”

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey