

## RACISM AND THE CHURCH

Dear Brother: Thank you for writing and sharing with me your thoughts about racism and the church. Yes, it is true that many of our congregations in the South did practice segregation in the century following the Civil War. But so did other religious bodies. It was a situation that grew out of the suffering and bitterness of that bloody conflict. That does not make it right nor excuse the fact but it just reminds us that our brethren were struggling with the same worldly pressures and problems as were all others.

We can either dwell on the mistakes and sins of the past or we can rejoice over the progress that has been made in the last 50 years. The great majority of those White brethren who failed to extend full fellowship to Black Christians are now dead. They will stand before God and receive their reward. The generation in which I grew up realized the mistake that had been made and corrected their attitude and conduct. Today, one would be hard pressed to find a church of Christ whose policy is not to accept Black Christians in full fellowship. That you might find a scattered few exceptions does not negate the greater good. If we look hard enough we can even find Black Christians who hold racist attitudes toward Whites. I have encountered a few such.

While virtually all White congregations would gladly welcome Blacks in their midst, I find that most Black brethren prefer to worship in a predominantly Black congregation. I do not take exception to this, I feel that they have that freedom in Christ to choose where they wish to worship. The important fact is that they are welcomed in our midst should they wish to worship with us.

To dwell on past wrongs and to refuse to accept the positive changes and move on in joyful fellowship and service will not solve problems nor edify those who do so. The wrongs were done in large part to folks now deceased by folks now deceased. Those now living did not enslave Blacks. The vast majority of those now living did not participate in segregation. In fact most of those in the church of today have gone out of their way to be cordial, friendly and helpful to their Black neighbors.

It is true that there was a time when Black students could not enroll in Christian Schools. But that time is past. They now can enroll in any of our schools. There is often assistance available for the cost of their education. To me that is a wonderful blessing and every student who desires to pursue a higher education should grasp the opportunity to enroll rather than burn with anger about wrongs committed 40 or more years ago..

I was privileged to meet and hear Bro. Marshall Keeble on a couple of occasions. I have his books and have read his biographies. Several graduates of his school have held meetings where I have preached. He was one of our greatest preachers and a great servant of the Master. He made the best of the difficult circumstances in which he found himself and accomplished more for Christ than most men of his day and since. We should reflect and ask ourselves how we would have proceeded had we been in his place? Many of the congregations that now exist among our Black brethren owe their existence to the labors of Bro. Keeble. You might wish to compare the accomplishments of his critics to those of Bro. Keeble. I think it would be an eye-opener. It was Bro. Keeble who inspired me to want to work to overcome the barriers between the races. I first heard him preach shortly after I was baptized into Christ.

You say that the gap between White and Black churches of Christ is widening daily, but the fact is that virtually all White churches are working to close the gap. If the gap is spreading, who is causing this to be?

I am sure that you could cite some cases of racism. I could recount some bad experiences I have had with Black people. I cannot however let that keep me from loving my neighbor as my self (Matt. 22:39) and treating all folks, including my Black brothers, as I wish to be treated myself (Matt. 7:12). Any person of any race or nation, should he search for it, could find some case in the past 200-300 years where either he or some of his ancestors suffered wrong or harm at the hands of someone of another race, tribe, or nationality. How he handles that past wrong will in large measure determine whether he will be happy, self-reliant, productive in life and at peace with himself and his fellow-man.

You are my brother in Christ. I love and respect you although I have never met you. May God hasten the day when the wounds of the past will be healed and forgotten and all His children will love each other and work together to bring the lost of all races to Christ. JHW

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