

PREJUDICE AND EQUALITY

BOOKS FROM AFTER JESUS' LIFE, THE NEW TESTAMENT: NT
BOOKS FROM BEFORE JESUS' LIFE, THE OLD TESTAMENT: OT

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO RACISM

Christians are against racism, Jesus said, 'Do to others what you would want them to do to you.' (Luke 6:31, NT) No one would want to be treated badly because of their country, culture or appearance! Christians think that everyone should be treated equally as God created everyone in His image (Genesis 1:27, OT). "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?" (Malachi 2:10, OT) 'God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.' (Acts 10: 34-35)

It also says in the New Testament that everyone is equal: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' (Galatians 3:28, NT). Jesus said to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12: 31, NT) and it seems impossible to love someone as yourself if you treat them as having fewer rights than you.

In the Bible, Jesus tells the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37, NT). Following this, Christians think they should treat everyone as their 'neighbours' whatever their race.

It is worth mentioning that in the past some Christians have read certain passages in the Bible as supporting racism. In one story, one of the sons of Noah, called Ham, looks at Noah drunk and naked. Noah is angry and says that Ham and his descendants will be slaves of the descendants of Noah's other sons. (Genesis 9:18-28, OT) Some Christians in the past saw this as supporting slavery and treating some people as of less value than others.

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

(LUKE 10:25-37, NT)

'A teacher of the Law came up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?" Jesus answered him "What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?" The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind"; and 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'" "you are right," Jesus replied; "do this and you will live." But the teacher of the Law wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbour?"

Jesus answered, "There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by, on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Take care of him,' he told the innkeeper, 'and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him.'"

And Jesus concluded, "in your opinion, which one of these three acted like a neighbour towards the man attacked by the robbers?" The teacher of the Law answered, "The one who was kind to him." Jesus replied, "You go, then, and do the same."

NOTES:

- The attacked man that Jesus talked about was Jewish
- Both the priest and the Levite were important Jewish religious people
- Jews and Samaritans (people from Samaria) were prejudiced against each other (there was 'racial tension' between them)
- Jesus used 'extremes' to make his point that all people are neighbours to each other

WOMEN

On the one hand, some Christians think men and women are completely equal and should have equal opportunities to do anything they want. Jesus said, 'Do to others what you would want them to do to you.' (Luke 6:31, NT) It also says in the Bible: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' (Galatians 3:28, NT). Christians also believe men and women are made in 'God's image' (Genesis 1:27, OT). This suggests that they are the same in an important way.

On the other hand, some Christians believe that women should be submissive to men and that their role is to look after the family home and bring up children. For example, 'the head of the woman is man' (1 Corinthians 11:3, NT) and 'a woman should learn in quietness and full submission.' (1 Timothy 2:11, NT) These Christians might point out that it was Eve who was tempted by the Serpent to eat the forbidden fruit and so bring evil into the world (Genesis 3, OT) and that Eve was created as Adam's helper (Genesis 2:18, OT)

There is disagreement between the churches over whether there should be **women priests**. **On the one hand**, Jesus was a man and all his most important disciples (the 12 apostles) were men (4 Gospels, NT). Some Christians, including Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, think that the priest represents Jesus at communion, so has to be male as well. **On the other hand**, Jesus treated women as more full participants in society than many of the people of his day (4 Gospels, NT). After Jesus' death, the Bible says women were involved in spreading and explaining Christianity, e.g. 'He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.' (Acts 18:26, NT). Also, see the first paragraph of this section for reasons why some Christians see women as equal to men in all respects. The Church of England has women priests.

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TO OTHER RELIGIONS

Christians believe that it is up to people to choose what religion they follow.

On the one hand, some Christians think that out of all the religions of the world, only Christianity is true. These Christians may recall Jesus in the Bible saying 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' These Christians might take this to say that people must believe in Jesus if they are going to get to heaven. Jesus also told his followers to spread Christianity: 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19, NT). So some Christians may try to convert people from other religions to Christianity by telling them about it. Such Christians are known as **missionaries**.

In one story in the Old Testament, God orders his people to ruin the religious buildings of their enemies. 'This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire.' (Deuteronomy 7:5, OT)

On the other hand, some Christians think that so long as people have followed the rules laid down by God - for example have been loving and forgiving - then, whatever their religion, they will be accepted in heaven. For after all, they may point out: 'Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?' (Malachi 2:10, OT). Jesus also said, 'In my Father's house are many rooms' (John 14:2) and some Christians may read this as saying that there is room for good people of other religions in heaven.

Overall, many Christians would try to treat people of other religions with respect, following Jesus' teaching to 'do to others as you would have them do to you.' (Luke 6:31)

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Christians believe that **forgiveness is important**. Many Christians believe that people cannot help but make some mistakes, so they need God's forgiveness, In the Bible, God is described as someone **'who forgives all your sins'** (Psalm 103:3, OT). One early Christian wrote in the Bible: **'If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins.'** (1 John 1:9, NT) Roman Catholic Christians confess their sins to priests who then act on God's behalf in telling them what they need to do to be forgiven. This is known as **confession**.

Christians also think that they need the forgiveness of others, as well as needing to forgive others. It says in the Bible: **'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.'** (Ephesians 4:32, NT) Forgiveness requires people to recognise that they have done wrong and feel sorry about it. Jesus says in the Bible: **'If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.'** (Luke 17:3, NT)

Jesus said: **'forgive and you will be forgiven'** (Luke 6:37, NT) so Christians also think that it is important that people forgive each other so that God will forgive them. If people do not forgive others for the mistakes they make, they will not get along - they will not be **reconciled**. Jesus said to **'love your neighbour as yourself'** (Mark 12:31, NT) and Christians may think you cannot do this if you do not forgive, especially as we seek the forgiveness of others.

So for Christians, forgiveness is important to bring people together and to bring people and God together, otherwise the bad things people do will separate them from people and God permanently.

Some Christians also think it is important to show that despite their differences the Christian Churches (e.g. Roman Catholic, Church of England, etc.) are joined together, can forgive each other their differences and can act as one Christian church. This is known as ecumenism. This thought is expressed at Communion services when the priest says, 'because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.' (1 Corinthians 10:17, NT) There is a Christian centre in Taizé, in France, where Christians from different Churches or **denominations** can worship together.