

## RESPECT OF PERSONS

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Some think that the conflict in South Africa in the twentieth century was simply a conflict between black communists and white capitalists, but it was not. The white South African government was a socialist government that regulated every aspect of society with the intention of advantaging whites. With guild laws, affirmative action laws, and minimum wage laws, for example, the white South African government ensured the dominance of white labor. However, the cost of such policies was to hinder the economic development of all of South Africa. Thirty-one years ago, Frances Kendall and Leon Louw, two white South Africans wrote:

Certainly blacks enjoy far, far less freedom than whites and, equally certain, they would be very much better off than they are now if they had the same rights as whites. But the economic activity of whites, in South Africa is extremely regulated and controlled. If all racially discriminatory legislation were repealed tomorrow, the people of South Africa would still be far from free, and our problems would still be a long way from a satisfactory solution. (Frances Kendall and Leon Louw, *After Apartheid: The Solution for South Africa*. San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1987, page 52)

Apartheid ended over twenty years ago, but trouble is again developing in South Africa. One month ago, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the government's plan to 'expropriate' the land of white farmers, without compensation, and to give it to blacks. Supporters of the policy say that this will right the wrongs of decades of injustice under the Apartheid system. Critics say it is not only unjust, but foolish, and they predict that South Africa will follow Zimbabwe into socialist misery. Now thousands of white South Africans are fleeing their homeland.

In the United States, the so-called Jim Crow laws were similar to Apartheid, and had a similar effect. The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 did away with Jim Crow laws by making it a federal crime to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Jim Crow laws did not allow the freedom to associate; the Civil Rights act does not allow the freedom to dissociate. It is as wrong for the state to force integration as it is to force segregation.

Not all forms of discrimination are wrong. God discriminates. Out of all the men of the world, God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations. He chose Isaac, and not Ishmael, to be the heir of the promise. He chose Jacob, and not Esau. Out of all the nations of the world, God, because of His promise to the patriarchs, chose Israel to be His people. (Deuteronomy 7:7, 7) He chose Israel to be His people, and he marked them by circumcision. Through Moses God gave Israel His law. God's law is a reflection of His character. It teaches man what God is like, and what He requires man what to do. The Nineteenth Psalm says, "The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes." (Psalm 19:7, 8) God gave dietary laws in order to separate Israel from the other nations. (Leviticus 20:25, 26) So, the children of Israel had to discriminate. They could not eat with Gentiles, because the food the Gentiles was forbidden to them. Although God separated the nation of Israel from the other nations, He wished for Israel to be a model for them. If the nation of Israel would obey the law of God, then the other nations would see the wisdom in it, and would adopt it as their own. (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

There are in the law of Moses six-hundred and thirteen commandments, but they can be summed up in two. Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40) The entire law of God reduces to these two commands: love God more than anything, and treat people the way you would like to

be treated. This is the essence of the law of Moses. God is more concerned with the state of a man's heart, than He is with the particulars of religious rites. Through the prophet, Isaiah, God said of the people, "With their lips [they] do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." (Isaiah 29:13) Through the prophet, Hosea, God said, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6)

Many Jews based their right standing before God on their heritage. When they came to John the Baptist to be baptized by him, he knew that their hearts were not right. He knew that they justified themselves before God, not by faith and obedience, but by their pedigree. He said to them, "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." (Luke 3:8) When they justified themselves this way before Jesus, He said to them, "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." (John 8:39)

The privileged position that Israel enjoyed became for them a source of racial pride. They regarded themselves as holy, and Gentiles as miserable sinners. When Saint Paul told a crowd of Jews that the Lord Jesus sent him to preach to the Gentiles, they became enraged and clamored for his death. (Acts 22:21, 22) They considered themselves enlightened, and Gentiles ignorant. They had pride in themselves, and contempt for Gentiles. Many Jews, however, had no personal holiness. The Lord Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees because they prided themselves on their careful observation of the law of Moses, but their hearts were far from God, and they mistreated their fellow man. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans that some Jews regarded themselves as moral guides to the Gentiles, yet hypocritically did the very things that they taught the Gentiles not to do. He wrote that some of the heathen were actually more moral than they. "But he *is* a Jew," he wrote, "which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God. (Romans 2:17-29)

Some of the religious leaders in Israel loved their religious traditions more that they loved God and man. When a lawyer tried to test Jesus by asking Him what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him what he, an expert in the law, thought. The lawyer cited the two great commandments, and Jesus told Him he was right. However, it seems the lawyer did not love all men, but only Jews, and he tried to justify himself by asking Jesus whom he should reckon as a neighbor. So, Jesus told Him the story of the Good Samaritan. A Jewish man, traveling alone, was beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the side of the road. A priest happened to come by, and, when he saw the man lying on the ground, he did not investigate, but passed him by on the other side. It seems he did not wish to defile himself, according to the law of Moses which states, "He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days." (Numbers 19:11) Then came a Levite, who took a closer look, but he also ignored the victim, and passed by on the others side. Finally, one of the Samaritans, a people despised by the Jews, found the poor man, treated his wounds, and put him up in an inn, telling the innkeeper to give the man whatever he needed, and he would pay for it all. Jesus asked the lawyer which of the three men loved his neighbor. The lawyer answered that the one who showed mercy did, so Jesus told him to do the same. The priest and the Levite were devout, but they did not understand the Scripture, which God spoke through the prophet Hosea, saying, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6)

The Pharisees believed themselves superior, not only to Gentiles, but to other Jews, as well. They did not simply believe themselves superior their kinsmen, they had contempt for them. They believed that they kept the law of God better than they. So, Jesus told of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee justified himself before God because, not only did he fast twice a week, and tithe everything that he had, but he was not, in his own estimation, a wretched sinner like the tax collector. The tax collector, for his part, would not look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus said the tax collector, and not the Pharisee went away right with God. Saint Luke records that Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. (Luke 18:9-14) The Pharisee compared himself to others; the tax collector compared himself to the law of God.

The law of God reveals to man what God requires him to do. However, man, since the Fall of Adam, is sinful, and he does not respond to the law of God as he ought. It is in the sinful nature of man, not to submit to the law of God, but to rebel against it. Even faithful Jews, under the Old Covenant, had difficulty submitting to the law. Saint Paul wrote of his own experience as a righteous Jew under the Old Covenant: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” (Romans 7:18, 19) The law of God, therefore, shows a man who he is. It shows him what is in his heart. It shows a man what is in his heart, and it is in his heart to sin. Many Jews did not understand this, however. Some Jews believed that they were righteous before God by keeping the law. They did not understand that for God to reckon a man righteous by his keeping the law, he must keep it perfectly. Saint Paul explained to the Galatians that the punishment for breaking a single law of God is death, for the law says, “Cursed *be* he that confirmeth not *all* the words of this law to do them.” (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10) They believed they could establish their own righteousness, but they could not, and so they were under the curse of God. (Romans 10:3)

Some Jews who believed in Jesus, also believed that if a Gentile would be one of the people of God, then he must become a Jew, receiving circumcision, and keeping the law of Moses, especially the dietary laws. This was contrary to the Gospel, which proclaims that “God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him,” and that “in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” (Acts 10:34, 35; Galatians 5:6) The moral law, founded as it is on the unchanging character of God, is immutable. The dietary laws, however, were temporary. With the advent of Jesus Christ, and the institution of the New Covenant, the wall separating Jew and Gentile was broken down, and the two made into one body in Christ. (Acts 10; Ephesians 2:13-16) This was difficult for some Jews to accept. Even Saint Peter wavered in his position, and, on one occasion, at least, chose not to eat with Gentile Christians. (Galatians 2:11-14) Some Jews who believed in Jesus insisted that Gentiles must become Jewish converts if they would be saved, but the Jerusalem council condemned this view. (Acts 15)

Some kinds of discrimination are good; others, evil. Saint James warned about sinful discrimination. He wrote:

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. (James 2:1-19)

Here Saint James comments on the Law of Moses which states:

Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob *him*: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I *am* the LORD. Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: *but* in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour... thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (Leviticus 19:13-15, 18)

The second greatest commandment is, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Jesus put it in other words when He said, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." (Luke 6:31) The Christian ought to be fair-minded. He ought not to treat one person well, and not another. He ought to treat all well. He ought not to favor a man because he is rich, or despise a man because he is poor. If two men enter into a church, and their clothes indicate that the one is a man of means, and the other is not, it would be a sin for the Christian to favor the one over the other. It would be a sin for him to give the rich man a good place to sit, and the poor man a lowly place. It would be wrong to pay attention to the one, and not to the other. If two men, one black, and the other white, enter into a white church, it would be wrong for a member of that church to favor the white man over the black. Or, if two such men enter into a black church, it would be wrong for a member to favor the black man over the white. To favor one over the other would be to deny that both are made in the image of God. Moreover, it would be to judge according to a man's appearance, and not according to his heart. That is not godly, "for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7) Jesus was no respecter of persons, as even His enemies acknowledged when they said to Him, "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men." (Matthew 22:16) The same principle applies outside the church. The Christian may choose his friends, but he may not choose his Christian brothers, nor his neighbors. He may choose his friends, but he may not choose to whom he would be good. If the Christian shows partiality, if he discriminates in being good to one, and not to another, in helping one, and not another, then he does not love his neighbor as himself, and he is guilty of breaking the whole law. Saint James wrote, "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." (James 2:8, 9)

Let us not show partiality by doing good to some, and not to others. Let us do good to all. Let us love our neighbors as ourselves, and so fulfill the law of God.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. *Amen.*