RACISM AMIDST GOD’S PEOPLE by Al Diestelkamp

Racism is sin! Like other sins (Eph. 5:3), it should “not even be named” among saints. But sadly—like fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness—racism occasionally rears its ugly head among us. While I have lived long enough to see significant progress in rooting out racism in the churches, I would not presume to claim that the task is complete.

To claim progress in race relations is to acknowledge a history of racism even among our brethren. The writings of some of the pioneer preachers in our nation reveal unbecoming attitudes toward black people and brothers in Christ. As late as the 1960’s and 1970’s when segregation was being debated in our nation, a few brethren were even publicly defending some of the tenets of white supremacy. Thankfully, by that time many brethren refuted their claims, and today—if any hold such views—they seldom admit it publicly.

Hopefully, most of us today wonder how gospel preachers who otherwise seemed to hold the Scriptures in such high regard tried to defend racial discrimination. The answer is that either they had to ignore or misunderstand the Scriptures. Some claimed that God created the distinct races, thus implying that He intended that they remain apart. They not only didn’t have Scripture to prove this, but it actually contradicts Scripture. It is in opposition to the biblical statements that “in six days God made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Ex. 20:11), and that Eve was so named because she is “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

While I rejoice that progress regarding racism has been made among brethren, I’ll admit that I wonder if it has come as the result of better biblical understanding, or by adapting to the cultural changes in society. I would like to think it is the former. Racism is something that is taught and learned. It is completely absent in little children unless older persons have poisoned their minds. There is truth in the lyrics of a song from the musical *South Pacific:* “You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late, before you are six or seven or eight, to hate all the people your relatives hate; You’ve got to be carefully taught.” Indeed, racism is hatred, and has no place among God’s people!

My early formative years were in the upper Midwest of our nation (Wisconsin and Minnesota) at a time when “people of color” comprised a much smaller minority, both in our neighborhoods and in the churches. My first memory of seeing a black person (other than in pictures) was when I was in the fifth or sixth grade. I knew him as brother Davis. I remember him as a very distinguished man who led eloquent prayers as he lifted his eyes toward heaven .(Yes, I was peeking). Later sister Shelton, a black woman with twin boys my age became part of the congregation. The boys, Elton and Welton, were in the Bible class with me. I mention this to note that I knew nothing about racism and segregation until we moved to the Chicago area when I was entering the eighth grade.

During my high school years in the “lily white” Chicago suburbs, I first became aware of racism in the church. At that time congregations in this metropolitan area were identified as either “white” or “colored.” After I graduated from high school, I continued to worship with the church in Berwyn, Illinois, a community known at that time as being “all white.” When I invited brethren from one of the “colored” Chicago churches to a singing in Berwyn, many black brethren came; but later some brethren rebuked me for inviting them. As much as I was disappointed then (to put it mildly), I am happy to report that today the Berwyn church is fully integrated. Furthermore, even though there is still much room for improvement, I know of no church that will not welcome people of different races.

As recent events have elevated racial tensions in our nation, Christians are called to be examples in showing love for all people, and to proclaim the truth that God, “made from one *man* every nation of mankind” (Ac. 17:26), making all of us His descendants and deserving of our love.

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LOVE…THINKS NO EVIL…BELIEVES ALL THINGS by Al Diestelkamp

Have you ever been accused of something of which you were not guilty? It hurts, doesn’t it? And no matter what you say, the accuser isn’t convinced. Such is sometimes the case with the accusation of racism. It seems that some people see a racist around every corner (or in the case of the church, in every pew). The charge of racism is a serious charge. It’s an accusation of sin. If there is evidence of bigotry, it needs to be exposed so that repentance can occur. If there is no basis for the charge, it is an unloving act. In the Spirit-inspired list of what love is—and is not (1 Cor. 13)—there are at least two characteristics that exclude false accusations:

***Love “thinks no evil”*** (v.5). In his commentary, Adam Clarke suggests this means “Believes no evil where no evil exists.” He says, “The original implies that he does not invent or devise evil; or does not reason on any particular act or word so as to infer evil from it.” *Clarke’s Commentary,* Vol. 6, p. 269.2.

***Love “believes all things”*** (v.7). About this phrase, Clarke says that the loving person, “Is ever ready to believe the best of every person, and will credit no evil of any but on the most positive evidence.” *ibid.,* p. 268.

Actually, it is not in the interest of promoting racial equality to make unfounded accusations or to *assume* that people are bigots. These only make matters worse and will inevitably delay the desired results.

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