



By Dr. Richard Youngblood

Question: This week our nation observed Martin Luther King's birthday. How can we help our children learn from and, hopefully, avoid the racial prejudice of the past?

I remember very well the days of racial bigotry and discrimination during the 1950's and 1960's. As a boy, I heard the racial slurs, witnessed the separate water fountains and public demonstrations of hatred at my high school. Although there were plenty of opportunities for me to be influenced by racial prejudices, I am thankful for Christian influences that taught me biblical attitudes. I learned that all people are created in the image of God and loved by him. Unfortunately, there were also some who claimed to be Christians who demonstrated the same prejudices and hatred as the world around them.

However, I do believe that we have made progress toward overcoming this problem since the days of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement. I have come to appreciate him more through the years as have many others. He was a courageous man. But we cannot assume such prejudices no longer impact us and our children.

Today, those of African descent are not the only racial, national or ethnic group facing prejudice and hatred. To combat such attitudes, we must be diligent in teaching our children about the way Jesus loved and respected all kinds of people. Children—in their innocence—usually do not show racial prejudice until they have come under the influence of adults with these ungodly attitudes toward others. We, as parents, can begin by following the example of Jesus in our own lives. We should teach our children that through a common faith in Christ we can be reconciled to God and live in a new relationship with our Heavenly Father (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). When we become one with God, we will find ourselves also united with each other. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female,” wrote the apostle Paul, “for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Jesus associated with, loved and valued all kinds of people. His actions sometimes meant that he broke the currently-accepted social norms with regard to race, gender, religious background, or economic and political position. For example, he stopped at a well to talk with a Samaritan woman (John 4). He visited in the homes

of both a prominent Pharisee (Luke 14:1) and a despised tax-collector (Luke 19:1-10). He healed the servant of a Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10), and he brought back to life the little daughter of Jairus, a ruler of a Jewish synagogue (Luke 8:40-56). Prejudicial people were often critical of Jesus; but this did not stop him from showing loving kindness to all people, even the people who hated him (Matthew 5:44-45).

One of the best illustrations of Jesus' attitude toward racial differences is the story of the Good Samaritan, a half-breed of both Jewish and Gentile blood. Samaritans were despised and treated with hatred by many Jews, and Jews were hated by Samaritans. In this story, a man was beaten and left for dead beside the road. The story implies that this robbed and wounded man was a Jew. Although a Jewish priest and a Levite had looked at the man and had passed by, the despised Samaritan stopped, tenderly poured oil on his wounds, bandaged him, placed him on a donkey, took him to an inn and paid for his care. Jesus, himself a Jew, told this story to the prejudiced Jewish crowd to teach them the meaning of God's command to "Love your neighbor" (Luke 10:25-37).

One mother taught her son that people are like apples. They come in all different colors, shapes and sizes. Some of these apples have been bumped and bruised. On the outside they may not look as delicious as others. When she peeled the apples and placed them on the table in different places, she said, "Now, tell me which one is the red apple, the green and the yellow apple." "They all look the same," the boy answered, "I can't tell the difference." But he took a big bite from each, and then smiling he spoke with understanding, "People are like apples! They are all different, but once you take off the outside they're pretty much the same on the inside." She saw no reason to comment further. In a similar way, Martin Luther King longed for the day when "little children will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." I believe Jesus would commend this illustration.

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