

God's Answer to Racial Profiling

We will have to wait months to find out how jurors in Florida will rule in the **Trayvon Martin** case. Did his accused assailant, **George Zimmerman**, act in self-defense when he shot the unarmed boy? Or did Zimmerman kill Martin because he just assumed any young black man walking through a gated neighborhood wearing a hoodie is a dangerous criminal?

Trayvon's case should cause all of us to check our hearts. We've all been guilty of making unfair judgments. Many of us **stereotype** people unconsciously.

Some Americans think all Mexicans are illegal and dangerous. Others think all blonde women are silly. Other people think all Arabs are terrorists, all skinny girls are anorexic, all Nigerians are con-artists, all Indians run convenience stores, all rural Americans are rednecks, all Jews are pushy, all black women are angry, all men with dreadlocks are potheads and all Italian-American teens act like the cast of *Jersey Shore*.

Yet none of these assumptions have any basis on fact. Prejudice is cruel, abusive and wrong-headed. And it can be fatal.

Stand-up comedians make us laugh at ourselves for making crazy generalizations. But the jokes are not funny when you're on the receiving end of prejudice. I've been judged unfairly before, in these ways:

- Because I am male, I am an insensitive jerk
- Because I have a Southern accent, I am ignorant
- Because I am a Christian, I am stupid and intolerant

- Because I am over 40, I have nothing relevant or valuable to share with the younger generation
- Because I am white, I am a racist.

I don't appreciate being unfairly pegged in these categories. I don't want people judging my character because of my skin color, my age, my gender—and certainly not because I refer to a group of my friends as “y'all.” All of us would prefer that people get to know us before they form opinions.

But prejudice is a monster that lives in human hearts. It is part of our sinful nature. When the prophet Samuel was looking for a replacement for Saul as king, God said of Jesse's son Eliab: “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, *for man looks at the outward appearance*, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7, NASB, emphasis added).

Man looks on the outside. That's how we are bent. But when we come to know Christ, and when He fills us with His love, we should surrender our tendency to stereotype.

Jesus was comfortable with all kinds of people who had been profiled in His culture: prostitutes, tax collectors, thieves, Romans, lepers, bleeding women, widows, centurions and blind beggars.

Yet we who call ourselves Christians sometimes still pay attention to stupid things like hoodies, tattoos, piercings, accents, body types, facial hair and veils instead of loving all people who are made in His image.

It is way past time for all of us to rid ourselves of prejudice. As long as we hold on to our stereotypes, we will repel people instead of attract them to Jesus and His message.

When the apostle Paul listed the qualifications for church leadership, he mentioned that bishops must be “hospitable” (1

Tim. 3:2). The Greek word here is *philoxenos*, and it means a whole lot more than just being willing to host a dinner. The word literally means “love of strangers.” (*Xenophobia*, on the other hand, means “fear of strangers.”)

Paul required church leaders to be free from prejudice. If we required the same today, we would raise a new standard. Leaders would confront racism from the pulpit instead of tolerating or ignoring it, and the church would become a much more welcoming place for people of all backgrounds to find the love of the Savior.

I’ve never liked the phrase “God is colorblind” because I know God created skin color, and He certainly has the ability to distinguish between varying shades of melanin. But God knows skin color has nothing to do with what is inside a person. His perception of our internal character is more accurate than any X-ray machine at an airport. He can read our motives, know our thoughts and see our hidden flaws. He doesn’t profile. Neither should we.

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