

AMERICA: THE MELTING POT

Many times throughout our lives we will hear America referred to as the melting pot. America is comprised of numerous different types of people. People have come from all over the world to live in the land of the free and the home of the brave. Many Americans can trace their ancestry back to the ancient times of Europe, Africa, South America, or Japan. We are called the “melting pot” because all these different types of people live in one land and are identified as Americans. While many other countries are comprised of people of the same heritage and background, America is full of diversity and difference. As many people view this variety as a positive aspect of our country, others see it as a disadvantage. With numerous types of people living in a close proximity, prejudice and racism has run rampant throughout the country. When someone looks different, or is not of the “European” heritage, they are many times looked down upon or even hated. These people are not disliked because of who they are as people, but rather because of their skin color. While some believe that America has changed and prejudice no longer exists, others realize that in some American hearts, hatred, disrespect, and racism still remain.

Prejudice and racism are not new concepts. They have both been around for many years. Even in the times of the New Testament, prejudice unfortunately played a large role. Before, and while Jesus was on earth, prejudice existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews were seen as the “chosen” race and they looked down upon and excluded the Gentiles in nearly all aspects of life. Peter had grown up as a Jew and had learned all the Jewish laws and customs. He had tried to follow the laws to the best of his ability. The type of food that was eaten was very important in the life of a Jew. The Jewish people wanted to separate themselves from the world in all aspects of their lives. After Christ came, all people could come to know the love of Jesus and experience His grace and mercy. Peter would soon learn that love would now outweigh the burden of the law.

PETER'S DREAM

In this text we find Peter up on the roof around noon. In those days the housetops were flat and perfect for sleeping or sitting. Of course, Peter like many of us, got hungry and was ready to eat. While he was waiting for the food, he went into a “visionary” state or, in our terms, had a dream. His dream was quite unusual for him as he saw a large sheet carried down from heaven with all sorts of animals on it. As Peter was a man of Jewish descent, he had followed the dietary laws of the Jewish tradition and had never eaten an unclean or common animal. These animals within this sheet were forbidden to be eaten by a devout Jewish man. Soon after the sheet came down onto Earth, Peter began to hear the voice of the Lord telling Him to eat of the animals on the sheet.

GOD'S DEMAND

God demanded that Peter kill and eat of the unclean animals. For many years, God had required the Jews to separate themselves from the rest of the world. The Jews were to follow the law in every area including what they ate. However, as time drew on, the Jewish people began to hate the Gentiles rather than hate the sin of the world. God demanded that Peter eat the unclean animals as Jews were becoming too legalistic and less loving. God was more concerned with the inside of the person and the type of heart that they had rather than the outward appearance of holiness. God realized that through the law, Jewish people were beginning to look down upon others who did not believe as they did rather than showing a loving attitude. When Jesus came, He fulfilled the law and thus the focus was more on the love of people rather than the legality of the law. God demanded that Peter kill and eat these unclean animals to prove to him that the Gentiles could now be accepted with the love of Christ.

OUR DUTY

We must realize that as Christians we are supposed to be set apart in the type of living that we pursue. However, our main goal is to love others despite our differences. We are to be in the world and yet we are not to be of the world. Today, many Christians end up disliking unbelievers because of their lifestyle. Jesus said we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, thus we should hate the sin, but love the sinner. We never should think of ourselves as higher than others simply because we try to live by biblical law. Our love will be the only thing that draws others to Christ. We must not condone the lifestyles or attitudes that they possess, but continue to share the love of Christ to them. God wants us to share His love with all people, regardless of their racial, ethnical, or religious background.

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