

GLASSES AND LENSES

On Prejudice.

*Taken from the book of Fr. P. Ribes, s.j. "To be Like Jesus"
Published by the Gujarat Sahitya Prakash.*

Intent of the Parable

- ✓ *To learn how prejudices are formed and transmitted.*
- ✓ *To realize that all of us are affected by prejudices of various kinds: national, cultural, social, sexual, religious, etc.*
- ✓ *To note that, without our realizing it, prejudices have a way of becoming a second nature in us.*
- ✓ *To note further that our prejudices color our perceptions of reality, condition our thinking processes, and determine the emotional and behavioral patterns of our lives.*
- ✓ *To see Christ as a man free from prejudice.*
- ✓ *To realize that in order to follow Christ we have to shed our prejudices.*
- ✓ *To honestly accept the fact that our prejudices, like our habits, die hard.*
- ✓ *To pick up courage to fight prejudice, first in ourselves and then in our society, even if this entails persecution and social ostracism.*
- ✓ *To renew and intensify our awareness that, being a man free from prejudice, Christ himself became an object of prejudice.*

The Parable.

Many, many years ago, nobody knows why and how, people began putting "specs" on every newborn child. Some specs distorted the colors. Red looked like green, black like white, yellow like blue. Worse still! Some lenses changed the very appearance of things and of people. Everybody's vision became distorted and vitiated.

As time rolled by, each country, each race, each social class, each religion began manufacturing and imposing their own brand of specs and lenses! Children, adolescents, youth, grown ups, men, women, everyone was compelled to wear his or her glasses at all times, and in all places. Nay, even the thought of taking them off was forbidden.

Tradition and authority rigidly enforced the rule: They shouted: What? Do you think of removing your specs? No! Not at all! You will never take off your glasses! It's forbidden. If you do so, you will be a traitor to our nation! You will be excommunicated from our religion! You will lose your caste!

And people conformed! At home, in the school, on the playground, in the temple, in the church, in college, in the bazaar, every body moved, lived, multiplied, and died with their glasses on. All, like sheep, toed the line. As a result, people saw things and others in different ways. The outcome was fatal!

Whites began shouting at blacks: “You blacks are lousy and dirty!”

Blacks retorted: “And you whites are exploiters and murderers!”

Brahmins yelled: “You Harijans, are inferior to us, dull and worthless!”

Harijans screamed at the Brahmins: “You, Brahmins, are proud and self-conceited.”

Atheists blew out their tops: “There is no God! You, believers, are a bunch of fools! How stupid you are to believe in a heaven up there, a pie in the sky!”

Believers rejoined: “Of course, there is God! Can’t you see the wonders of God’s creation? Have you no brains, you damn animals!”

Men sneered at women: “All of you women are useless! You are inferior to us! You are good for nothing! It’s we who work hard and built the world!”

Women snorted: “Shut up, you big mouths. You, men, are selfish brutes! You exploit us, use us, and when you don’t need us any more, you ditch us!”

The quarrelling voices of humanity kept on increasing,
The yells, the accusations and counter accusations, rose and swelled.
All over the earth one could hear yells and cries:

The Poor are lazy!
The Rich are blood suckers!
Communists, Socialists, Republicans, all liars!
Westerners! Capitalists, all robbers!
Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Madrasis, Goans, Keralites, murdabad!
Employees, Politicians, Government, Police, Exploiters!
Priests, Sadhus, and Holy Men, fakes!
Away, away with them all!

Resentments festered! Hatred increased.
Wars broke out!
Blood was spilt! Innocent people were killed!
Wives were widowed!
Children were orphaned!
The law of the jungle prevailed. Death carried the day!
The world was strewn with graveyards!!!

1. Reflection Questionnaire and Points for Discussion.

1. What do glasses of different colours do to those who wear them?
2. What do glasses stand for in the parable?
3. Applying the story to real life can you tell:
 - What are Prejudices?
 - How are they born?
 - How are they passed on from one generation to the next?
 - What are the effects of prejudice in us individuals and in the society at large?

4. Name some of the common prejudices existing in Indian society today.
5. From the way you think, feel, talk and act, can you detect some prejudices in you? Name them.
6. Can we fight against prejudices? Give some hints on how to do it.
7. Is it easy or hard to fight against prejudice? Why?
8. Can we, human beings be completely free from prejudices? Why?
9. Kindly suggest some hints on how not to act on prejudice while speaking and interacting with others.

2. Points for Teaching and Input:

First: Nature and origin of Prejudice

- The word 'prejudice' is a compound word, namely, 'pre' + 'judgment'.
- Before anything is known, examined or studied about a person or a group of persons, we already pass a judgment on them! We pre-judge.
- All men are born free from prejudice. You and I too!
- At birth, our minds are like blank slates and our hearts like virgin not tuned musical instruments. Nothing is written yet in our brains, nor any tunes or melodies yet recorded in our hearts.
- When we were born, our minds were like blank slates, blank tapes or fresh CDs.
- Everything that we saw or heard was recorded in our minds: true and false alike, objective or biased statements, accurate or distorted perceptions.
- As we grow our parents, teachers, elders and people we associate with – unawares put on us their own brand of specs
- The culture we are born in, the class and caste we belong to, the prevalent ideas of our society, our religious affiliation, our ethnicity, the media to which we are exposed even the very idiosyncrasies of our language stereotype our minds, deprive us of the freedom of thinking and, wilily nilly, condition the emotional tunes of our hearts.
- Too often when others tell us that this or that person or thing, is like this or like that, we blindly take in their opinion without ourselves critically examining it.
- Also, uncritically, we take for true what - public opinion – takes for granted.
- The recordings of the so called 'significant people' - parents, family members, close associates, teachers and friends of our tender days - are the most important and nearly indelible recordings stored in our mental and emotional tapes.
- Each one of us has been also deeply influenced in our thinking and feeling, by the social, cultural, religious, political, national and regional milieu to which we belonged and wherein we grew and lived.
- We gullibly believe as true what the ads, news papers, mass media, political heavyweights, even religious authorities tell us.
- We are so much conditioned by prejudices that we cannot see things and people as they are! We cannot feel, think and act objectively because our rigid mental and psychological processes mould our lives into fixed patterns.
- Later on in life, we keep playing back to ourselves those tapes over and over again.

- Unless we take the trouble to question – time and again - the validity of our recordings, we shall fall into the prejudices and misjudgments of those who supplied us the recordings.
- As we mature and grow up we have the duty to courageously revise and examine those recordings and our past personal perceptions and delete all that is false and biased no matter the cost or the consequences, even if we have to incur criticism and the displeasure of our friends and dear ones.
- To shed prejudices in later life is not easy. They have become to us sort of second nature. It is painful to shed them. In a way we have to die to our past.
- It's extremely difficult to die to our former selves and put on a fresh way of seeing, feeling, thinking and acting!
- If we shed prejudices, our own people will not understand us, they may even disown us. Even Jesus in this connection said that one's worse enemies are one's home people.
- By shedding our prejudices we have much to 'lose' and yet we stand much to 'gain'. It's like the cocoon that has to die to its former self in order to be born a butterfly, to a better and truer life.

Second: **Be Aware of the following Dangers!**

- **Cultural Biases:** Our perceptions, thoughts and feelings are 'culturally' conditioned. This makes it nearly impossible for us to really appreciate the values of people hailing from different cultures and religious backgrounds: their tastes, manners, artistic expressions – music, dance, poetry - even their moral values are different from ours.
- **Introjections:** Many ideologies, principles, values, postulates, etc. were swallowed up by all of us, without critical examination, especially in childhood.
- **Opinions as facts:** Many of the so called facts are not facts at all, but just mere opinions taken as facts. For example, the superiority of some races, the validity of our social structures, class distinctions, political systems, etc.
- **Parental injunctions:** Orders, commands, principles of living, rightly or wrongly, insisted upon by our elders, when we were small, still rule our grown-up lives. For example: don't waste time- all sex is bad - when asked for favors or help never say 'no' - people are out to cheat you,- poor people are lazy - hit back – be rich - make it to the top - look good , etc.
- **Fear of Change:** If we shed our prejudices we shall have to change! We are afraid of change. It brings unpredictability, doubts and anxieties. Someone remarked: "It's more comfortable to live in a known error than to search for the unknown truth."
- **Social pressures:** force us to conform to the "status quo", namely to do what is usually done, to accept what is acceptable to the majority. If we change we shall strike a discordant note, we shall be different from others, so to say, queer. One needs lots of courage to be 'oneself'.

- **Vested interest:** By keeping our existing prejudices, we have little to lose. Breaking away from them, we have much to lose: our reputation, friends, economical status, peace of mind, promotions, even our life.
- **Inborn Dishonesty:** For instance indulging in ritual protests, slogan shouting, and intellectual discussions to pacify one's conscience and doing nothing about it!
- **Blaming others:** Blaming the 'structures', the Government, the Church, etc. Also waiting for others to redress the wrongs done against those being prejudiced.

3. Personal Check

- **Are you tainted by any of the prejudices mentioned below?**
- **Check your conscience. Be honest.**
- **What can you do about them?**

Religious Prejudices:

- ✓ Believers and non-believers.
- ✓ Male and female.
- ✓ Christians and Non- Christians.
- ✓ Catholics and Protestants.
- ✓ Practicing and Non- practicing Catholics.
- ✓ Charismatic and Non-charismatic.
- ✓ Other groups and associations.
- ✓ Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jews, Parsis.
- ✓ Political ideologies, etc.

Community Prejudices:

- ✓ Malayalis and TAMILIANS.
- ✓ Goans, Mangaloreans, East Indians.
- ✓ English and Non-English speaking.
- ✓ Nationals and foreigners, etc.

Caste Prejudices:

- ✓ Brahmins and non-Brahmins.
- ✓ High castes and low castes.
- ✓ Jobs and professions.
- ✓ Social stratification.
- ✓ Intermarriages, etc.

Social Classes:

- ✓ Rich and poor.
- ✓ How do we treat our servants?

- ✓ How do we deal with poor relatives?
- ✓ How do we treat beggars, the destitute?
- ✓ How we respect and admire the wealthy?

Political and National:

- ✓ Our nation is best.
- ✓ Some countries are inferior.
- ✓ Americans, Germans, British, etc.
- ✓ Socialists, Democrats, Republicans, etc.

Superiors and Inferiors.

- ✓ How do we treat those under our care?
- ✓ Do we feel 'superior' before our inferiors?
- ✓ What attitude do we have towards authority?

Gender discrimination:

- ✓ Sex prejudices. Are men superior to women?
- ✓ How do we treat our wives, mothers, sisters?
- ✓ How do we treat women in general? Do we respect them as equals?

Rank and Prestige Prejudices:

- ✓ How do we treat the uneducated?
- ✓ Exaggerated respect given to the celebrities.
- ✓ How do we feel towards the social deviants? Thieves, drunks, drug-addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals, AIDS patients, etc.?

Legalistic prejudices:

- ✓ Do we place law above people?
- ✓ Do we allow freedom of conscience?