

Do not be a snob

A sermon preached at Poplar Baptist Church, 19th May
2019

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. (Romans 12.16)

Introduction

We started to think about this verse last week. We saw from the first part of the verse how, as believers, we are to be one in our thinking. I would like to come back to the verse today and to think about the sentence, “Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.”

The literal translation of the phrase that is translated “Do not be proud” is “Do not be high minded”. The King James Version translates it “Mind not high things.” The New King James Version says, “Do not set your mind on high things.” The New American Standard Version “Do not be haughty in mind.” The ESV simply says, “Do not be haughty”.

The apostle is urging his readers not to set their minds on the high things of this world, and the high people of this world. In colloquial terms he is saying, “Do not be a snob”.

Snobbery should have absolutely no place in the thinking and behaviour of a Christian.

There are various forms of snobbery.

First of all there is what we might call “practical snobbery.” This is where a person considers some tasks to be beneath him. “Oh”, he says, “you would never find me cleaning toilets.”

There is social snobbery, whereby a person pays a particular interest in those people whom he considers to be important, and treats with contempt those whom he considers to be less important than himself. Such a person judges everyone he meets according to a scale.

Immediately he comes into contact with each person he makes an evaluation, based upon the way the person speaks, or the vehicle he gets around in, or the way in which he dresses, or the level of education that he displays. He places that person on a scale relative to himself. The person who scores more highly than himself he treats as “important”, and somebody to whom he should be ingratiating. The person who scores lower than him he treats as “unimportant” or “lower class” and treats in a condescending way. The higher the score that the other person gets, the more ingratiating the first person is, and the lower the score, the more the first person treats the second person with contempt.

Thirdly, there is intellectual snobbery. This is where you rank a person not so much according to his wealth and social standing, but according to his intellectual powers. You look up to and try to gain recognition from the person whom you realise is your intellectual superior. You look down on and despise the person whom you consider to be your intellectual inferior.

A fourth form of snobbery we may call “spiritual snobbery”. This is where a person makes evaluations of others based upon their spiritual credentials. If another person is deemed to be spiritually superior, perhaps because of some spiritual gifting he appears to have, or because of some prominent position he has in the church, then a “spiritual snob” treats him with special deference. But if a person is not particularly gifted, or if he has no prominence in the church, then he is treated by the “spiritual snob” with contempt.

The apostle says that instead of being snobs, and being haughty, we should “be willing to associate with people of low position”. There is a question of translation here. If you look in the footnote it says, “or willing to do menial work.” Is the apostle saying that we should be willing to mix with lowly people, or that we should be willing to engage with lowly things or tasks? Both translations are possible, and perhaps there is a deliberate ambiguity in the inspired text, so that it covers both possibilities. We should have the attitude of loving to be involved with lowly things and also loving to be involved with lowly people.

The word translated “associate” means literally “be carried away with”. This word sometimes is used in a negative way, to speak of being carried away by false doctrine. Here it is used in a good sense. Paul urges that we should be willing to “get carried away” with those are in a low position, and with tasks that are lowly. We should go along with them and be friends with people whom the world would consider to be

unimportant, and we should be glad to do jobs that are not in the limelight, to serve the Lord and others.

We see from this that instead of being snobs, we should relate freely and frankly with all people as equals. We should not do so in a condescending way, but sincerely. We should take a genuine interest in the lives of others and treat all men as really important.

In our culture, as indeed in many cultures, it can be very difficult to eradicate this wrong way of thinking from our minds. It is almost second nature to us. Even today, in Britain, we are very class conscious, and it is very widespread that distinctions are made between people on the basis of family background, income, educational attainment, and so on. These sorts of distinctions are ingrained into our whole way of thinking, and it can take a great deal of effort to rid ourselves of this mindset. But, as believers, we must learn a different way of relating with people.

How can we be different? As with all the other things that we have seen in this chapter, the key to living differently is that we think differently. We need to be no longer conformed to the pattern of this world, but instead we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we might prove in experience how good God's will is. We need to think God's thoughts. The apostle says 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 16, "So from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view, [or according to the flesh]". We need to learn to do what the apostle does. We should not see people from a worldly, or fleshly point of view. Instead we should see them as God sees them.

So what I want to do in the remainder of our time is to remind us of certain Biblical truths, which, if we properly remember them, will eradicate snobbery from our thinking and behaviour.

Here are some truths which we will do well to remember, and which will help us to avoid this terrible sin of snobbery.

1. We are made in the image of God.

We are created by God, in his image. That image has been marred by sin, but even so there is a reminder of God in every human being with whom you come into contact, however weak or insignificant that person might seem to be. Therefore everyone should be treated with great respect. James says in chapter 3 of his letter, verses 9 to 12,

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth

come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

If we say that we are Christians, and that we love God, then we must show our love for God by treating all, however poor and weak they may be, with love and respect, because they are made in God's image.

2. All natural gifting has come from God

All gifts that you have, and all gifts that anyone else has, have been created by God and belong to him. Psalm 24 verse 1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Therefore natural gifting is no ground for boasting or pride. We should not look up to those who are especially intelligent, or physically strong, nor despise those who are not particularly gifted. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 7, "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" There is absolutely no reason to rank ourselves against others on the basis of gifting, because all natural gifting has been given by God, as he has seen fit.

3. We are all terrible sinners in God's sight

The apostle says in Romans chapter 3 verse 23, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." All of us are in the same boat. You cannot look down on anyone else and judge him or her, because you are a sinner yourself. Nor, on the other hand, should you regard anyone as a great hero. Your "hero" is a sinner like you and everyone else. He may achieve great things, but if you look closely and dispassionately at his life you will soon enough find out about his sins.

4. We will soon to lose everything in this world

We brought nothing into this world, and we will take nothing from it. Job said, after all his possessions had been taken from him, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart" (Job 1.21). The man with great intellect that you so admire will one day be an old man with a failing memory. The rich man whose company you crave

will one day in a casket awaiting burial, with nothing to take with him. James says in chapter 1 of his letter, verses 9 to 11,

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

So we should not be impressed by those who are rich, nor should we despise those who have nothing. All alike will pass away in due course, as we shall ourselves, leaving behind all that we have had.

5. Those who are saved are saved by grace alone.

The apostle says in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no-one can boast.” Our salvation is not one iota due to our own merit. Nor is the salvation of any other believer due to his inherent goodness. Even the faith by which we have been saved is the gift of God.

Therefore we have no basis for boasting. We cannot look down on others. Nor should we be overly impressed by the work of God in other believers. Those believers are also only saved by grace.

6. Spiritual gifting is by grace

Not only is salvation by grace, but the spiritual gifting is also by grace. Gifts of the Spirit are called “charismata”. The word “charis” means grace. So gifts of the Spirit are gifts of God’s grace. They are entirely undeserved. So we should not look up to those who are abundantly spiritually gifted. Nor should we despise those who are not very gifted. Nor should we worry if we think we are not very gifted. God has given to each one as he sees fit, according to his grace.

7. Those who are saved are the sons of God, and kings and priests.

The apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 8 verses 14 – 16, “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”

What an amazing thing! We who are believers are adopted into God's family! We can call God “Abba, Father.” Jesus is our brother! Humanly we may be nothing. But in Christ we are very highly exalted. We have been raised up with Christ, and seated with him in the heavenly places.

Revelation chapter 1 verses 5 and 6 says, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.” The lowliest fellow believer is a child of God, a king and a priest to serve God. He or she should therefore be treated with great love and respect.

Sometimes the root of snobbery is the desperate desire to find importance and significance. So people “name drop”, and talk about how they have met important people, in the hope that others will be impressed.

But we do not need to try and impress others. We are loved by God! We are the children of God! We have a status in Christ that the greatest president does not have, nor the richest man.

8. In Christ, human distinctions are of no significance

The apostle Paul says in Galatians 3 verse 28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” He is not saying that these differences no longer exist. Jews are still Jews. Gentiles are still Gentiles. Men are still men. Women are still women. But, for believers, these differences are of no great significance. The one thing that counts is that a person is in Christ. If he or she is in Christ, then he or she is united with all other true believers. All true believers are the children of God.

9. God brings down the rich and famous of this world, and raises up the “nobodies”

In the song that Mary sang when she was told that she was going to be the mother of Jesus, she said, as recorded in Luke chapter 1 verse 52, “He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”

Paul writes 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 26 – 31,

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Why try to be friends with the rich and famous of this world? They are the ones whom God is bringing down. We should value those whom God values. This is the point that James makes in his first letter, chapter 2 verses 1 to 7,

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here's a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?”

James says, effectively, what you doing showing undue deference to the rich? They are, by and large, the enemies of Christ. It is, generally speaking, the poor who are rich in faith. So these are the ones that you should welcome and honour.

10. What God values is very different from what man values.

Man values good looks, money, power, education and gifting. God values faith, humility, holiness and love.

In 1 Samuel chapter 16 we learn about how God told Samuel to go and anoint a new king for Israel in place of Saul, he sent him to Bethlehem, to Jesse. Jesse's sons were brought before Samuel, and when he saw Eliab, who was a fine looking man, Samuel thought to himself, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before me." But in verse 7 we read that God said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

God says through his prophet Isaiah, in chapter 66 of that book, verses 1 and 2, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word."

Jesus says, as recorded in Luke chapter 16, verse 15, "What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight."

We should not value people by human standards, but by the standards of God.

Conclusion

We have seen today that we should not be "high minded" and snobbish. Instead we should show love to all. If anything, our "bias" should be towards those who are weak and despised in this world, rather than towards the rich and famous.

I have tried to remind us of Biblical truths to help us to overcome the deep-seated snobbery which resides no doubt still naturally resides in many of us. Let me remind you of what these truths are:

1. We are made in the image of God.
2. All natural gifting has come from God
3. We are all terrible sinners in God's sight
4. We will soon to lose everything in this world
5. Those who are saved are saved by grace alone.

6. Spiritual gifting is by grace
7. Those who are saved are the sons of God, and kings and priests.
8. In Christ, human distinctions are of no significance
9. God brings down the rich and famous of this world, and raises up the “nobodies”
10. What God values is very different from what man values.

I hope that these will help you as you seek to think in a different way, and so to treat others in a different way.

I have to say that most of these truths that I have talked about this morning only apply to those who are truly born again. So I must ask you, are you a Christian? Have you repented of your sins? Have you trusted Christ to save you? If your answer to that question is, “No” or “Not sure”, then I urge you to come to Christ and ask him to save you.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at

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