

# November 2005: Breaking Through Racial Barriers

by Aaron Greenway

A couple of days ago we went to visit an old friend of mine from seminary who is now the pastor at a church in Richardson. It had been at least a couple of years since I had seen him. It seems that by God's direction he has taken the reigns of this church broken by various circumstances. After a time of healing, trying to keep it intact, he finally presented a special message, the message to reach every race, giving up prejudices against people from other backgrounds. He asked the question, "If your son/daughter married someone of another race, how would you react? Because this would say a lot about what is really in your heart."

When I was much younger, God had saved me and put me in with a faithful group of friends at "Sunnyside Temple". I would sit down with them at restaurants talking about the things of the Lord. We would go to the parks and witness together. We would cry together. And we would share the things of God with one another, challenging one another's faith, all in love. At that time there were many of us who had come out of that particular church going into the ministry full-time. The Lord had brought such a unity that was never destroyed because the love of God was in our hearts, and for that reason we were able to communicate the Gospel with those that had never heard it before, receiving it into their hearts.

I saw this phenomenon again when I went to Peru, a group of people with a zeal like no other, a unified people, a people that loved me like their own brother, so much so that one day when I returned to the United States, everyone went to see me off. The Body of Christ is wonderful, to make a sinner-turned-saint feel loved. The fact that we were of different races did not matter. It did not matter that we had different backgrounds and different cultures. The Holy Spirit transcends all of that. Perhaps we have so many differences that I would never have anything in common with them if not for Jesus Christ. But He is sufficient to unify every single believer.

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A pastor once said that many in the church won't bend the knee because once they do, they are obligated. Perhaps working with certain folks in the church is not much to their liking. In many ways, the church has turned into a club, so that the unsaved are never allowed in even when they are there physically. I have seen Christians that stick to their group, that want nothing to do with that brother or sister that speak a different language, that is rich or poor, that did not go to the right school or has the wrong brand of clothes on. The excuse is, "We relate better to those who we share something in common." This is true on the human level. But the Lord never gave us that option, and what's more, if the name of Christ is not able to unify us, nothing is. A split church because of race, language, economic status, or because of a popularity contest is an impotent church, and it will have no lasting impact on the world. If the unsaved have to depend on those kinds of people to communicate the Gospel to them, they will be waiting a long time. We accept anyone who comes through that church door as equally important to ourselves, so that the lost will come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.

The Apostle Peter had to struggle with this truth when he had a vision from the Lord telling him to accept Cornelius, a Roman centurion that had asked Peter to come to his house to tell him the truth about Jesus. In the book of Acts 10:34-36, Peter responded, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all." Did you understand that? Of all. If you naturally gravitate toward those who are only like you, there could be a problem. If you only associate with your own group and not with the new, awkward, shy person in the corner, maybe there is a problem. No one should ever come in the church and feel rejected or out-of-place. The church should be the first place they feel accepted and loved especially when our Savior went all the way to the cross for them.

In this regard, what is holding us back from reaching those who are different from us? There is an African-American family down the street from you that doesn't know the Lord. There is that person who has that "punk hair", you know, the weirdo, the one who has the cleft palate. What are you going to do about them? There are some Mexicans in the church that are always by themselves that speak Spanish. What about them? Are you going to accept them or reject them? Choose today.

Something to ponder...

Your brother,  
Aaron Greenway