

Introduction:

A social experiment was once conducted in which ten people were interviewed for a company. Before going in for their interviews, a red dot was painted on the cheek of each person. They entered their interview, sat across the desk from the interviewer, answered questions, and then went through a debriefing following the interview. Each of the ten interviewees stated that the interviewer kept staring at the dot on his or her cheek. The very interesting thing is that five of the interviewees were actually given a clear dot that was not visible on their skin. However, they still thought the interviewer was focusing on their dot. What do we learn from this? People feel self-conscious about the things they believe make them stand out.¹ And the fact is we all have dots, whether it be our race, our class, our income, our education, our weight, the clothing we can afford, our gender, our hair or lack thereof, it might even be an actual dot like a port-wine stain or mole on our face.

Understanding this, how should we treat people who are different from us? The same way we want those different people to treat us (**Matthew 7:12**). The problem is in our world there is a whole lot of dotism going on from all sides. Whether we talk about racism, classism, genderism or any other kind of ism, it happens, but it must not be named among Christians. I think the greatest statement against this kind of mentality found in Scripture is **Colossians 3:11**: "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all" (ESV). The point is that Christ's church is inclusive. In this body, there is not to be white or black, Asian or Hispanic, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, well-dressed or poorly-dressed, Democrat or Republican, home-schooled or public-schooled, fat or thin. Rather, there is Christ who is all and is in all. No doubt those external things are there. I am not suggesting that we pretend there are no differences among us. But, when we look at each other, we need to see past the differences to the one big similarity. We need to see Jesus Christ in each of us. And when we look out to the world, we need to see past all those differences and see the one big similarity that these are all people for whom Jesus died so that He could dwell in them as He does us (**John 3:16**).

So what exactly is dotism, whether we are talking about racism, classism, sexism, educatism, politicism? It is "speaking, acting or thinking negatively about someone else solely based on that person's color, class or culture"² or whatever other difference we want to put in that definition. Consider a well-circulated story that illustrates this concept using the problem of racism.

A few years ago, on a weekend trip to Atlantic City, a woman won a bucketful of quarters at a slot machine. She took a break from the slots for dinner with her husband in the hotel dining room. But first she wanted to stash her quarters in her room. "I'll be right back and we'll go eat," she told her husband, and carried the coin-laden bucket to the elevator.

As the elevator doors were about to close, two black men slipped inside. One of them was tall...very tall...an intimidating figure. She did what everyone does on an elevator, she avoided eye-contact. What would these two black men do? They might rob her. Oh why didn't she ask her husband to come with her? Since she was standing in the middle of the elevator, the men took up positions on either side of her. She began to perspire a little and uttered a prayer, "Lord, please let it all be okay." They all stood there waiting for the doors to close when one of the men raised his arm and said, "Hit the floor."

Without a moment's hesitation, the woman threw up her hands, dropping the bucket, quarters flying everywhere, and fell to the floor.

One of the men leaned down and said, "Ma'am, if you'll tell us which floor you want, we'll press it for you." After she stood up, the average sized man said, "When I told my friend here to hit the floor, I meant that he should hit the elevator button for our floor; I didn't mean for you to hit the floor."

She was obviously flustered. The two gentlemen helped her pick up her quarters and then helped her get to her room. After she closed the door, she could hear them roaring with laughter. After she deposited her quarters, she brushed herself off, and went to have dinner with her husband and tell him the humiliating story. The next morning, when the couple went to check out, they found that their hotel bill had been paid, and a dozen roses had been left for the woman. Each one had a one hundred dollar bill wrapped around the stem. A card said, "Thanks for the best laugh we've had in years." It was signed, Eddie Murphy and Michael Jordan.

¹ David A. Anderson, *Gracism: The Art of Inclusion* (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2007), 13.

² David A. Anderson, 21.

Unfortunately, this story is an urban legend that has been around since the 70s featuring the likes of Reggie Jackson, Lionel Richie, Wilt Chamberlain, Magic Johnson, Jackie Robinson, and even Jesse Jackson in its various versions. It didn't happen, no matter what the person who e-mailed the story to you said about having a cousin who saw the whole thing. But it really illustrates our point. We get on elevators with people every day and don't think a thing about it, especially if they look like us. There was only one thing that caused that woman to fear. The men were black men. She thought negatively of them because they were black, so much so that an innocent comment was misconstrued as a mugging. And then we laugh. Some of us pick up on the racist overtones of this part of the story. Sadly, what most also miss is how much our own prejudices are demonstrated. At the end of the story, were we surprised to hear who the men were? And did you think, "Oh, if that woman had only known who those men were, she would have known she had nothing to fear." And in that moment, we reveal our own lingering racism. "What?!" you exclaim. Yes, our own lingering racism is revealed by this idea that if she had only known who they were, she would have known she had nothing to fear. In other words, had it been two unknown black men, she would still have had something to fear, but because you know these men to be wealthy, upstanding citizens we think she was safe. But if it had been two unknown white men would you have thought she had something to fear? Have you ever heard anyone protest, "I'm not racist, some of my best friends are black." Obviously, when we know people we feel differently about them, either believing good about them or ill based on our experience with them. Our isms aren't necessarily how we feel about people once we get to know them. It is how we feel about them based on our first look. "He's black; better hold on to my wallet." "She's white; probably a racist." "Look at those shabby clothes; she must be lazy." "He's homeless; probably a bum who just wants to rely on welfare and my tax money." "Listen to his southern drawl; how stupid can people get?" "What a Yankee twang; he's probably an unfriendly jerk."

The fact is every one of us has some isms to some degree or another. We've all made sweeping judgments about certain classes of people based on our experience with just one or two. But we must learn to overcome those, especially here. It is a sad thing that most congregations are pretty one dimensional when it comes to race and class, and we are not much of an exception. If we are going to follow the biblical pattern, we will learn to include different cultures and statuses. In here, there will be, if you will, Jew, Greek, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free. There will be white, black, Hispanic, Asian, poor, Republicans, Democrats, Northerners, Southerners, young, old, refined, rough around the edges, highly educated, high school drop-outs. But we will not treat people based on that; we will treat them based on Christ in them or based on Christ who wants to be in them.

But how can we accomplish that. How can we overcome the lingering vestiges of our isms? I have a book in my library by a fellow named David Anderson entitled based on a different ism, one that will overcome these divisive ones. He suggests that we move from genderism, classism, and racism to "Gracism." He suggests an outline of behavior from **I Corinthians 12:22-26** that explains what it means to act based on Gracism rather than the other isms we have discussed. I've adjusted it a little bit, but the general gist of this lesson, though based on **I Corinthians 12** was prompted by what I read in that book. Also, I want to give special props to Perry Hall, whose sermon on these issues provided me with great points and awesome illustrations.

First of all, note that the beginning of this entire section about the working of the body follows this statement: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (**I Corinthians 12:13**, ESV). This section on the body doesn't just deal with gifts; it deals with backgrounds. Whether we are striving to include folks of differing abilities and gifts or folks of differing race, ethnicity, culture, and background, the Gracist response will be the same. We will cover the first three points in this lesson and the other three in our next.

Discussion:

I. Greater Honor—"I will lift you up" (**I Corinthians 12:23a**).

- A. Paul's stipulation in this passage is pretty shocking. Oh, it's not shocking that he says some should have greater honor. What is shocking is who should get the greater honor. "And on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor" (ESV). Wait! What? I mean, I could understand if he says we should bestow honor on the honorable, but bestow it on those who are less honorable? Really?
- B. Yet, that is exactly what Paul says. Who do most of us think should get the greatest honor? Ourselves. But that is not where we should put the honor. We need to bestow the honor on others. But then who is next in line for honor? Those who are most like us. But that is not where we should put the honor. The Gracist honors those who lack honor no matter their race, no matter their background, no matter their income.
- C. **Romans 12:10** says we should be outdoing one another in showing honor. We must not reserve honor for those who look like us. Rather, we should be lifting up and honoring everyone, especially those who don't seem as honorable to us.

II. Greater Modesty—"I will cover you" (**I Corinthians 12:23b**).

- A. Modesty refers to covering or presenting our bodies in a way that will avoid shame and embarrassment. We cover the parts that are to be kept privately between husbands and wives. Further, we cover the parts that we find embarrassing. We don't like to highlight those things. And so, women put on makeup to cover blemishes. Men wear toupees to cover bald spots. Modesty is the idea of covering rather than exposing.
- B. When we talk about the Gracist showing greater modesty and covering others, we mean that instead of trying to expose, embarrass, or shame others based on their differences, they strive to cover and protect them from that ridicule. In **James 2:2-4**, the Christians were not covering or showing greater modesty to their poor guests. They were highlighting it, shaming them for it, mocking them over it. Whether the difference is skin color, accents, cultural behaviors, eating choices, dress styles, education choices, or even just standards for television watching, the Gracist doesn't mock others, seeking to expose and embarrass them.
- C. But there is another major area. What if the person really sinned? Shouldn't we expose them for that? Interestingly, we can sometimes live by double standards. If a friend, or someone like us sins, we give them the benefit of the doubt, go to them privately, talk it out, and work through it. But if someone we don't like or someone is part of a group of people we think less of, we'll talk about it to others behind their back, make a public spectacle of it, hold on to it until we can use it against them in front of others. That is ungodly behavior. The Gracist recognizes that **Matthew 18:15** applies to everyone. **James 5:20** says that bringing a sinner back is covering a multitude of sins. **I Peter 4:8** says that comes from love. Yes, we do want to cover sins, not by ignoring them, but by dealing with them properly. Certainly, if someone, even our close friend, lives in rebellion and refuses to repent, we must expose their error. But we treat all people the same on this, hoping for private covering.

III. No Division—"I will stand with you" (**I Corinthians 12:25a**).

- A. Look at the heavenly vision of the saved in **Revelation 7:9**. John saw a multitude praising God from every nation, every tribe, every people, and every language. It was a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial meeting to worship and honor God. People from different backgrounds, with different skin colors, different accents, "linking arms and holding hands" to submit together to the one God. What a beautiful picture? Should we wait for that picture until we get to heaven? Should we wait until then to stand together? There was to be no division between Jews or Greeks, slaves or free in the New Testament; is there to be division today between black and white, rich and poor, this side of the tracks and that?
- B. Rather than dividing, we stand together. I think of the prayer that I once heard and now often repeat that God will strengthen us to stand so close together that none of us can fall down. The Gracist stands this close even with people of different colors, backgrounds, class, status. She doesn't divide off into her little group of friends that looks like her.
- C. During the Civil Rights era, a first grade white girl met a black girl on the first day of school. Segregation had prevented the white girl from associating with black people. Integration changed all of that and made both of the girls very scared. When the white girl returned home after that historic day, she told her mother that she sat next to a black girl in school. The mother tensed up in anticipation of the worst. She asked her little girl what happened. The little girl replied, "We were both so scared that we just held hands all day." Now that is standing together and removing division.

Conclusion:

Gracism is a new way to look at others, whether they are similar to us or different. We put aside the isms that divide and put on the one that brings us together, allowing us to welcome each other, include each other, accept each other (**Romans 15:7**). Take these steps with people whether they have the same skin color, the same culture, the same background, the same income, the same education, the same kinds of clothes, or not and watch as this congregation becomes more like that early New Testament church and more like the kingdom as it will be in heaven.