



"Indifference is the essence of inhumanity."
—George Bernard Shaw

29-Jul-16

Rejection Hurts

Sometimes when we talk after church services, we review instances that have happened in our efforts to obey [God](#) that have put a strain on our relationships with others. It seems that the closer these associations are to us, the more these conflicts affect us and the more their rejection hurts. Rejection, the cause of many conflicts, is a major topic in the Bible:

- » [Isaiah 53:3](#), a prophecy of the coming Messiah: "He is despised and rejected by men."
- » [John 1:11](#), where John writes of Jesus: "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."
- » [John 15:25](#), where Jesus recites from prophecies in [Psalm 69:4](#) and 109:3: "They hated Me without a cause."

Rejection can be defined as "the spurning of a person's affections." The root of "rejection" is the Latin word *rejectio*, which means "a throwing back." The word-picture illustrates a forceful return of something advanced, like a basketball player rejecting an opponent's shot. In the same way, people reject others and their well-meaning ideas, words, efforts, and emotions. As we

know, rejection can come in many different forms and hit a person on different levels.

The Bible is full of stories of the godly being rejected by [the world](#), and Genesis alone provides several accounts of rejection. As early as chapter 3, we see Adam and Eve reject God in favor of taking the knowledge of good and evil to themselves.

Immediately afterward, Genesis 4 recounts the story of Cain and Abel, sons of Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel may have been twins, but regardless, Cain was the firstborn. Eve, it appears, thought that Cain was the fulfillment of the prophecy in [Genesis 3:15](#) of a coming Messiah to redeem mankind. When Cain was born, she exclaimed that she had "acquired a man from the LORD" ([Genesis 4:1](#)), and "acquire" is what *Cain* means. The Bible does not record what she said when Abel was born, but it seems that her feelings towards him were more ambivalent. As the meaning of *Abel* is "breath" or "nothing," it suggests that to her, Cain was the more important of her two sons by far. Her preference for Cain was effectively a rejection of Abel.

Another example of rejection in Genesis is found in the story of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel (Genesis 29). Leah, the older sister of Rachel, was daily acquainted with rejection, even before she married Jacob. Citing a tradition that older sisters had to marry before younger ones, her father, Laban, deceitfully palmed Leah off on the love-struck Jacob "like a dishonest businessman getting rid of damaged goods at full price," to quote commentator Vickie Kraft.

Imagine Jacob's shock, distaste, and anger when he saw Leah in the morning light, and then consider how Leah would have felt by his response. The Bible tells us flatly that he loved Rachel more than Leah ([Genesis 29:30](#)). Perhaps, consistent with human nature, he made a rash judgment of her based on her looks rather than on her character.

Joseph was an obedient son whom his father loved but his older brothers rejected (Genesis 37). Jacob gave him a coat of many colors, a garment of privilege and status in the family to show his special affection for him. This

favoritism is a reason why Jacob's other sons hated Joseph. When Joseph later related his dreams, his brothers interpreted them as predicting he would have dominion over them, and it pushed them over the edge.

Certainly, no one has felt more rejection than our Savior, [Jesus Christ](#). During His ministry, He was rejected by the people of Nazareth, Samaria, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. [John 7:5](#) records that His own physical brothers rejected Him because they did not believe who He was. Of course, He has actually been rejected by all mankind through its rebellion and [sin](#).

We, too, as members of Christ's body, have suffered rejection. John writes in [I John 3:13](#), "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you." Jesus cautions us in [Matthew 10:21](#), 34-36 that even members of our families will turn against us, and in [John 15:20](#), He plainly states, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." Most of us have felt at least some of this hostility.

Now we will look at these examples from God's view. [I John 3:12](#) informs us that Cain's deeds were evil and Abel's righteous, but note that Cain's deeds were evil *before* he killed his brother. He had made a lifetime of bad choices, not just the one. Another fact to consider is that, although God calls Abel righteous, He did not deliver him from Cain's jealous wrath.

Though rejected, Leah bore son after son for Jacob, vainly hoping that each child would endear her to him. Yet, by the time that Leah bore Judah, her fourth son, she no longer sought to win her husband's heart, but God's, saying, "Now I will praise the LORD" ([Genesis 29:35](#)). In the end God blessed Leah with six sons and a daughter—and Leah was the wife buried with Jacob in the family tomb, not his favorite, Rachel.

After Joseph was rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery, God put Joseph through some prolonged trials, but eventually, He elevated him to second in command over the mightiest nation on earth. The Bible has many negative things to say about Jacob's other sons but not one word of criticism of their godly brother.

The apostle Peter calls Christ "a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious" ([I Peter 2:4](#)). [Luke 20:17](#) draws attention to a

prophecy pertaining to Christ as "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." After all of His suffering and rejection, He has taken the highest position of all.

The same apostle calls us Christians "living stones" in God's House ([I Peter 2:5](#)). At our best, though, we are stones in the process of being cut and shaped. We should never forget what God says about us: "Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" ([I Corinthians 1:26](#)). Yet, even though God calls us "the weak" and "the base," He is using us "to put to shame the things that are mighty" (verse 27)!

Notice the encouraging command Peter gives in [I Peter 4:13-14](#):

To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (New American Standard Bible)

When we are rejected by our co-workers, friends, neighbors, and even our families, we share in the rejections of Christ and those of godly men and women since this world began. Although our affections have been spurned by the world, they have been accepted by God.

Despite not being born noble, we are being made into godly royalty, and in our future positions in God's Kingdom ([Revelation 5:10](#)), we will need to have true empathy for those we lead. Jesus' sufferings helped make Him perfect in His role as King and High Priest ([Hebrews 2:10](#)), and likewise, ours will perfect us to fulfill our new responsibilities with and under Him.

- John Reiss

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

Love doesn't become 'love' until the thought, or the feeling, motivates the person to act. Love is an act. If we don't do what is right, the right feeling will never be formed, because emotions are largely developed by our experiences. The right emotions require God's Holy Spirit. Like a marriage relationship, our relationship with God grows more and more intimate as we give it time and attention, conforming to the other person's preferences in the relationship. We are never going to know God unless we do the same kinds of things with Him, keeping His Commandments, devoting time to prayer, Bible study, and meditation. If we are working on our relationship with God (giving it our time and attention), then God's love for us will be reciprocated back to Him in the form of obedience, totally trusting in Him to shape our lives for His purpose.

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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