

P.S.

**EVERYBODY KNOWS** what snobbery is in the world at large; it is a characteristic witnessed and exhibited all too often in human interaction. People look down on others because of their wealth, their status, the power they wield at work, their education, the wine they drink, which side of town they live—and so the list might go on.

Branding, such an important phenomenon in the modern world, builds in part on the human inclination to snobbery. Take the example of cars. There are premium brands like Porsche and BMW, and the super-premium such as Aston Martin or Bentley. Why do people want to own them? Yes, because they drive well, because they have impressive specifications, because they are well built and look good. But not just for these reasons. It is also because the neighbour has one, and one mustn't be shown up. Or, even better, the neighbour doesn't have one, and one's own car can be paraded as superior. I have what you don't or can't have. It doesn't happen as explicitly as that, of course, but such reasons may well underlie, deep in the psychology of purchasing. Many of us would be kidding ourselves if we thought that we were only buying the premium marque because the doors fit flusher, use a better grade of grease, or because the car has less understeer.

So much for snobbery in the mundane things of life. Spiritual snobbery is also an ever-present danger. In many ways the scribes and Pharisees were the epitome of spiritual snobbery, and as such they were in constant confrontation with the Lord. Their attitude is captured eloquently in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican.

What, then, are some of the possible reasons why one might be tempted to feel spiritual snobbery as a Christadelphian, looking down on others, and thinking oneself, in that aspect of life at least, to be better than they? A quick brain-storming on the topic gave rise to the following list:

- I do the daily readings regularly. Many of my brothers and sisters are losing their grip on this.
- My family has been in the Truth for x generations.
- I attend ecclesial meetings and functions, and am an active participant in ecclesial activities. I belong to x committee and attend y Bible

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school. Quite frankly, I don't know what my brothers and sisters are playing at in their lack of commitment.

- We don't stand for x in our ecclesia.
- The exhortations I give are always based on the daily readings; some brethren are so lazy, taking the same exhortation about with them everywhere they go.
- I am related to x and a good friend of y.
- I have a thorough understanding of topic x and can delineate precisely why view y is wrong.
- My children have all come into the meeting.
- I am not as closed-minded or spiritually repressed as my brothers and sisters.
- My Bible has more markings in it than yours.
- Our family invites others to our home, even though our invitations are not returned.
- Without my influence and guidance my ecclesia would have made x unwise decision.

And so the list might go on for a very long time. Life offers more opportunities for spiritual snobbery than we might care to think.

I'd like to make two observations concerning the nature of these dangers. First, for a community which (rightly) places emphasis on doctrine and understanding, on active participation in personal Bible reading and study, it may be the case that spiritual snobbery comes to share certain characteristics with intellectual snobbery. We are better because we know more and because we study harder. Yet, when we compare the gap between our understanding and that of some other person with the gap that exists between ourselves and God, our excellence of knowledge looks rather pale. Intellectual snobbery came to be one of the defining features of Pharisaism.

The second point is that many of the items in the foregoing list are good things. It is good to be hospitable. It is good to do the daily readings and to understand one's Bible. The difficulty only arises in the self-image and the image we project onto others potentially arising from these activities. There is no question that it is better to be involved in ecclesial activities than to stand apart, and better to uphold the standards of the Truth. But let this never lead to pride or any snobbish view of ourselves. Rather, we ought to esteem others better than ourselves.

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