

****When Prejudice Cannot Speak Its Name:**

Parallels Between Hidden Racism and Sectarian Attitudes in the Church**

Many people assume prejudice only exists when it is spoken directly. But those who cannot or will not express bias openly often reveal it through **patterns of speech, behavior, and assumptions**. This dynamic is true both in racial prejudice and in denominational prejudice within Christianity.

This document outlines **10 parallels** that show how a denomination can express a spirit of superiority or exclusion toward other Christians, even while denying such attitudes.

1. Broad Generalizations Disguised as “Spiritual Observations”

Racial parallel:

People who avoid explicit racism may make sweeping claims about entire groups while calling them “facts” or “observations.”

Church parallel:

A denomination may say things like:

- “Those Christians don’t really study the Bible.”
- “Churches like that have no depth.”
- “They aren’t as committed as we are.”

These are not theological evaluations—they are **categorical judgments** about whole groups of believers.

2. Use of Spiritual “Code Words” or Dog Whistles

Racial parallel:

Terms like “urban,” “illegals,” or “protecting our culture” function as coded language signaling prejudice to insiders.

Church parallel:

Denominations may use coded religious language:

- “They’re worldly.”
- “They don’t have the truth.”
- “That church is part of Babylon.”
- “We’re the remnant; they’re the compromised ones.”

These phrases allow prejudice to be communicated indirectly while maintaining spiritual respectability.

3. Behaving Differently Around Christians of Other Traditions

Racial parallel:

People may show subtle discomfort, distance, or distrust around certain racial groups even if they never voice racism.

Church parallel:

Likewise, a denomination may:

- Withdraw from fellowship with other Christians.
- Treat outsiders as spiritually inferior.
- Assume believers from other churches “won’t understand.”
- Show impatience or condescension once they learn someone’s denomination.

Behavior often reveals prejudice more clearly than doctrine.

4. Defensiveness When Unity or Bias Is Discussed

Racial parallel:

When confronted with the topic of racism, people may respond with:

- “I’m not racist, but...”
- Minimizing someone else’s experience
- Redirecting the conversation to blame others

Church parallel:

A denomination may respond to unity conversations by:

- Becoming defensive about its uniqueness
- Minimizing the spirituality of other believers
- Redirecting the discussion to why others are wrong
- Saying, “We love everyone, but...” and then excluding others

Defensiveness signals an underlying fear of losing superiority.

5. Double Standards in Judgment

Racial parallel:

Similar behaviors are judged differently depending on the group.

Church parallel:

A denomination may:

- Excuse sin or error within its own walls as “an isolated problem”
- Interpret similar issues in other groups as “proof their doctrine is false”
- Praise its own growth as “God’s blessing”
- Interpret other churches’ growth as “deception” or “compromise”

Double standards reveal **tribal loyalty**, not spiritual discernment.

6. Prejudice Expressed Through Humor

Racial parallel:

People who avoid explicit racism may still tell jokes that rely on stereotypes.

Church parallel:

Denominations may joke about other Christians while claiming it's harmless:

- Mocking other worship styles
- Stereotyping Catholics, Pentecostals, Baptists, or non-denominational believers
- Laughing at caricatures of other traditions
- Using humor to reinforce superiority

Humor becomes a safe channel for expressing attitudes that would be unacceptable if stated plainly.

7. Insular Social Circles and Denominational Isolation

Racial parallel:

A person may avoid forming relationships with certain racial groups, even if they claim not to be racist.

Church parallel:

A denomination may:

- Socialize almost exclusively with itself
- Avoid joint worship, prayer, or mission
- Discourage members from attending other churches
- Treat outsiders as spiritually suspicious

Isolation fosters spiritual prejudice and maintains a sense of superiority.

8. Value Judgments Rooted in a Sense of Doctrinal Superiority

Racial parallel:

Racists may deny hating others while consistently attributing negative traits to them.

Church parallel:

A denomination may not say “We are better,” but may consistently:

- Attribute bad motives to other Christians
- Assume its theology is the only mature or biblical interpretation
- Dismiss differences as “excuses”
- See its own culture as God’s ideal

This expresses **theological ethnocentrism**—the assumption that one’s own spiritual culture is inherently superior.

9. “Exception” Language Toward Individuals

Racial parallel:

“You’re not like the rest of them” is a classic form of hidden racism.

Church parallel:

A denomination may say:

- “You’re different—you’re not like other Catholics/Charismatics/Baptists.”
- “Most people from that denomination aren’t serious, but you’re sincere.”

This reveals a belief that **the group as a whole is spiritually inferior**.

10. Actions That Exclude or Harm, Even Without Explicit Claims

Racial parallel:

Racism is often clearest in actions that reinforce exclusion.

Church parallel:

Sectarian prejudice is often visible in:

- Policies that forbid cooperation with other Christians
- Teachings that invalidate the spiritual experiences of others
- Fellowship structures that reinforce separation
- Narratives that say God is only working “with us”

Even without explicitly stated superiority, these actions promote **division, exclusion, and spiritual hierarchy**.

****Conclusion:**

The Spirit of Sectarianism Operates Like the Spirit of Prejudice**

A denomination does not need to say:

- “We are the only true Christians,” or
- “Others are inferior,”

for a sectarian spirit to be present.

Just as hidden racism shows itself through patterns of attitude and behavior, so does **hidden denominational prejudice**. The danger is the same:

- Group identity replaces humility
- Superiority replaces love
- Separation replaces fellowship
- Suspicion replaces unity in Christ

Recognizing these parallels can help believers pursue **the unity Jesus prayed for** (John 17) and resist the spiritual pride that harms the body of Christ.

Don't Make Excuses

If you feel like this document did the thinking for you, it's not the models fault. Here is its output with clean context for people hiding racial prejudice. That whole –they'd never say it but they are thinking it– kind of thing

Don asked:

How would I know someone is a racist if they couldn't say it directly, but might say it to me another way?

ChatGPT said:

There is no single, infallible test for whether someone is racist—especially if they avoid saying it directly. But there *are* consistent patterns in how people communicate prejudice indirectly. What you're really looking for is a **pattern of attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors** that reveal how they think, even when they choose their words carefully.

Below is a structured way to evaluate indirect racism without jumping to conclusions prematurely.

1. Look for Generalizations Disguised as “Observations”

People who don't want to state racism openly may speak in broad categories but frame them as innocent comments.

Examples:

- “Those people just don't value education.”

- “They’re naturally more violent / less driven / less capable.”
- “I don’t know why *they* always act like that.”

These statements reveal beliefs about inherent group traits, which is a core feature of racist thinking.

2. Watch for Code Words or “Dog Whistles”

Some language carries meaning only for people who share the bias.

Common signals:

- Talking about “protecting our culture” without specifying from what.
- Using terms like “urban,” “illegals,” “gang culture,” “thugs,” or “welfare people” to imply a racial group without naming it.
- Framing diversity as a “threat.”

If the language consistently cues racial stereotypes without direct mention, it is often intentional.

3. Pay Attention to Discomfort or Different Behavior Around Certain Groups

Indirect racism often shows up in behavior more than words:

- Reacting with visible discomfort around certain racial groups.
- Treating people of one race with notably less patience or respect.
- Making assumptions about someone’s ability, trustworthiness, or background based on appearance.

Behavioral patterns are often more revealing than statements.

4. Notice How They Respond to Conversations About Race

A person's reaction when race is discussed can be very telling:

- Becoming defensive when racism is mentioned (“I’m not racist, but…”).
- Centering themselves or minimizing others’ experiences.
- Shutting down conversation or redirecting blame.

These reactions often indicate underlying biases, even if unspoken.

5. Identify Double Standards

Racism frequently emerges through inconsistent judgments:

- Seeing the same behavior as “normal” for one group but “problematic” for another.
- Excusing wrongdoing in people who look like them but condemning others harshly.

Double standards reveal belief structures more than explicit statements do.

6. Look at Their Humor

People who hide racist views often express them through jokes, expecting plausible deniability.

Ask:

- Who is the target?
- Would the joke still be “funny” if a different group were substituted?
- Do they defend harmful stereotypes as “just jokes”?

Humor is one of the most common indirect expressions of prejudice.

7. Notice Their Social Circles and Comfort Zones

Patterns that might signal underlying racism:

- Avoiding meaningful relationships with people of certain races.
- Segregating themselves socially without clear reasons.
- Expressing fear or mistrust of diverse environments.

People often reveal their worldview by who they choose to include or exclude.

8. Evaluate Value Judgments

They might not say “I dislike that group,” but they may consistently:

- Attribute negative motives to certain races.
- View their own culture as superior.
- Dismiss systemic inequality as “excuses.”

When value judgments consistently fall along racial lines, it’s a strong indicator.

9. Watch for “Exceptions” Language

Statements like:

- “You’re different—you’re not like the rest of them.”
- “I don’t usually get along with people from your background.”

This implies a belief that the group as a whole is inferior, with you as the rare exception.

10. Consider Whether Their Actions Harm or Exclude, Even Without Explicit Words

Ultimately, racism is not only about statements—it's about impact.

Ask:

- Do their decisions advantage one racial group over another?
- Do their judgments consistently align with stereotypes?
- Do their actions reinforce inequality or exclusion?

Behavior is often the clearest evidence.