

Biblical Theology of Race and Ethnicity

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It's good to be with you on this fine, cool summer evening, studying God's Word together. Tonight, we're continuing our little series "Biblical Theology of" and tonight it's the theology of Race and Ethnicity. The series is going to include talks on technology and gender and ADHD, and a good look at our culture each week to start. If you have the little handout, it says we have a quote each evening, the problem product problem of racism. And then we've got to spend time on the question -- what is a social construct? I know many of you would say, what's that all about? I'm just gonna try to label it for a minute, because it's a big issue in our culture right now, but we'll spend most of our time on what the Bible actually has to say about race and ethnicity. I want to read first. Keep your fingers ready to go to the different texts we are looking at for the sermon tonight.

I'm going to start with Romans 12: 4-5 and then we'll pray.

This is God's word for us in one body. We have many members, and the members do not all have the same function so we, though many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another.

Let's pray for a moment.

Lord, I pray that we would indeed be one body that we here in this place and your people throughout the world would have a clear vision that your church is one body spread throughout the world, on every inhabited continent, and that although we are diverse in so many ways, it's your purpose to diversify and unify us in Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.

So I was born in New York City, and I lived in New York City to the age of seven years old, in second grade, and I lived in a non-prosperous neighborhood and I had a clear sense that the people in my neighborhood looked a little bit different from one another. And years later I said to my mother, hey, mom what was the ethnic makeup of our neighborhood? She said it was probably about almost half Anglo, 45%. She said probably about 40%, percent African-American, about 15% Puerto Rican. So it was a majority minority place for my first seven plus years of my life. And then I moved to western Pennsylvania, then I lived there in North Carolina, and spent most of the rest of my growing up years in places that had, you know, about 1% ethnic minority. But I did have a rich taste of that. And I inherited, I believe, from that experience and from my own parent's approach to things, what we call today color blindness, by which I do not mean that I couldn't tell what people skin color was, but it just didn't matter, because, you know, we played ball, we went skating, we ran around. And whoever you were, if you were friendly, that was good enough. We just we just didn't care.

And many years later, I said something about that. Growing up in a colorblind neighborhood as a child and a man stopped and looked at me and said, Dan, that's not good enough. I mean, we're glad that when you look at somebody, you don't care what color their skin is, but you're a theological leader and a teacher, and you can't just say, I personally am relatively colorblind. We need you to speak, to teach, to take a stand, to encourage other people. So, I've taken that to heart because it's good and he said it in good faith and wanted me to listen to him. And I did. I grew up more or less colorblind. But that doesn't mean, despite appearances, that my family exactly did.

Now people ask me constantly about my background and since my name is Doriani and they say, so you're Italian? And I say, so I'm not Italian. It's just letters. It's just syllables. I'm not Italian. It's a stage name. My grandfather was an opera singer, and that's my name. My name should be. If you think Doriani is bad, my name should be Tishkosky. Russian-Jewish is what it means. And my family escaped from communist Russia in the 30s and came to America. And my father kept my grandfather's stage name for a variety of reasons. But one of them was to obscure his Jewish identity. And my dad did not talk about that at all. But I was born 10 or 15 years after Hitler was killing millions of Jews because they had the wrong ethnicity in Hitler's mind. And so, looking back, I think no wonder he didn't want people to know. He was perfectly happy for people to think he was Italian because people don't kill Italians just for being Italians. But for some years people did kill Jews just for being Jews. So there was another side to my experience. And then in my later years studying things, I learned that it's hardly distinctive to say that it was Jews, or African Americans or Asian Americans who suffered prejudice. In fact, it seems to be if you look at human history that people are always looking for a way to say their group is better than your group.

Now, if you know a little bit of history of America, the first great surge of immigration was in 1910 to about 1920, and most of the people who came over during that period were no longer the northern and Western Europeans, the Germans and the Dutch and the Norwegians and the English and the Scottish, who had been so numerous in earlier waves. But now they were much more Italians and Jews and some Arabs and Hungarians and Poles, and they were the new immigrants who weren't quite white. Well, you may say, what does that mean? Well, I'm going to tell you. There's a book called Working Toward Whiteness, written by a scholar named David Roediger. And he studied America in the 1900's during the age of immigration. And the idea was, if you were Eastern European or Southern European, even though you were European, it didn't exactly count. And that was the main stream views. So one of the great thinkers of that day, a man named Henry Pratt Fairchild, one of the first sociologists to truly be a sociologist, wrote a book called Greek Immigration to the United States, 1911, Yale University Press. This is what he said in 1911, the modern immigrants. This is not a joke. I'm quoting what he said, and he meant it. *The modern immigrants, by which he means Greeks and Italians and Hungarians and Poles, must be regarded as inferior peoples. Like the Negroes, they are brought for economic reasons to do hard work and mill work, to do work which an American does not care to stoop. The business of the alien again, Southern and Eastern Europeans, is to go into mines*

and foundries and sewers, to breathe the stifling air of factories and workshops, to go out on roads and railroads and the burning sun of the summer, and then the driving sleet and snow, if he proves himself a man. My comment. So I guess that was in doubt that he's really a man.

If he proves himself a man and rises above his station and acquires wealth and cleans him up very well, we will receive him after a generation or two. But at present he is far beneath us, and the burden of proof rests with him. That's 1910, spoken of Greeks and Hungarians and Italians and Macedonians and all the rest.

Now I say this because it illustrates the fact that people seem to like to look down on other people. It seems to be part of the human sinful, fallen nature to divide the world between us and them. And we're superior and they're inferior. Now, of course, if that was the case, if Dr. Fairchild, was speaking for the majority, it seems that he was in 1911. Imagine how difficult it would be for someone who was Asian-American or Hispanic or African American to prove themselves and rise to the station where they could be viewed as real men.

About seven years ago, I read an article by a newspaper man who was living in Madrid where he wrote for the main newspaper there and he was rising in his career and they decided to send him to LA to cover America for a while. And he wrote a piece about it that I saw in the Wall Street Journal, I think, I wish I'd kept the piece of paper. I think it was the Wall Street Journal. And he said, you know, a funny thing happened to me while I flew over the Atlantic. When I left, I was white because Spanish people in Europe are considered white. And when I arrived in LA, I was no longer white. I was now Hispanic. That's what he was labeled. That's what he was called.

So that's the way people tend to see things. Now we have to ask the question are race and ethnicity real? and to what extent are they real? To what extent are they important decisions? To what extent are they? Are they God's decisions or God's will for the human race? Now, some people say that race is a social construct, and when people say something or other is a social construct, what they mean is there's nothing real there. There's nothing important.

We have to eradicate the distinctions that we might think we see because they're artificial, human made and destructive. If you've heard about the term *social construct* at all, you probably heard it applied to gender. And people sometimes say gender is not real. It's just a social construct. You are not male or female. What matters is how you feel about yourself and how you choose to express yourself. And it's all arbitrary. And I want to be really clear. I almost feel like saying, if I'm not clear, raise your hand, then I'll try it again. All right. The idea that gender is a social construct is false. The idea that race or ethnicity is a social construct is nothing but a social construct is false.

But it's true that there's some social dimensions to the way we think about ethnicity and the way we think about gender. Let me give you a simple illustration. I feel uncomfortable not wearing a tie when I preach. I've been told not to wear a tie. I feel uncomfortable because ties are in this part of the world, in this social group are a way of saying I am a professional, knowledgeable male.

You agree with that? The ties say to the world, I'm a man and I'm probably a professional, and you should probably be nice to me because I'm a professional, so it makes sense. Few heads, not quite a few heads, not all right. So ties are a way of signaling that I'm a man who's educated. Next question is, how did you signal you were an educated man in the year 1840's cause ties hadn't been invented yet. They had other ways of dressing and showing the world. I'm a man. And I want you to know I'm a man. Which is a good thing. But the ties specifically, the ties socially constructed.

Let me give you another example. In my house, my wife does 96.4% of the cooking. I do the other 3.6%, and I do it exclusively outside. And when I do so outside, because I'm a man doing manly things, we don't even give it the same word. The word is grilling. So if a woman prepares food, it's called cooking. And if a man does so while perspiring on to the meat and dripping his body fluids on to the meat, it's magnificent, manly stuff. That's a social construct.

Now, men still want to be men, and women still want to be women, and we approve of that. But there are aspects of gender that are socially kind of arbitrary and almost laughable. Racist. Kind of like that. It's not entirely like that, but it's somewhat like that.

Now, for the purposes of illustration, I brought a piece of paper with me today, and I'm going to hold it up, and I'm going to see if you can follow what I'm doing here. What color is this piece of paper? What would you say. It's white. What color am I according to racial categorizations, I'm white. Do I look like this piece of paper? I do not. If you look carefully at your skin or my skin, or the skin of the person next to you, which I invite you to do, the white person's skin next to you is actually off color beige and actually speckled or modeled beige and most of the time with flecks of pink and undertones of pink all over the place. So there's no such thing as a white person. We use the word white to describe people who come from Europe and northern climates, where you don't need a whole lot of protection from the sun. And in our society, in a fairly intense degree, to a significant degree, white comes to be associated with other things, especially if it were a tie, like being educated and professional and having been in America for a while, and matters of that nature.

Now, if you all look at me and you know my name is Doriani you might look at me and think it looks kind of Italian. But here's the truth I'm not Italian at all. On my father's side, I'm Russian and mostly Jewish. On my mother's side, I'm Scottish and Irish and English and French. Not a bit of Italian in me, but somehow people call me, look at me and they say white. They look at people who are have some African roots and they say black. And I'm going to tell you, they're not black either. They're varied shades of brown. Some are very dark brown, some are almost looking black. Most look some color. That's sort of various shades of brown. And then Eastern Europeans and southern Europeans and Northern Africans are a little bit deeper in their shades.

And you know that the whole business is a little bit uncertain, because in the beginning, when people first started to talk about race, it was around 1450, 1440 to be really exact, when the Portuguese started to have boats good enough to go hundreds of miles from Portugal and to

reach the shores of various parts of Africa. And they said, oh my goodness, the people there look different and there are two races of humanity. And then a little bit later, people traveled further and they said, oh, we've made it to Asia. Guess what? There are three races of humanity. They're black and there's white and there's yellow. By the way, Asian people are not yellow either. Hold up a piece of paper if they'll let you, or ask them or imagine it. They're not yellow. And then people decided, well, there's another distinction. Pacific Islanders look a little bit different. Their facial features and their hair is a little bit different. So we got four races. And then later on they said, we're going to say about Middle Easterners and Northern Africans, I think maybe there's five races. And then after a while they said, no, there's six races because that includes people who come from southern Europe who speak Spanish and they're Hispanic.

Now, you know that when people say there's two races, no. Three, no four, no five, no six, there's something arbitrary going on. It's far better to hear what the Bible says and what the Bible says is there's one race, the human race. There is one race, the human race. And there are various ethnicities and colors and languages and traditions and histories and conceptions of what's beautiful. And it varies. But the most basic thing we can say is one race, the human race.

Listen to what God says in Genesis 5, Genesis 1: 27-28. Genesis 5 repeats it almost verbatim. It says this -- *let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over all the earth. So God created man in his image, male and female.* He created them. It does not say black and white or red and yellow, black and white. It says male and female. That's the one basic division in humanity between male and female. Then after the fall, described in Genesis 3, we come to Genesis 12, and God calls Abraham to himself with promises. And he says in Genesis 12:1-3, I will make of you a great nation, and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. All nations, all ethnic groups, all linguistic groups will be blessed in Abraham.

You know, I think you probably know that there are more Christians living in Asia and Africa and South America than there are in Europe and North America. Christianity is more and more a Southern and Eastern religion, and we praise God for that in the New Testament.

In case we missed the point, Jesus says, go and make disciples of all the nations because they're all to be my disciples. And over in Revelation it says, not one time, not two, not three, but four different times, almost the same thing. It says the first one in Rev 5: 9-10 - *We praise Jesus because by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation* -- tribe, language, people, nation, not race.

Now you may say to yourself, well, doesn't the Bible talk about races? Sometimes in the translation we use the most, it appears not nine times, and five of them refer to people running fast. And in four of them it refers to the people of God who are called -- For example, I Peter:5 -- a chosen race and a royal priesthood. So, it means either the people of God, which are the chunk of humanity from every tribe and people and tongue and nation who believe in Jesus, or it's people running around really fast.

The Bible does not use the word race the way we do. So now I'm going to say another thing. The human body of people is one race. But if you want to have races, I'll allow you to have two races. And they are the race of Adam and the race of Christ. Listen or turn, if you would, to Romans 5. I'm going to read verse 12, and then verses 17 to 19. If there are two races here, they are Romans 5:12.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, Adam, and death spread to all men, because all sinned. So we could say we are a sinful race. Verse 17, there is another race, and that is the race of the redeemed.

People of God are united to Christ. For if verse 17, because of one man's trespass, Adam's death reigned through that one man, and much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as and life for all men for us. one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification. By one man's disobedience the many were made sinners. So by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. So, if you want two races, I'll give them to you the fallen race and the redeemed race. Those are sinners, and they stay in their sin. And those who are redeemed and belong to Christ and have the gift of righteousness and justification.

Humanity is united in Adam, united in God's creation, united in Christ. If we receive those who do receive God's grace, God's justification, God's peace, the gift of faith, no condemnation, but now exoneration through Christ. Those are the two races if you want to have races. And again, the Bible doesn't use the word the way we do. Now. What does the Bible talk about?

The Bible does talk about diversity in the human race, the one human race of mankind. The first comes up in Genesis 10, which we're not going to read right now. It's called the Table of Nations. God told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and to some degree people were and there were scattering throughout the world. And those places they wanted their leading people are named to some degree in Genesis 10. In Genesis 11, it says they decided they would like to try to stop scattering and they'd like to build a tower. Said all be unified. And God said, no, I'm going to scatter you and people scattered throughout the world. In Acts 17: 26—28 it describes what God did as Paul goes to Athens to preach to the people there about God's purposes for the world. He's moving from Christianity being primarily centered in Israel, you know, missionary journeys of Paul. He goes throughout the world. He goes to the great cities of the world and says, you two can become a part of the redeemed family of God. And this is what he says in Acts 17, speaking to people who are not believers in the Areopagus, the open forum in Athens, he says, *God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel or grope their way toward him and find him, it is not actually far from each of one of us, for each one of us for we are his offspring.*

So what he's saying is very simply this God determined to scatter humanity and humanity is different. The Athenians, educated people, knew very well that there are cities that have their histories and their identities and their styles of clothing, their music, the way they go about war, their pottery, their styles of eating and all the rest. And that is a part of God's purpose to scatter humanity throughout the world putting them in their places. So in due time they would find their way back to him. Jesus recognizes the problem of ethnic hatred in the gospels as well. Jesus notices the differences between people and he tries to correct them, and he does correct them. I don't know if you remember this, but the parable of the Good Samaritan is preceded in Luke 9 by a little journey.

Jesus and the Apostles took their Samaritan territory, and as they travel through Samaritan territory, there was a town that didn't want to receive them. Maybe the Apostles are trying to find out where are we going to stay and where they were going to eat in this particular town. Didn't want to receive Jesus. And the Apostles came to Jesus and said, shall we call on fire to burn them? And Jesus said, no, actually, I think I'm going to tell you a parable about a good Samaritan, because Jews and Samaritans had intense prejudice against each other. And so Jesus created a good Samaritan. And later on, the gospel of Luke says, there were ten lepers, and one of them came back and he was a Samaritan. Jesus, by that kind of action, is letting people know that the Samaritans are not outcasts or despised people, but they can be our brothers in Christ.

And of course, before Jesus ascended into heaven, he said, go and preach the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the other parts of the earth. These people, the greatest rivals of Israel, these people also can be godly. And the people of God.

We pay a lot of attention in our culture, in many cultures to color, skin color, hair color, eye color, the shape of eyes, how much curl there is in her hair, whether everybody has a brown iris, or whether you can have an iris that's green or gray or blue or hazel. And the Bible pays attention to this sort of thing once in a while. Just every once in a while, we see something like the Song of Songs or Song of Solomon, in which the woman says, I am very dark but lovely, and that's it. That's all there is. And then in Acts 13:1, among the people who were leaders in the church of Antioch, there is Simeon, who is called Niger, which means dark.

That's my addition, by the way, and that's almost the list of times where people skin color is noticed in the Bible, and there's no uptake, there's no real commentaries, no development. In fact, there's probably 5 or 6 times in the whole Bible where there's any serious mention of what people look like. There is David, who is ruddy and handsome, probably means he had reddish skin. There is Daniel, who was very handsome. There's Abigail, who is very beautiful, and that's it. Nothing much happens. The Bible acknowledges that people look different, and it just won't let us make much of that. It acknowledges it enough to say we see it in. It just doesn't count very much at all. And that's the way it should be with us, and we have a hard time with it.

Somebody said to me before the service, you know, talking about race and ethnicity, that can you in trouble with that. And I said, yep, there's one thing I think I need to say that could get me

in trouble. So here it is. You ready? So I'm going to try to say it as nicely as I can. And please, please just take these as words from a nice person is doing his best to help you understand and live in to what I'm talking about. So here goes. I have on four occasions in my life, been viewed through the lens, clearly viewed through the lens of what I look like. Now. I think about this. Meditate on this because I look like a European person and I talk like someone from, you know, some vicinity where people get educated. And so I get the benefits of being white educated. And so my interest is in looking for places, in my experience, where I can begin slightly to identify with what it might be like to be treated with prejudice because of your appearance. So here goes. And they all have to do with police officers. I am not against police officers, it's just my experience. I love police officers. The vast majority there are wonderful, godly people are so glad we're there. We're so glad we have non corrupt officers. You got it. Here's what happened. I've been the unwanted object of attention by police officers four times in my life, and two times I did something wrong, but I was dressed really well and absolutely nothing happened.

And twice I was dressed like a ragamuffin and I was treated poorly. One time, extremely poorly. So here's number one. About 30 years ago, I was driving down the street and there was very leafy street, and there was a stop sign, and I just went right through the stop sign. I just went right through it because I didn't see it.

And a police officer pulled me over and I was driving a relatively new car, and I had a sports jacket on and a white shirt, a tie, and a police officer apologized for pulling me over. Sir, did you notice that you rolled through a stop sign? I said, I did not, I didn't. Where was the stop sign? He said, well, right over there. Maybe there's a tree in the way. Try to pay attention to invisible stop signs and play. Go, please. Go on your way. Thank you very much.

Second time I was also in a neighborhood I didn't know and it was on one of those roads that changes speed limits every half mile. You know what I mean? 40. 30, 35, 45, 40, 35. And I was pulled over. I was going 41 miles an hour in a 30 mile an hour zone. And I had a suit on. I'd just been preaching. I had a tie. My car was clean. The police officer pulled me over, said, sir, I'm so sorry to pull you over. Please forgive me, but you were going 41 miles an hour in a 30 mile zone. Try not to do that. The sign changed half a mile ago. It's not your fault, but I have to pull you over, etc..

So I was clearly in the wrong two times wearing a suit. And I got in no trouble either time at all. Another time I was driving down the road and I was coming home from the gym, and I was pretty sweaty. And I hate to admit it, but I might have had a cut off t shirt. You know, it was a sign of not really full, proper sleeves. And I was driving along and a police officer came out of a street at about, I'm going to say 18 miles an hour and almost drove into the side of my car, and he pulled me over and put his hand on his gun. It was all swaggering and threatening and that, you know why you pulled me over. I felt like saying, because you almost crashed into me and you feel guilty about it. But I knew that wouldn't help. And then I recognized him and he recognized me. I just preached in his church about four days earlier. And his tone changed. Oh, Dr. Doriani, so nice to see you today. And his hand came off his gun and he stopped threatening

to give me a ticket for being in the way of him running through a stop sign. That one was funny. The other time I was 18 years old, college freshman, kind of ratty clothes, raggedy beard, and, I was pulled over by a police officer, told to pull up my ID, put my hands on the on the hood of the police vehicle, told not to move soon. There were four policemen holding their guns at me, pointing at me, threatening me. Don't move or we'll shoot. You happened to fit the description of a murderer who killed a police officer. And he just escaped from jail. Well, that's not good.

But here's the thing in my hands. At that time, I had an organic chemistry textbook and a calculus textbook, and I actually said to them, because al is just smart enough to not realize this wasn't a good thing to say. I said, you know, the chances of me being a recently escaped murderer, I just got out of jail are really low. Because just ask yourself the question, how many cop murderers run from jail and say, before I go, I better get my organic chemistry and calculus textbook. None of you think that's funny. The police officers didn't think it was funny. Now be, you know, in a few minutes, here's my ID, here's my meal pass. Here's my, you know, here's everything I'm identifying myself all over the place. And they said I'm blah, blah, blah, blah. I mean, after I exonerated myself, that then yelled at me, told me never to walk around the street again without whatever it is they wanted me not to do, I got to say, I think it was kind of because I was dressed not real well and had a raggedy beard. I don't know, I was 18 years old. How many people have killed a cop by the age of 18? Probably not a whole lot. Gotten condemned to jail, broke out carrying calculus textbooks, organic chemistry textbooks. They saw a man who wasn't. Well, that's what they saw. They saw a man who had a raggedy beard and kind of long hair and they were mad and they treated me according to my appearance. The Bible says we ought not to do that. I understand their position as a cop killer. I get it, I get mad, but don't take it out on me because my clothes aren't nice.

I want you to turn to Acts 13. I'm gonna ask you to notice a couple of things about the way God does things. And there's a town, a city really. I shouldn't say a town. A city of size called Antioch. And there are a couple Antioch's in the Bible, there's Syrian, Antioch and a city in Antioch. This is one of the Antioch's is the Antioch that became the first multi-ethnic church. And it's also Syrian. Antioch is also the church that sent out the first deliberate, planned missionaries to plant churches in the world.

And this is what it says -- now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene Manaen, a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they're worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul, for the work to which I've called them. And then, after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Now you would say to yourself, okay, this is about Paul and Barnabas being sent off. That's right, that's true. That's good. But I'm going to ask you to notice the names. And the names are Barnabas, which is Jewish, and Simeon, which is Jewish, but called Niger, which means he is very dark skinned, which means he was probably an African convert to the faith of Israel next, Lucius of Serena. And that's a small island. And Lucius is a Latin name. He's Latin, almost certainly and

a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, that's the leadership team in Antioch, a Jew, Roman, someone probably from Africa, and someone who appears to be Anita might. And it's just mentioned nobody makes anything of it.

That's the way the church is supposed to be. The church should have the diversity. Antioch was probably about as diverse as any city in the world at that time. And if a church is in a diverse neighborhood, it should be diverse. And that church was, and it allowed them because they were from varied ethnicities, it allowed them to think and to see there all these places, all these people groups, all these nations there, there are people who are Latin, there are demands or Edomites.

There are people from Africa that need to hear the gospel. And so they're the ones who sent out the first missionaries, all for the purpose of evangelism and praise. The Book of Revelation tells us that at the end of time, all the peoples, all the tribes and tongues and peoples and nations, it doesn't say races. All the tribes and tongues and peoples and nations will bring their glory into the new world.

When God restores all things. I'm going to ask you to turn and see it in your own Bibles. And if you're the kind of person who might even put a tiny little pencil mark by it, because this is the first of four very similar statements in the in the book of revelation, describing the beauty of God's global redemption. Chapter five. Verse nine, people are singing a song to Christ. They're saying, worthy of you to take the scroll and to open its seals. For you were slain, and by your blood you ransom people from God, for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God. And they shall reign on the earth. That's what God sees. He sees tribes and languages and peoples and nations. They have their history. They have their style of music. They have their idea of what's beautiful in terms of clothing and pottery and all the rest. And if you're willing, if you've turned to revelation five, would you just turn one page over in your Bible?

Maybe two, depending on your translation to chapter seven and chapter seven? Verse nine. Paul has a vision and it says this. After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands.

That's what God sees. He sees nations and tribes and peoples and languages. He doesn't see people. We should judge based on their appearances. He acknowledges the role of history and formation and language and the way languages make people different from each other. And yet they're all one. Later on in revelation 21, it says, the kings of the earth will bring their glory into the city of God, meaning all their history, all their accomplishments through the years.

Now, this isn't all the Bible has to say about these matters in acts chapter 20, there is a teaching that might even be more necessary for us here. And the teaching goes like this. There is, according to acts 15, a famine going on in Jerusalem. This troubles Paul, and he wants to bring a gift to the city of Jerusalem and the Christians there to relieve them in the time of famine.

And he has, you know, his goal is to preach the gospel where it's never been preached before. Of course, that's his main goal, but he also has an interest in the people of God, the ethnic people of God, the Jews, Christians, Jews living in Jerusalem. And so he decides to collect an offering from the Gentile churches to show solidarity between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

He's risking life to go back to that city where as many folks, he's traveling slowly by boat, a thousand miles, taking time out of his missionary journeys, intention to go to Spain. He goes a thousand miles wrong direction. And as he goes, he says, I'm not just going to bring a gift. I want to bring a gift that shows how we're all one family, one people of God.

And so he brings representatives from various cities where the gospel has brought forth new churches. So the people he brings with him come from Berea and Thessalonica and Derby and implicitly from Ephesus. But what's really interesting to me is that he names some of the people that come with him, and among the people come with him is a man named Aristarchus and another man named Secundus. And that means nothing to us. But people would have understood exactly what it meant when they read it.

Aristarchus comes from two Greek words that means virtuous leader. So imagine having a boy and saying, my son made a baptism this morning. My son, his name is Virtuous Leader. That's his name. His name is virtuous leader. How are you doing Virtuous leader? Aristarchus is virtuous leader. That's a kind of name you give when you're aristocratic. And when people heard the name Aristarchus, they thought, okay, top of society.

And when people heard the word Secundus, they knew that he was a slave. Because slaves are given names like Primas, Secundus, Tertius, Cortez and Quintus and Sixtus. And what they meant was number one, slave number two, slave number three, slave number four, slave number five, slave among people had many slaves. And so Paul chose to bring two people, not racially diverse, but socioeconomically diverse. I'm bringing with the people from Derby and Ephesus and Berea, someone from the upper crust of society. Not only does he have a slave name, you understand that when a slave is given a name, people care about their name slightly enough to just say, you know what your name is? Number two. That's your name, your number two slave. Paul said, I'm going to bring number two to make it as clear as possible that people who are not even the best slave, but just slaves, are coming to show the solidarity of the entire people of God, not just racially skin color, not just ethnically. What region of the world you came from, not just linguistically or nationally, historically or culturally, but also socioeconomically, because we are all one people.

Unity in diversity is the word. And what does the Bible have to say to us about all this? First of all, the Bible says, do not judge by appearances. You remember the call of David. You remember that Samuel the prophet went to find the next king when Saul had been demonstrably dethroned for his lack of faith, and it was clear that was somebody from the house of Jesse.

And when Samuel saw the noble looking sons of Jesse, sure. This is the one God said to Samuel, don't judge by appearances. And Jesus said in John, do not judge by appearances. Judge with righteous judgment. And James says, brothers show no partiality based on the way people dress. Can I read James 2:1-4 to you?

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor man and shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good seat while you say to the poor man, you stand over there, or you sit down at my feet, have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

It's not just skin color or accent, it's our clothing. It's anything that people see that could allow us to look at someone else and say inferior, not as good. It's human nature to do that, to say, my people are better than your people. One of the places this is most clear is in India, where there is really no genetic diversity in the land. It's one people group. There's some diversity in skin colors. You move from north to south, but it's one people. It's very clear. And so there's really no opportunity to be prejudicial in India. But they do have a caste system. And the caste system lets people say, you can be a doctor, you can be a lawyer, you can be an educator. You can start a business in this caste. You get to sweep the streets, you get to clean toilets. So even though there's nothing ethnic for people to push on or look at, people create something allows us to say, you are not as good as I am.

So, brothers and sisters, let us resist all such thinking and all such approaches to the people we meet in life.

We are one race, the human race. And if we're redeemed, we are the human race. I'm just going to give you a couple names and a couple ideas that may help you live out your life without prejudice toward people based on experience. The first word I'll give you is internalized racism. That's a label for what we feel when we see someone who looks very different from us, even if we don't do anything about it. It's internal. It's an attitude. When we see somebody looks very different, or maybe they eat very different food and so they smell a little bit different. It's internalized racism.

Institutional racism is overt restrictions. Certain people can go into certain neighborhoods and other people cannot. You can drink from this water fountain, not that water fountain. You go to this school, not that school, etc. that's institutional. It's legal. It's housing, it's movements.

Association number two, aversive racism is discomfort we feel with somebody, even if you don't know what's going on. And if you feel that when you see somebody is different, just label it, pray about it, talk to yourself about it, question yourself. There's also this is another loaded word, systemic racism, which means even though no one has an overt dislike or hatred, there are sometimes systems that are built up that create barriers to some people.

And here's my illustration. It comes from the world of education in colleges and grad schools. It's almost impossible to get a scholarship unless you're a full-time student. It's almost impossible in most schools. You have got to be full time. We're not going to waste our scholarships on part time people. But in cities, people who want to get a theological education, who are African-American are all full time pastors, and they have a full time job. And they're also trying to get a theological, theological education. They're plumbers, electricians, or whatever they might be, and they pastor, and you better believe 100% of them are part time seminary students. So if you say you have to be full time, you've just disenfranchised all the African-Americans and most of the Hispanics as well.

You didn't mean to, but you did it. My own seminary, Covenant Theological Seminary, had that role for years. And I said, folks, we're disadvantaging. We are giving scholarships to people who have a tradition of receiving scholarships and people who are Anglo with strong educations and their families support them. And they believe it's worthwhile to be a full time student. And we don't mean to, but we are blocking our African-American brothers from coming and get a theological education because they're we're making them pay more than anybody else because it's part time and it's not their fault. We got to change and to the credit of the people around. But they all said, good point. We're going to change it now. They didn't form a study committee. They didn't form a task force. They just stopped doing it. They just changed because they realized that we had been making a mistake.

So look around for barriers that we put up that you put up, whether you mean to or not, and look around for your own prejudices. Maybe you grew up in a multi-ethnic, multi linguistic multinational setting and you're delight to hang out with people who look a little bit different and talk a little bit different from you.

But please don't tell yourself you have no bias. You may have a bias toward those who are pretty or handsome or tall, or people who talk the way you talk. We're all prone to prejudice. We all need to remember that all of God's people are his. We are one nation. We are one people. God created one humanity. And if there's any distinction, it is only this the distinction between those who are of the race of Adam and have not yet received Christ, and have maybe even rejected him, and the race of Christ, the people who belong to him and love him.

So I invite you to live out your identity in this church. This is a marvelous church for missions. We heard from Olan Stubbs, who gave a quick short report, and among the points in his report was the statement that campus outreach is on third on the campus is in 13 nations, and we send missionaries out to dozens of nations.

Praise God for what we do right. We love the world. Let's love the world. This right here, right here in front of us. Not just the world that's out there. Examine yourselves. Look at yourselves and ask the question, do you want to be part of those who welcome the people from every tribe, tongue and people and nation, as the Lord himself does?

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, I thank you for your teaching about who we are. And Lord, we know that in our sinfulness and in our traditions, we tend to make divisions and decide who's in and who's out and who's better and who's worse and what people group usually our own is better than another people group. Lord, help us break from this. Help us to receive and believe that what counts is that you made us in your image, to govern your world, to fill it, to subdue it. And then, Lord, when it was broken, when sin entered and decay entered, there is another race, the race of the redeemed, the chosen people, a holy race, your race, the race of the redeemed Lord, I pray, Lord, I pray that we would examine ourselves, repent if we have any need to reconsider how we view the people around us to receive, to love all the nations, all the peoples, even as you do.

We prayed in Jesus' name,

Amen.