

Racism, the Image of God, and the Gospel



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Key idea:

All humans are descended from Adam and are the image of God, but there are many different ethnic groups, and God is calling us to overcome the sinful tendency to separate and to come together so that the Gospel might flourish in our area.

Key text:

Acts 17:26-28

From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Key points:

1. Paul taught that we are all descended from one man (Adam) and that we are all God's image-bearers.
2. Though there is only one human race, all descended from Adam and Eve, there are many "ethnicities" or "tribes". Our 'ethnos'/ethnicity is part of the image of God, is a major part of who we are, and will continue into eternity.
3. Our Triune God is so awesome, so beyond compare, that a multitude of ethnicities and cultural expressions are required to display His glory and proclaim His praise!
4. We must recognize our sinful tendency to want to separate from those not like us, preferring to be with our own "tribe"/'ethnos' rather than embracing one as God calls for us to do.
5. God has determined that we live in a time and place where many 'ethnos' live together and it is a critical part of our call to learn to embrace one another.

6. God's purpose in all of this is to bring people back to Himself and to cause the Gospel to flourish.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's text and teaching stood out most to me? Why?
2. Why is it critical to understand that we are all descended from Adam? What does this tell me about the idea of different 'races' within humanity?
3. Why is it imperative to stress that every human being equally bears the image of God? How does this understanding undermine racism, sexism, or mistreatment of the poor?
4. Why is it important to understand that even though there is only one human race, there are many 'ethnos'? What is it that makes an 'ethnos' distinct from other 'ethnos'? What elements combine to make a distinct cultural group?
5. Is there anything such as a 'neutral' culture? Is it possible for me to not be affected by my own culture? If not, in what ways has my culture shaped me? What things do I tend to like because of my culture? What things do I tend to dislike because of my culture? How can I learn to recognize how my culture is shaping me?
6. Why is fear and demonizing of other cultures impacting my own culture such a temptation for us? In what ways has racism been a particular expression of this problem in American history?
7. Can I think of examples of where I have personally observed or acted in a 'racist' or 'ethnocentric' manner? Was the person acting in this manner even aware of it?
8. Bret indicated that addressing the issue of 'racism/ethnocentrism' is critical for the flourishing of the Gospel in our time and place. Do I agree with him? Why or why not?
9. Can I think of some ways I can personally work to learn more and address this issue more effectively? What steps do I think are helpful and will lead to a flourishing of the Gospel? What things might I do that would actually undermine the flourishing of the Gospel?
10. Whom can I pray for, share what I have learned, and invite to church this week?