

The Bible and Race

I. Introduction

- A. No one will dispute that the issue of race is one of the hottest issues in our land today. The Bible has much to say on the subject, and the Church needs to preach the biblical perspective; it needs to be applied in its Body life, and with reference to the world, it needs to be a light in a dark world. It needs to set the example and lead. With a Bible in its hand the Church should be telling the Government how to act, not *vice-versa*.
- B. Racism historically becomes rampant when there are large population displacements due to natural catastrophe, political upheaval, or war. The modern world is indeed a melting pot which is currently becoming a boiling caldron. Example: At the formation of the Soviet Empire Stalin engaged in massive population shifts and arbitrary drawing of borders. Today racial strife threatens to engulf the new commonwealth in ethnic wars.

II. The Origin of the Races.

A. The Evolutionary View

If one assumes an evolutionary view of humans then it is impossible to avoid the argument that some races may be further evolved than others. In the 19th century, after Darwin's works were published, it was common to see in print drawings of the evolutionary tree with a white European at the end of the line.

B. The Biblical View

1. The Bible answers some of our questions about the origins of racial characteristics, the nations, and language groups. It gives a genealogy of the nations from the three sons of Noah and the general statement: *From these the nations spread out over the earth.* Gen. 10:32. In Chap. 11, in the story of Babel we have the origin of the language groups.
2. The Sin of Ham (Gen. 9:20ff.)
 - a. Because of an improper attitude about his father's nudity a curse was pronounced on the youngest son of Ham, i.e. Canaan. This story must be seen in the light of the culture at the time it was written. What Ham did somehow was a terrible reproach on the family. The curse, therefore, was to be on his family. At first glance this may seem unfair, however, it appears certain from the context of Genesis that a later generation may be judged for the sin of an ancestor if they are of like mind and deed. The Canaanites were one of the most sexually decadent groups in all of Scripture (see Lev. 18. *nakedness* is used 24 times!). The book of Genesis was probably written just before the Israelites were about to enter the land of Canaan. It is appropriate at this point to inform them about the Canaanites and the curse that is on them. This curse was completely fulfilled in that day. The canaanites were indeed

servants of the children of Israel. See Jos. 9:27; 16:10; Jdg. 1:28,30,33,35; IKg. 9:20,21) They were finally wiped out by the Romans in 146 B.C. at Carthage.

- b. We bring up the matter of the Curse on Ham's son in this outline because of the erroneous interpretation that the curse resulted in the black-skinned people and is therefore used to justify their slavery. This interpretation became popular in this country early in the 19th Century, and unfortunately still endures among extremist groups today. Note: The curse was not on all the descendants of Ham, only on Canaan and his descendants and it was fulfilled as the Israelites conquered Canaan. And foremost, *the Canaanites were a light-skinned people!*

3. The Biblical Explanation for Racial Diversity

- a. All races descended from our first parents, Adam and Eve. All the genetic diversity that we see today was built in at the beginning. After the Flood, as family groups were isolated by geographical and language barriers, certain physical characteristics began to be expressed more frequently while others were suppressed. Perhaps a better way to view this is that we are all one race, the human race, with some diversity of physical features.
- b. Usually these physical differences are very slight confined to only skin pigmentation, hair texture, certain cranial features and eye color. *Biologically speaking, all are of the same species*, are inter-fertile and produce fertile offspring. There is no difference in the size of the brain! Skin color is due to the variation of a substance called melanin in the skin. More melanin means more coloration. Jesus' skin coloration was probably somewhere between black and white, i.e. olive-skinned as are people of the Middle east today.

III. Definitions of Racism

- A. Definition of Racism: Racism embraces the belief that hereditary biology determines the differences between groups, that cultural differences are predetermined and immutable, and that the distinguishing social and cultural features of the subordinate group are inferior. These faulty assumptions are responsible for irrational prejudice and discrimination.
- B. Racism may involve one or more of the following:
 - 1. Prejudging a race of people (or an individual from a different race) *solely* (the key word) on the basis of physical characteristics. Examples: declaring that one race has more sexual libido, are more fertile, are better athletes, have lower IQ's.

(Note: An ethnic group may not share all the same physical characteristics, but they do share the same language and culture. For example, Jews are an ethnic group. They have racial differences. European Jews are racially different from Mediterranean Jews.)

2. Stereotyping: This is a form of universalization. It may be applied to people with a certain physical characteristics, or to an ethnic group. Examples: (the word *all* is understood) Jews are elitist, Orientals are sneaky, Italians are hot-headed, Slavs are barbaric, Native-Americans are ecologically minded. The key mistake here is the absoluteness of the word *all*. There is nothing wrong with saying an ethnic group has a certain trait as long as it is not universalized, e.g. *Italians tend to be aesthetically minded in that they have produced many great artists and composers. Not all of them are. Where we usually get into trouble here is with a negative stereotype where we indict an entire people. For example, The _____ are a brutal people.* Many of them might be, but not every individual, and it is certainly not due to physical characteristics!

IV. The Bible and Race

- A. It is an interesting observation that the Bible never groups people by racial or physical characteristics. It does however on the basis of language, ethnicity, or geographical area.
- B. One whole book of the Bible was written to combat racism. This was of course the book of Jonah. Jonah was not anxious to see God spare a people he hated. The sins of these people (the Assyrians) were indeed heinous, but their sinful condition did not have anything to do with racial characteristics, or ethnic grouping. It had everything to do with the sinful condition of their hearts and a faulty worldview (See part V.)
- C. God chose the Jewish nation to be nation of priests. It was God's desire for Jews to tell the world the truth about the true God. In the OT they were constantly warned not to mistake this for favoritism. The Jews were a chosen *people*, not a race. God called into being a community of people who would live among the nations to serve His purpose. See Dt. 7:6-8; 9:4-6; Amos 9:7. (The Jews were racially a mixed multitude from the beginning. See Gen. 41:50-52; Ex. 12:38; Lev. 24:10; and Ezek. 16:3).
- D. It is God's intent and purpose for the Church (*The Israel of God*, see I Pet. 2:9, a declaration written to gentiles!) to fulfill His plan to save a multitude from every tribe, tongue and nation (Rom. 9:23ff.; Rev. 7:9). We believe there is significance in the number of disciples that Jesus sent out on one occasion to preach the good news of the kingdom--70 disciples (Lk.10). There are exactly 70 nations mentioned in the table of nations in Gen. 10!
- E. In the church there is equality of all races and groups. *There is neither Jew nor Greek*, Gal. 3:20ff. In the Greek, the word *Greek* meant all those who were non-jews.
- F. The Great Commission is all-inclusive. *Make disciples of all nations*. Matt. 28:19.
- G. *For God so loved the world...* How can we as Christians do any less?
- H. What about interracial marriage? The Bible is silent on the issue but is very vocal about any kind of union with paganism. Christian young people are to marry those who share

the same worldview. The issue is not race. However, a person of another race may also be from a different culture, i.e. lifestyle, which may preclude them from ever being a happily adjusted couple. Intermarriage from two different economic brackets may also not be wise. (There are several examples of racial intermarriage in the Bible. Joseph and Moses come to mind.)

V. A Biblical Basis for Discrimination

- A. Can Christians discriminate at all? Absolutely! We must be a judge of culture. A culture is the embodiment of a worldview. We are not here referring to all aspects of a culture (e.g. how they wear their hair, what they eat, lifestyle, etc.) but only that which has to do with moral and truth claims. If Christianity is *true truth* as Francis Schaeffer used to say, then all truth claims must be measured in terms of Scripture. If a tribe practices cannibalism the goal of the missionary (after conversion) is to get them to understand the truth about the dignity of man as revealed in Scripture, and to therefore enjoin them to cease the practice. The *way* we judge another culture (or our own pagan U.S. culture!) is also vitally important. I Pet. 3: 15,16 tells how, *with gentleness and respect*. For more information on this, see *How Shall We Then Live?* or *The Church Before a Watching World* by Francis Schaeffer.
- B. Christians should study and learn about other cultures. This is essential in the task of evangelism, but we must avoid the underlying assumptions of the multi-culturalist movement currently popular in our country and in the West which assumes all cultures are equal. This is nothing but relativism.

VI. Overcoming Racism

- A. None of us are innocent of the sin of racism. We must realize that by being racist we are (1) being prideful, (2) we are in judgement of our Creator who made different races, (3) we are denying the *imago dei*, and (4) we are tacitly giving approval to evolution. We must at all costs uphold the dignity of all men. This is the hallmark of the Christian ethical system.
- B. Racist attitudes are learned behavior. The Christian home must reflect a Biblical attitude about race. Parents must be consistent models. It doesn't help to be strongly pro-life and exhibit an irrational attitude about race.
- C. Christian leaders, pastors, and Bible teachers must loudly proclaim the universality of the gospel message. It is inconsistent for a church to be involved in world missions and not be open to ministering to local racial and ethnic groups. The book of Jonah is not just for kids!
- D. Different racial and ethnic groups may have very different worship styles. A worship style of one ethnic group should not be forced on another group. Therefore, ethnic groups tend to band together. *The point is that a church body should be open and diverse.*