

Race, Politics, and the Gospel - The Idea of Race and the Image of God
Bart Box

Intro and Preliminary Class Notes

- Big question: Who is shaping our thoughts on these matters?
 - Is it the culture at large or is it the Christ of the Bible?
 - Is it the Word of God or the latest word we've read somewhere?
- Ground rules:
 - This class is not intended to take sides or take shots.
 - We must pursue unity by practicing charity.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2)

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

- We will not cover, explain, or speak to everything!

When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. (Proverbs 10:19)

- Questions?
 - We have a Q&A night planned later in the class.
 - Submit questions at www.cfcberkeley.org/equip.

The Idea of Race and the Image of God

- The modern conception of race was popularized in the 17th and 18th centuries.
 - In part, the classification of races was done as a justification for slavery.
 - There was an increasing need to segment society into greater and lesser degrees of humanity.
- The Bible puts forth a different story—one man, many nations (or ethnicities).

And he 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, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. (Acts 17:26-27)

- The Bible doesn't ignore the existence of nationalities, sets, or groups of people who are identified together by common language, geography, culture, and history.
- But theologically more significant than the many is the one.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

- The image of God (or *imago dei*) may be understood in several ways:
 - The structural view - The image of God is something we possess (e.g. conscience, moral judgment, or spirit) that distinguishes us from the rest of creation.
 - The relational view - The image of God is seen in the use of the will, reason, soul, etc., in relation with God and others.
 - The representational view - The image of God is found primarily in acting as God's representative over creation.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:28)

- The image of God, not race, dignifies humanity in a way that is utterly unique and irreducible.
 - All people everywhere at all times bear the image of their Creator God and are made to reflect and represent Him.
 - The image admits of no degrees.

The whole concept of the "image of God" is the idea that all men have something within them that God injected.... And this gives [man] a uniqueness, it gives him worth, it gives him dignity. And we must never forget this... There are no gradations in the image of God. Every man from a treble white to a bass black is significant on God's keyboard, precisely because every man is made in the image of God. One day we will learn that. We will know one day that God made us to live together as brothers and to respect the dignity and worth of every man. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Takeaways...

- The Bible's teaching on the image of God exposes racism as a serious and tragic sin.
 - The degradation of an entire group of people based upon skin color has no place in the kingdom of God.

- It is not a just society that treats one group this way and another group that way based on skin color or ethnicity.
- The God of all the earth will do right (Gen. 18:25) by us all.
- The Bible's teaching on the image of God provides the pathway to genuine progress in racial division.
 - Colorblindness is not the goal in the Bible, since it obscures the Bible's teaching on the goodness of diversity in Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-16)

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 3:8-10)

- At the same time, neither is an obsession on skin color what we need in this moment.

There is not a white nature, black nature, Asian nature, or Hispanic nature. There is a human nature. Any notions to the contrary only reinforce the sort of racialized ideas we are trying to overcome. When we start with black or white instead of the image of God, we shut each other out of our shared humanity, conducting ourselves as if we can hardly speak to one another, learn from one another, or love one another across the racial divide. When you meet someone of a different race, you should look at that man or woman as someone more like you than different—someone who, deep down, has the same sorts of fears, sins, needs, and aspirations. We ought to think, “This is my neighbor with an immortal soul. And though he may have experiences, for better or worse, that I have not had, I am face to face with someone who has been made in the same image as I.” (Kevin DeYoung)

- The Bible's teaching on the image of God warns us about stereotypes, generalizations, and broad-brush attacks on whole groups of people.
 - We must avoid demonizing the opposition in any and every debate.
 - We need the right kind of individualism—every man and woman judged on their merits.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Some of God's image-bearers commit acts of atrocious wickedness. They should be deterred, denounced, and punished. Some institutions and laws in God's world are unjust. They should be changed and their affects ameliorated. At the same time, surely loving our neighbors entails giving the benefit of the doubt¹⁸ to others wherever possible—not assuming the

worst about the individual and not assuming the worst individual is indicative of the whole group. If we are going to burn the country down—figuratively and literally—every time we see their bad guys doing bad things, we give power to the worst people to set our agenda instead of to the best. We ought to reject any narrative that tells us that “those other people”—black, white, Hispanic, Asian, cops, protesters, Muslims, Christians, Jews, atheists, rich, poor, Republicans, Democrats, conservatives, liberals—are as bad as the worst people of their kind. We should not curse people made in the likeness of God. More than that, we should have a good reason before we castigate them too. (Kevin DeYoung)

- The Bible’s teaching on the image of God tells us that we need Jesus.
 - We are *made in* the image of God, but Jesus is the image of God.

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Hebrews 1:3)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (Colossians 1:15)

- Jesus is both the perfect example and the goal of the image.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)

...that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:2-3)