

## What the Bible Teaches about Ethnic Harmony<sup>1</sup>

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When John Piper introduced an ethnic harmony seminar to Bethlehem Baptist Church in November 2000, he shared, “This issue is an emotionally no-win issue, which is one of the reasons (of dozens) that people don’t want to touch it. You just get beat up so much. ... It’s a hard issue to deal with. But it’s worth it.”<sup>2</sup> This is a challenging topic not just intellectually but experientially for a wide range of people.

Ethnic harmony is a controversial issue in our culture, and the Bible says a lot about it. This article updates a seminar I presented to my church in January 2020. I focus on understanding and applying what the Bible says about ethnicity. I organize what the Bible says about ethnicity under eight propositions. These headings are in my own words, but I am adapting them from the seven synthesizing conclusions by Danny Hays in his thoughtful volume in D. A. Carson’s *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series.<sup>3</sup> Here are my eight propositions:

1. God created every human being in his image with equal dignity and worth, so ethnic partiality is sinful.
2. Humans in the Bible’s storyline are multiethnic.
3. God’s global plan to save sinners includes people from every ethnic group.

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, “Why Deal with Racial Issues? Racial Harmony Session 1,” *Desiring God*, 29 November 2000, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/why-deal-with-racial-issues-session-1>.

<sup>3</sup> J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 14 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 201–6.

4. God approves of interethnic marriage.
5. God's people must love their neighbors across ethnic lines.
6. The church—both Jewish and Gentile Christians—must maintain the unity (including ethnic harmony) that Christ powerfully created.
7. The church should welcome ethnic diversity.
8. The church should love justice, which entails treating all ethnicities justly and encouraging its members to pursue justice in society.

**1. God created every human in his image with equal dignity and worth, so ethnic partiality is sinful.**

What is the image of God? Four texts are foundational:<sup>4</sup>

I. 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." So God created man *in his own image, in the image of God* he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:26–27)

II. This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him *in the likeness of God*. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. (Gen 5:1–2)

III. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man *in his own image*. (Gen 9:6)

IV. With it [i.e., the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made *in the likeness of God*. (James 3:9)

We could go into much more detail and explore several related issues: (1) *Image* and *likeness* are interchangeable.<sup>5</sup> (2) Christ is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; cf. John 14:9; Heb 1:3). (3) Paul says that our union with Christ restores, renews, and transforms our image, which will be glorified when God glorifies our bodies (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:22–24; Col 3:10). (4) Because God created humans in his

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

<sup>5</sup> For more nuance, see Peter J. Gentry, "Humanity as the Divine Image in Genesis 1:26–28," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 2.1 (2020): 56–69.

image, every human belongs to God: “Jesus said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’” (Matt 22:20–21).

In the past two thousand years, Christian theologians have held to one of four basic views of the image of God: (1) It is what humans are—a capacity or characteristic that makes humans like God, such as reason or will or conscience. (2) It is what humans do—namely, exercising dominion over creation (cf. Ps 8:3–8). (3) It is how humans relate to God and to others. (4) It is some combination of the previous three views. A broader definition seems most persuasive to me: *The image of God in humans is that humans resemble and represent God, which entails what they should do and how they should relate to others.* In other words, humans are like God in various ways (nature) and represent God (status and purpose), so humans have the capacity to manifest that image by how they exercise dominion over creation and by how they relate to God and others.<sup>6</sup>

For our purposes with reference to ethnicity, we do not need to precisely define the image of God. But Christians should affirm the following four statements:

i. *Humans are the only earthly creatures whom God created in his image* (Gen 1:26–27). Not plants, not animals—only humans. This makes humans special. Humans uniquely image or represent God on earth—like how a child represents his or her biological parents or like how a picture of a person represents the actual person.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I say “capacity” in order not to exclude unborn babies or mentally disabled people. Elsewhere I describe the conscience as a human capacity and explain, “Like other human capacities such as speech and reason, it’s possible for a person never to actualize or achieve the capacity of conscience. A child dies in infancy, having never spoken a single word or felt a single pang of conscience. Another child is born without the mental capacity to make moral judgments. Others, through stroke, accident, or dementia, lose the moral judgment they once had and the conscience that went with it. Still, to be human is to have the *capacity* for conscience, whether or not one is able to exercise that capacity.” Andrew David Naselli and J. D. Crowley, *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 22.

<sup>7</sup> I say “earthly” and “on earth” because I am not certain that angels are not created in the image of God. My leaning at this point is that God created only

ii. *All humans are created in God's image* (Gen 9:6; James 3:9). The image—or how humans express the image—is damaged in fallen humans since God restores it in believers (see Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:22–24; Col 3:10),<sup>8</sup> but all humans are still made in God's image.

iii. *God's creating humans in his image is the basis for the sanctity of human life* (Gen 9:6). Contrast Genesis 9:3—“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.” God permits humans to kill animals for food; he forbids humans to murder fellow humans.

iv. *God's creating humans in his image is the basis for human dignity* (Gen 9:6; James 3:9). Every single human—from embryo to elderly, of every skin color, of every ethnicity—is worthy of respect. Your ethnicity is relatively unimportant compared to your identity as a person in God's image. Here is how John Piper puts it:

In determining the significance of who you are, being a person in the image of God compares to ethnic distinctives the way the noonday sun compares to a candlestick. In other words, finding your main identity in whiteness or blackness or any other ethnic color or trait is like boasting that you carry a candle to light the cloudless noonday sky. Candles have their place. But not to light the day. So color and ethnicity have their place, but not as the main glory and wonder of our identity as human beings. The primary glory of who we are is what unites us in our God-like humanity, not what differentiates us in our ethnicity.<sup>9</sup>

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humans (not angels) in his image. For example, Bavinck argues, “The incarnation of God is proof that human beings and not angels are created in the image of God, and that the human body is an essential component of that image.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 2: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 560.

<sup>8</sup> The Bible does not explicitly say that God's image is damaged or marred. Some theologians infer that God's image is damaged since Paul says that God restores or renews or transforms the image. Other theologians insist that it's better to say that people—not the image—are damaged. E.g., see John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). For a summary of Kilner's book, see <https://www.booksataglance.com/book-reviews/dignity-and-destiny-humanity-in-the-image-of-god-by-john-kilner/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/racial-reconciliation>.

This is the most fundamental reason why programs of “diversity training” usually backfire in their attempt to foster mutual respect among ethnic groups. They focus major attention on what is comparatively minor, and virtually no attention on what is infinitely, gloriously major—our common, unique standing among all creation as persons created in the image of God. If our sons and our daughters have a hundred eggs, let us teach them to put ninety-nine eggs in the basket called personhood in the image of God and one egg in the basket called ethnic distinction.<sup>10</sup>

How should God’s creating every human in his image affect how we view fellow humans? When we view a fellow human, we might be inclined to focus on differences: skin color (white, black, brown, etc.), facial features (eyes, nose, ears, hair, etc.), sex (male or female), age (young, old), height (short, tall), build (thin, thick, muscular, etc.), attractiveness (ugly, beautiful, dirty, clean, etc.), socio-economic status (rich, poor), speech (language, dialect), behavior (concerning, noble, etc.).

We inevitably notice differences. But when we view a fellow human, what is the *main* feature we should see? *A fellow image-bearer*. God creates every human in his image, so every human shares the same dignity and value that results from the image of God. No ethnic group is inherently superior to another. So it is sinful to view your own ethnic group as inherently better than another. In other words, ethnic partiality or *racism* is sinful. Here is a typical definition of *racism*:

- prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized ....
- the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another<sup>11</sup>

God does not show partiality or favoritism (Deut 10:17; 2 Chr 19:7; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Gal 2:6; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; 1 Pet 1:17), nor should we (Prov 18:5; 24:23; 28:21; James 2:1–13; cf. Jude 16). Specifically, we

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<sup>10</sup> John Piper, “Racial Reconciliation: Unfolding Bethlehem’s Fresh Initiative #3,” *Desiring God*, 14 January 1996, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/racial-reconciliation>.

<sup>11</sup> *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

should not base how we treat fellow image-bearers on their ethnicity. Ethnic partiality is sinful because God created every human being in his image.

**2. Humans in the Bible’s storyline are multiethnic.**

Hays explains,

Adam and Eve are not Hebrews or Egyptians or Canaanites. It is incorrect for the White Church to view them as White or for the Black Church to view them as Black. Their ‘race’ is not identifiable; they are neither Negroid [i.e., African] nor Caucasian, nor even Semitic. They become the mother and father of all peoples. The division of humankind into peoples and races is not even mentioned until Genesis 10. Adam and Eve, as well as Noah, are non-ethnic and non-national. They represent all people, not some people.<sup>12</sup>

For the rest of the Bible’s story, humans are multiethnic—that is, humanity has many ethnicities. Sometimes Bible storybooks for children present Bible characters as if they all looked like White Anglo-Americans. That is not the case. Humans in the Bible’s storyline are multiethnic, and the vast majority did not look like White Anglo-Americans. Various ethnicities—including Black Africans—have been part of the Bible’s storyline from the beginning.

Hays spends most of his book *From Every People and Nation* demonstrating not just that the humans in the Bible’s storyline are multiethnic but that Black Africans from Cush/Ethiopia play an important role in the Bible. He describes four main ethnic groups:<sup>13</sup> (1) *Asiastics or Semites in the northeast—including the Israelites*. (2) *Indo-Europeans in the west—Hittites and Philistines*. They were probably the OT people closest-looking in appearance to Caucasians, though they “probably resembled the people of modern Greece or Turkey more than they may have resembled the people of modern England or mid-western America.”<sup>14</sup> (3) *Egyptians in the south*. Egyptian art portrays Egyptians with light brown skin—a mixture of both Black African and Asiatic elements. (4) *Cushites further south*. Ancient Egyptian art and later art by

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<sup>12</sup> Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 47–48.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

Greek and Romans depict Cushites as Black Africans “with classic ‘Negroid’ [i.e., central and southern African] features,” and “numerous ancient literary texts refer, directly or indirectly, to the black skin colour and other ‘Negroid’ [i.e., African] features of the Cushites.”<sup>15</sup> Hays summarizes,

Black Cushites were active players in the geopolitics and economics of the Ancient Near East. The Cushites controlled Egypt for a short while, and allied themselves with Judah against the Assyrians. The Black African Ebed-Melech played a crucial role in Judah’s theological history, saving the prophet Jeremiah and symbolizing the inclusion of future Gentiles who come to God by faith. Likewise, the first non-Jewish believer in the New Testament was a Black African [the Ethiopian eunuch—Acts 8:26–40], and a leader of the early Church in Antioch was likewise probably Black [Simon who was called Niger—Acts 13:1].<sup>16</sup>

The so-called “curse of Ham” in Gen 9:18–27 is a sham. Some White Christians have misused that passage to defend enslaving Blacks. Noah curses not Ham but Canaan, Ham’s youngest son (Gen 9:25). There is no basis for extending that curse to all of Ham’s descendants. The people Noah curses are the Canaanites, who are ethnically more like the Israelites than Black Africans. “The curse on Canaan has absolutely nothing to do with Black Africa.”<sup>17</sup>

What was the ethnic world of the New Testament like? Hays summarizes,

The story of the New Testament took place in a world with a wide range of ethnic diversity. Although the educated population of the Roman Empire tended to refer to themselves as ‘Greeks’, in reality they were made up of dozens of different Indo-European, Asian, and African ethnic groups. And while many people in the urban areas were assimilated into the Greco-Roman culture, the countryside tended to remain more diverse, reflecting the ethnic composition that pre-dated the Romans. Jews were present in large numbers in most cities and,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 55. Cf. appendix four: “What Are the Implications of Noah’s Curse,” in John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 263–67.

by and large, retained their ethnic identity. Likewise, Black Africans from Meroe (in Greek, *Ethiopians*) and Berbers from North Africa also interacted frequently with the first century Mediterranean world.<sup>18</sup>

What did Jesus look like? We obviously do not know for certain. We know that his beard was long enough for people to pluck out with their hands. We know that he was a Jew from Galilee, so his skin was probably a dark olive (i.e., yellowish brown). In December 2002, *Popular Mechanic* published a story on “The Real Face of Jesus.” Scientists and archeologists concluded that an average first-century Galilean Jewish man was 5 feet, 1 inch tall and 110 pounds with a face something like this:<sup>19</sup>



John Piper argues, “Jesus was born a Jew to devastate every boast in ethnic superiority, and to create one new, joyful, mercy-loving race.”<sup>20</sup> Humans in the Bible’s storyline—including God the Son incarnate—are multiethnic.

I have intentionally been using the term *ethnicity* instead of *race* because I think it is more helpful. Here are typical ways to define *race* and *ethnicity*:<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 156.

<sup>19</sup> See Justin Taylor, “What Did Jesus Look Like?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 9 July 2010,

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/what-did-jesus-look-like/>.

<sup>20</sup> John Piper, “Why Was Jesus Born a Jew? The Devastating Mercy of His Ethnicity,” *Desiring God*, 11 December 2019,

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-was-jesus-born-a-jew>.

<sup>21</sup> *The New Oxford American Dictionary*.

- *race*: each of the major groupings into which humankind is considered (in various theories or contexts) to be divided on the basis of physical characteristics or shared ancestry
- *ethnicity*: the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition

In other words, race is primarily *physical* or *biological*, and ethnicity is primarily *cultural*. Race focuses on physical characteristics such as skin color and hair texture; ethnicity includes such physical characteristics but focuses on cultural characteristics such as language and geopolitics.<sup>22</sup>

Thabiti Anyabwile has compellingly argued that there is no biological basis for *race* and that forcing humans into racial categories is harmful.<sup>23</sup> Voddie Baucham asserts,

Race is arbitrary. Racial classifications are not real classifications. There is but one race. There is virtually no genetic difference between a black and a white man...We have the same original parents. We are of multiple ethnicities but one race. The racial distinctions between

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Marc Cortez: "We first need to understand what terms like *race* and *ethnicity* mean in modern discourse. People commonly use those terms to capture aspects of human existence that are more biological (race) or cultural (ethnicity). ... When discussing biblical/theological perspectives on race, we need to be careful not to confuse our categories. ... Xenophobia is not a new phenomenon, and people in the ancient world had many ways of identifying differences between people groups and using those differences as the basis for hatred and exclusion. However, they generally did not develop prejudices based on skin color or the other phenotypical characteristics we traditionally associate with race today. ... Instead, ancient people focused on characteristics like religion, kinship, geography, and language as the primary categories of differentiation. ... While the ancient world had certain ways of clearly identifying difference, their categories were not based on permanent, biological/phenotypical characteristics like skin color and facial features." Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 213–14.

<sup>23</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, "Bearing the Image: Identity, the Work of Christ, and the Church," *Together for the Gospel*, April 2008, <https://t4g.org/resources/thabiti-anyabwile/bearing-the-image-identity-the-work-of-christ-and-the-church-session-ii/>.

us are arbitrary distinctions based on certain features we have, but not on real differences.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, in John Piper’s first appendix in his book *Bloodlines*—“Is There Such a Thing as Race? A Word about Terminology”<sup>25</sup>—Piper lists eight reasons that the term *ethnicity* is better than *race*:

1. There are no clear boundary lines. ... The term race is imprecise and has very blurry edges. In other words, the dividing lines between the races are not discernible.

2. All races are mixed races. ... There are countless degrees of racial traits that can be mixed in any given marriage. This means that there are no pure “races.” There are only degrees of mixture.

3. We are all related in Adam. ... We are all biologically related to one another and descended from one common ancestor.

4. The historical traits used in classifying races are arbitrary. ... The traits historically used in classifying races have been arbitrarily limited [e.g., to color, hair, and facial features].

5. Physical traits are comparatively superficial ... when compared to the combination of physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and relational aspects that give us the richness of our personal identity.

6. Science serves “the superior.” ... Historically, the emergence of the anthropology of races in the modern world has gone hand in hand with assumptions of inferiority and superiority. Thus the science was bent from the beginning to serve “the superior.”

7. The category of race is not found in the Bible.

8. Ethnicity is more helpful. ... Physical traits that we usually think of in defining race are biblically marginal, biologically ambiguous, superficial in relation to personhood, and not as helpful as the concept of ethnicity in helping us relate to each other with respect and understanding about the more significant differences that we bring to our relationships.

Even though *race* is not a helpful conceptual category, we cannot ignore the word because people have sinfully discriminated between

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<sup>24</sup> Voddie Baucham, “Racial Reconciliation,” in *By What Standard? God’s World...God’s Rules*, ed. Jared Longshore (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2020), 131.

<sup>25</sup> Piper, *Bloodlines*, 234–40.

individuals and groups based on physical characteristics and shared ancestry.<sup>26</sup> Yet when we use the term *race* according to contemporary usage, we undermine the Bible's teaching that we all share one race—the human race. We humans are all related. We share the same bloodline. All humans have one common ancestor, the first man, Adam: God “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26a).<sup>27</sup>

### **3. God's global plan to save sinners includes people from every ethnic group.**

This is built in to the Abrahamic covenant:

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*” (Gen 12:1–3)

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<sup>26</sup> Joe Rigney commented on a draft of this document, “I agree with your preference for ethnicity, but think we also need to find a way to acknowledge that ethnicity frequently tracks with one feature of ‘race’—namely, shared ancestry, which accounts for the similar physical characteristics that we associate with race. One way to say it might be that the invention of race (racialization) was owing to the elevation of one aspect of ethnicity (physical characteristics flowing from shared ancestry) over all others (i.e., language, culture, history). The latter are what give ethnicity its fluidity, whereas elevating the former inevitably led to the arbitrariness of racialization. Put simply, I think it's important to acknowledge that ethnicity often has a biological/shared ancestry component, but that this component must not be absolutized.”

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jesse Johnson, “Thabiti on the Myth of Race,” *The CrippleGate*, 17 July 2013,

<https://thecripplegate.com/thabiti-on-the-myth-of-race/>; Jesse Johnson, “The Myth of Race,” *The CrippleGate*, 22 October 2015,

<https://thecripplegate.com/the-myth-of-race/>; Jesse Johnson, “4 Distinctives of a Christian View of Race,” *The CrippleGate*, 6 August 2020,

<https://thecripplegate.com/4-distinctives-of-a-christian-view-of-race/>.

From the beginning, God planned to bless “all the families of the earth.” The NT confirms this over and over.<sup>28</sup> Paul describes our mission: “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his [i.e., Jesus Christ our Lord’s] name *among all the nations*” (Rom 1:5).

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples *of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18–20)

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ... In Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [has] come *to the Gentiles*. ... Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring ... who is Christ. ... *There is neither Jew nor Greek*, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:8, 14, 16, 28–29; cf. 2:11–16)

Here there is *not Greek and Jew*, circumcised and uncircumcised, *barbarian, Scythian*, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. (Col 3:11; cf. Acts 10:9–43)<sup>29</sup>

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God *from every tribe and language and people and nation*, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev 5:9; cf. 7:9; 14:6)

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<sup>28</sup> See Jason S. DeRouchie, “God Always Wanted the Whole World: Global Mission from Genesis to Revelation,” *Desiring God*, 5 December 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-always-wanted-the-whole-world>.

<sup>29</sup> Piper explains, “The point of Colossians 3:11 is not that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences have no significance; they do. The point is that they are no barrier to profound, personal, intimate fellowship. Singing alto is different from singing bass. It’s a significant difference. But that difference is no barrier to being in the choir. It’s an asset.” Piper, *Bloodlines*, 211.

We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things *for the joy of all peoples* through Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup>

#### **4. God approves of interethnic marriage.**

Hays and Piper (among others) have soundly demonstrated that God approves of interethnic marriage.<sup>31</sup> The clearest example of this in the Bible is when Moses marries a Black African woman—a Cushite (Num 12:1). Miriam and Aaron oppose that marriage, and God shows that he approves of it by striking Miriam with leprosy—a skin disease that made her skin as white as snow (Num 12:10). Piper asks,

Is there more here than mere punishment? Is there symbolism in the punishment? Consider this possibility: in God’s anger at Miriam, Moses’s sister, God says in effect, “Do you like being light-skinned, Miriam? Do you belittle the Cushite because she is dark-skinned and foreign? All right, I’ll make you light-skinned.” Verse 10: “Behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow.”

God says not a critical word against Moses for marrying a black Cushite woman. But when Miriam criticizes God’s chosen leader for this marriage, God strikes her skin with white leprosy. If you ever thought black was a biblical symbol for uncleanness, be careful how you use such an idea; a white uncleanness could come upon you.<sup>32</sup>

The Bible does not forbid *interethnic* marriage. It forbids *interfaith* marriage. A believer must not marry an unbeliever (cf. 1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14–7:1).<sup>33</sup> Piper explains, “The issue is not color mixing, or customs mixing, or clan identity. The issue is: *will there be one common allegiance*

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. John Piper, “I Exist to ....” *Desiring God*, 2 March 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/i-exist-to>.

<sup>31</sup> J. Daniel Hays, “A Biblical Perspective on Interracial Marriage,” *CTR* 6.2 (2009): 5–23; Piper, *Bloodlines*, 203–15.

<sup>32</sup> Piper, *Bloodlines*, 212.

<sup>33</sup> Kathy Keller, “Don’t Take It from Me: Reasons You Should Not Marry an Unbeliever,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 23 January 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/01/23/dont-take-it-from-me-reasons-you-should-not-marry-an-unbeliever/>; Mike Gilbert-Smith, “Can Christians Marry Non-Christians? A Biblical Theology,” *9Marks*, 13 March 2017, <https://www.9marks.org/article/can-christians-marry-non-christians-a-biblical-theology/>.

to the true God in this marriage or will there be divided affections?"<sup>34</sup> One of the Bible's most celebrated marriages is between a Jew and a Moabite—Boaz married Ruth. Their union led to the birth of King David and eventually to Jesus the Messiah.

Hays summarizes,

The Scriptures approve of interracial marriages between believers. Moses married a Black woman and God gave his total approval. The text is not ambiguous. Paul's proclamation of organic unity and total equality in the Church likewise destroys the barrier of racial intermarriage prohibition. This truth is important for the Church, because the ban by Whites on interracial marriages—especially those between Blacks and Whites—lies at the very heart of racism. To forbid one's children to marry people of another race, based not on their relationship with Christ, but solely on their skin colour, implies the heresy of racial superiority. When White Christians forbid their children to marry Black believers, they make a mockery of Paul's theology of unity in Christ. Regardless of what White Christians may say about racial equality, the interracial marriage prohibition proclaims by action that their primary identity is not their relationship to Christ, but rather their relationship with their White culture: that is, the world. Likewise, to speak of racial reconciliation while continuing to prohibit racial intermarriage is extremely hypocritical. This issue lies at the crux of racial division.<sup>35</sup>

### **5. God's people must love their neighbors across ethnic lines.**

Any time you have a group of sinful humans, there will be divisions—even if every human has the same skin color. *Sinful people sinfully divide people*. They create a sinful us-versus-them system. This happens on school playgrounds among third-graders. And it has happened over and over in human history between ethnic groups all over the world. Here's how D. A. Carson put it in 2002:

The phenomenon of racism is disturbingly rampant. Quite apart from the black-and-white variety engendered in the West by the tragic history of slavery, racism surfaces all over the world. Most Chinese parents would not want their daughter, for instance, to marry a

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<sup>34</sup> Piper, *Bloodlines*, 210.

<sup>35</sup> Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 203.

European-American lad; most Japanese think that Koreans are a step down. The list is endless. Add the tribal conflicts in Africa, of which the genocide in Rwanda is merely the most notorious recent example; add the myth of Aryan supremacy that demanded not only *Lebensraum*, precipitating World War II, but issued in the Holocaust; add the slaughter of a million and a half Armenians at the beginning of the twentieth century; add the Russian slaughter of Ukrainians and widespread non-Russian Slavic distrust of Russians; add the horrors of apartheid, now abolished in law but a long way from being totally overcome; add the treatment of Aborigines by Australian Caucasians; add the treatment of “Indians” in the Americas (North, Central, and South) by Canadians, Americans, Brazilians, and the Hispanic countries. The list is endless.<sup>36</sup>

If you visit Israel, you can feel the tension between Jews and Arabs. Carson is right: the list goes on and on.<sup>37</sup>

Ethnic conflict has marked sinful humans from the beginning. It is not new. It is not just a black-white American issue. It is a sin-issue that sinful humans must address at all times in all cultures. So it should not surprise us that Jesus directly addressed the ethnic-based tension between Jews and Samaritans when he ministered to first-century Jews.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going

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<sup>36</sup> D. A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 88–89.

<sup>37</sup> I drafted this document in January 2020 right before I took a trip to Nairobi, Kenya to preach and teach. When I shared a draft of the document with a missionary friend in Nairobi, he replied, “This is a BIG issue in Kenya between the 40+ Kenyan tribes. ‘Tribalism’ is alive and well in Kenya—especially at election time.”

down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:25–38)

Jews despised Samaritans (cf. John 8:48) because Jews thought Samaritans were defiled with Gentile blood and pagan worship practices. When the Assyrians defeated the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital of Samaria in 722 BC (1 Kgs 16:24), the Assyrians deported many Israelites to Assyria and repopulated Israel with foreigners (2 Kgs 17:24–31) who intermarried with the remaining Israelites. The result was Samaritans, whom Jews regarded as ethnic half-breeds. Samaritans had their own version of the Pentateuch and rejected the rest of the OT. When the Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well, he adds this aside: "Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9). That is why Jesus's request for a drink surprises the woman at the well. Many Jews viewed all Samaritans as ritually defiled. The Samaritan woman did not expect Jesus to talk to her (cf. 4:27), let alone become ritually defiled by drinking from her water pot. She does not know that Jesus cannot become ritually defiled; he sanctifies what he touches (Matt 8:3).

The Samaritan woman at the well later says to Jesus, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship" (John 4:20). "This mountain" refers to Mount Gerizim. Moses commanded the Israelites to pronounce the law's blessings from Mount Gerizim and its curses from Mount Ebal just across the valley of Shechem to the north (Deut 11:29; 27:12–13; Josh 8:33). The Samaritans had erected a temple on Mount Gerizim; it replaced Jerusalem as their spiritual center. In 128 or 127 BC, John Hyrcanus, the Jewish high priest in Judea, destroyed the Samaritan temple. The

hostility between Jews and Samaritans continued to Jesus's day. The Samaritan woman is changing the subject from her adultery (John 4:18) to the most controversial religious issue between Jews and Samaritans: Should God's people worship in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim?<sup>38</sup>

That historical context helps shed light on the story of the Good Samaritan. The story Jesus tells would be shocking to a Jew at the time (and to a Samaritan!). God's people must love their neighbors across ethnic lines—even when there is ethnic tension and conflict and even when showing such love is countercultural and costly and inconvenient.

The story of the Good Samaritan is important in Luke-Acts. It connects to Acts 1:8 (“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and *Samaria*, and to the end of the earth”) and to Acts 8 (proclaiming the gospel in Samaria and to the Ethiopian Eunuch).

**6. The church—both Jewish and Gentile Christians—must maintain the unity (including ethnic harmony) that Christ powerfully created.<sup>39</sup>**

That is the theological message of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We must be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:1). We do not create this unity; we maintain or preserve it. Christ created it.

These two paragraphs from Ephesians 2 and 3 highlight the remarkable ethnic harmony that Christ created at the cross:

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself

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<sup>38</sup> This paragraph and the previous one adapt notes on John 4 in D. A. Carson and Andrew David Naselli, “John,” in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 1898, 1900.

<sup>39</sup> This section adapts Andrew David Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 250–54. See also Jarvis Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010).

is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 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, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

For this reason [i.e., the previous paragraph—Eph 2:11–22] I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery [μυστήριον] was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery [μυστήριον] of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Eph 2:11–3:6)

Compare and contrast 2:12 and 3:6. Paul says in 2:12, “remember that you [Gentiles] were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” In 3:6, Paul lists three labels, and each has a Greek prefix that means “together”:

1. συγκληρονόμα, *sugklēronoma*, “fellow heirs” (NIV: “heirs together with Israel”)
2. σύσσωμα, *sussōma*, “members of the same body” (NIV: “members together of one body”).
3. συμμετοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, *summetocha tēs epangelias*, “partakers of the promise” (NIV: “sharers together in the promise”)

The mystery is that Gentile Christians are *equal* with Jewish Christians in the church:

- a. “Fellow heirs.” They equally share the same inheritance as Abraham’s offspring (cf. Eph 1:14; Rom 4:16). Formerly, they were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph 2:12). Now they are on equal footing.
- b. “Members of the same body.” They are equally members of the same body, the church (cf. 2:16, 19–22).
- c. “Partakers of the promise.” They are equally partakers of the same promises, particularly “the promised Holy Spirit” (1:13). Formerly, they were “strangers to the covenants of promise” (2:12).

We experience these blessings because of our union with Christ: the end of 3:6 says “in Christ Jesus.” Our union with Christ reverses our predicament in 2:12. The union of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians is possible because of our union with Christ. So some people describe the mystery as a “double union”: (1) our union with each other into one new group and (2) our union with Christ.

How is that a mystery? Is that hidden in the OT? The OT announces that God plans to extend his blessings to the Gentile nations (e.g., Gen 12:3; 22:18). And the OT prophesies that Gentiles will turn to the God of Israel and be saved (e.g., Isa 2:1–4; Jer 3:17; cf. Rom 15:9–12). So how is that a mystery?

- Did anyone expect that Jews and Gentiles would be an organic unity? Did anyone expect that believing Gentiles would be on an equal footing with believing Jews (cf. Eph. 2:14–18)?
- Did anyone expect that we would experience this equal footing because of our union with the Messiah (“in Christ Jesus”)?
- Did anyone expect that God would do this by means of setting aside the Mosaic law (Eph 2:14–15)?

Here is how NT scholar Harold Hoehner puts it:

In the OT Gentiles could be part of the company of God, but they had to become Jews in order to belong to it. In the NT Gentiles do not become Jews nor do Jews become Gentiles. Rather, both believing

Jews and Gentiles become one new entity, Christians (Eph 2:15–16). That is the mystery.<sup>40</sup>

What is promised and fulfilled? The OT promises that God will extend his blessings to the Gentile nations and that Gentiles will turn to the God of Israel and be saved. That is promise and fulfillment.

What is hidden and revealed? Jews and Gentiles will be an organic unity; believing Gentiles will be on an equal footing with believing Jews. That was hidden, and now it is revealed.

This issue was very controversial in the early church (probably even more controversial than recent black-white tensions in America). Many Jewish Christians had no problem with Gentiles' being included in the people of God *but not as equals*. The Jewish Christians assumed that they were more deserving of God's blessings because they were physically descended from Abraham. But Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are not only part of the same body; they are *equally* part of the same body. If that is the case for Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, how much more is it the case for various ethnic subsets of Gentile Christians?

The church—both Jewish and Gentile Christians—must maintain the unity (including ethnic harmony) that Christ powerfully created. Our identity in Christ is more significant than every other self-defining characteristic.

### **7. The church should welcome ethnic diversity.**

Our hearts should soar when we read about the multiethnic people of God in Revelation 5 and 7. Since God loves the nations and commissioned his people to make disciples of every people group in the world, it would be wrong for a local church to deliberately adopt a strategy that allows only one people group to be part of their church or that excludes a particular group. It glorified God when first-century churches in the Roman empire included both Jewish and Gentile Christians. And today Churches glorify God when they maintain the ethnic harmony that Christ powerfully created. So churches today should glorify God by maintaining the ethnic harmony that Christ powerfully created. But you cannot have ethnic *harmony* without ethnic *diversity*.

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<sup>40</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 434.

The church should welcome ethnic diversity because ethnic harmony can glorify God.

There is a tension between indigenous ministry and diversity. Hays argues, “While there may be practical and sociological reasons for creating and maintaining Churches that are ethnic specific (Black Churches, Hispanic Churches, White Churches, Korean Churches, etc.), this division into ethnically based worshipping communities is contrary to the imperatives of Paul.”<sup>41</sup>

There is a difference between what God commands and what may be a wise strategy in a particular situation. For example, the Bible does not command churches to have multiethnic leadership. The qualifications for a pastor are about ability (to teach) and character—not about ethnicity. But it may be a wise strategy for a church to intentionally seek multiethnic leaders to better shepherd a flock. John Piper led Bethlehem Baptist Church to pursue ethnic diversity for at least five biblical reasons:<sup>42</sup>

1. It illustrates more clearly the truth that God created people of all races and ethnicities in his own image (Genesis 1:27).

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<sup>41</sup> Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 205. Carson comments, “Without for a moment wanting to play down the commonness of white prejudice, we must reflect as well on the many Korean churches here, the many Chinese churches, the many Latino and Vietnamese churches, and so forth. In all of these cases, very often the Christians who are least desirous of integrating with others are from the *minority* side: many Koreans and Chinese and Vietnamese and Latinos want to preserve something of their own culture and race and heritage. Some of the problems come, as we shall see, in the second and third generation. And similarly, it is not too surprising that many African-Americans would prefer to worship in African-American churches, even while they may feel that the point of exclusion is entirely or almost entirely on the European-American side. ... Many minority churches argue today that the church is the only social institution that preserves the meeting of minorities as minorities, and it is this social construction that permits a group to raise up leaders to represent it.” Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, 92. On some Korean-American churches, see 95.

<sup>42</sup> John Piper, “How and Why Bethlehem Pursues Ethnic Diversity,” *Desiring God*, 24 January 2007, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-and-why-bethlehem-pursues-ethnic-diversity>. (This article is appendix three—with three pages of additions from March 2009—in Piper, *Bloodlines*, 256–62.) Cf. Ken Davis, “The Biblical Basis for Multiethnic Churches and Ministry,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 14.1 (2010): 55–96.

2. It displays more visibly the truth that Jesus is not a tribal deity but is the Lord of all races, nations, and ethnicities.
3. It demonstrates more clearly the blood-bought destiny of the church to be “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9).
4. It exhibits more compellingly the aim and power of the cross of Christ to “reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Ephesians 2:16).
5. It expresses more forcefully the work of the Spirit to unite us in Christ. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Bethlehem Baptist Church (my church) is following the vision that John Piper cast. In his article “How and Why Bethlehem Pursues Ethnic Diversity,” Piper explains how the pastors think about ethnic diversity when we hire paid pastors and choose non-paid pastors:

It seems to us that the *admiration* we feel for this diversity in the New Testament should carry over into the *desires* we have for the visible church today. It seems to us that the local church should *want* these things to be true today at the local level where this diversity and harmony would have the greatest visible and relational impact. For us, this has implied *pursuit*. If we admire it and desire it, then it seems to us we should pursue it.

It is important to qualify such a pursuit. Ethnic diversity is significant, but it is not the only factor nor the most important one. A church should not prize ethnic diversity above everything else. Theology and philosophy of ministry are more important than ethnic diversity; that is, a church should not compromise on sound doctrine for the sake of greater ethnic diversity. A church should not pursue ethnic diversity at any cost. A church must beware of pursuing ethnic diversity in an unhealthy way that could foster a divisive, discontent, and inward-oriented posture instead of a unifying, content, and outward-oriented welcoming posture.

**8. The church should love justice, which entails treating all ethnicities justly and encouraging its members to pursue justice in society.**<sup>43</sup>

Let's unpack that statement in seven steps.

**i. Justice is making righteous judgments.**<sup>44</sup>

Justice according to the Bible is *making righteous judgments*. That is, justice is doing what is right according to the standard of God's will and character as he has revealed it in his word. A third of the 125 times the word *justice* appears in the OT, the word *righteousness* is next to it. The standard of justice is not "contemporary community standards"; it is God's righteousness. Justice and righteousness begin with God's own character. What God commands humans to do expresses his will and character. God's righteousness is what makes human rights right. What humans call *rights* are right only if God says they are right.

The word *justice* in the Bible is interchangeable with *judgment*. It's the noun form of the verb *judge*. Justice is fundamentally the activity of judging or making a judgment. So we can define justice according to the Bible as *making a judgment according to God's righteousness*. Or more simply, *making righteous judgments*. This definition has two components: a standard (God's will and nature as Scripture reveals) and an action (applying the standard or making a judgment on the basis of that standard—i.e., doing justice).

King Solomon illustrates what it looks like to wisely make a righteous judgment. After Solomon discerned which prostitute was telling the truth about her baby, all Israel "stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice" (1 Kgs 3:28)—that is, to *apply righteous judgments*. Doing justice is applying a righteous judgment: "By justice [i.e., by applying righteous judgments] a king builds up the land" (Prov 29:4).

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<sup>43</sup> Thanks to John Piper for suggesting I add this final heading. (I was initially going to attempt to fit all of this section under the seventh heading.)

<sup>44</sup> This section condenses Jonathan Leeman and Andrew David Naselli, "Politics, Conscience, and the Church: Why Christians Passionately Disagree with One Another over Politics, Why They Must Agree to Disagree over Jagged-Line Political Issues, and How," *Them* 45 (2020): 15–16.

**ii. Systems (not just individuals) can be unjust.<sup>45</sup>**

Governments exist for the purpose of justice. God instituted governments to do justice for everyone created in his image (Gen 9:5–6; Rom 13:1–7; cf. 2 Sam 8:15; 1 Kgs 10:9; Prov 29:4). So when Christians talk about abortion, immigration, poverty, same-sex marriage, or ethnicity, they are fundamentally talking about doing justice and opposing injustice. Subcategories of justice include *procedural* justice (how a society makes fair decisions), *retributive* justice (how to fairly punish criminals), and *distributive* justice (how the government distributes or redistributes its nation’s resources). The most controversial subcategory these days is *social* justice, which speaks to societal structures broadly and includes elements of the other subcategories of justice.

Christians might debate how to define and evaluate social justice,<sup>46</sup> but it has provided a category that some modern American Christians may not have had: individuals are not the only ones who can be unjust; systems can be, too.<sup>47</sup> Legal and social structures can be unjust. Sinful people pass sinful laws and support sinful institutions and social practices. Haman convinced King Ahasuerus to enact a genocidal campaign against the Jews (Esth 3:7–14). What started as the sin of two individuals quickly became institutional: it became something bigger than individuals, something institutional, something no individual could stop. Isaiah warned against “iniquitous decrees” and “writers who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right” (Isa 10:1–2). Jesus condemned the experts in the Mosaic law for loading burdens on people that were too hard for them to bear (Luke 11:46). And the first church unjustly neglected the widows of Greek-speaking Jews (Acts 6:1).

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<sup>45</sup> This section condenses Leeman and Naselli, “Politics, Conscience, and the Church,” 16.

<sup>46</sup> See Ronald H. Nash, *Social Justice and the Christian Church* (Milford, MI: Mott, 1983).

<sup>47</sup> I question the wisdom of using the term *social justice* because for many it is a technical term in contemporary critical theory, which is incompatible with Christianity. See Neil Shenvi, “Christianity and Social Justice,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 11 April 2018, <https://shenviapologetics.com/christianity-and-social-justice/>. (More on critical theory below.)

**iii. Christians must not show ethnic partiality in attitude or deed, and those who have sinned that way must repent.**

Ethnic partiality is sinful (see §1 above).<sup>48</sup> It is sinful to believe that your ethnicity is superior to another. It is sinful to speak or act in a way that implies your ethnicity is superior to another. It is sinful to prejudicially or antagonistically discriminate against another person on the basis of their ethnicity. It is sinful to disapprove of interethnic marriage since God approves of it.<sup>49</sup> Christians must not show ethnic partiality in attitude or deed. And those who have sinned that way must repent. Christians are repenting sinners.

John Piper argues that the main point of James 1:26–2:13 is this: “Don’t show partiality because of riches or rank, but live under the law of liberty; that is, love your neighbor as you love yourself.”<sup>50</sup> That passage is not explicitly addressing ethnicity, but it certainly applies to ethnicity. We must not show partiality in regard to ethnicity.<sup>51</sup>

**iv. Christians who are victims of ethnic partiality must not nurture resentment or show ethnic partiality in return.**

This statement might sound insensitive—the opposite of showing compassion. But that is not my intent. My intent is to show compassion by lovingly sharing the truth and by not withholding the truth. The statement is true—just read Romans 12:17–21 or 1 Peter. And this is a truth that can be liberating and life-giving to victims of any sin—including various kinds of ethnic partiality. Here is how Carson frames it:

The fall did not introduce mere sins; it introduced the “fallenness” that is endemic to every human being. God is no longer at the center of

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<sup>48</sup>See Kevin DeYoung, “10 Reasons Racism Is Offensive to God,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 25 June 2015, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2015/06/25/10-reasons-racism-is-offensive-to-god/>.

<sup>49</sup> For surprising statistics on who still disapproves of interethnic marriage, see the beginning of part 6 of this article by Neil Shenvi, “Social Justice, Critical Theory, and Christianity: Are They Compatible?,” Neil Shenvi—Apologetics, 14 January 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-6/>.

<sup>50</sup> Piper, *Bloodlines*, 181.

<sup>51</sup> Piper, *Bloodlines*, 181–90.

every one of us; each of us wants to be at the center, to have a domesticated God (in other words, a false god, an idol). Such idolatry means that we seek to control not only our own lives but in some measure the lives of all who touch us. This massive de-godding of God, this odious idolatry, works out in countless sins of every description. It includes oppression on the one hand and nurtured resentments on the other—and both feed into what we call racism. Idolatry means we are so selfish most of the time that most of us do not automatically think in terms of sacrificial service. If idolatry produces tyrants whose chief lust is to control, it also produces populist demagogues whose chief lust is to control—and both of them will entertain mixed motives, confusing their genuine desire to do good among their own people with their transparent lust for power. Because almost all sin has social ramifications, the biases, hatreds, resentments, nurtured feelings of inferiority and superiority, anger, fear, sense of entitlement—all are passed on in corrosive ways to new generations.<sup>52</sup>

I do not intend to downplay or excuse ethnic partiality at all. Ethnic partiality is sinful, and Christians who are guilty of ethnic partiality must repent. But here I am addressing Christians who are at the receiving end of actual or perceived ethnic partiality. With love I want to gently warn against adopting the mindset of a victim that is so common in our culture now. I am warning against empathy blackmail: “You must completely agree with me and share my perspective, or else you don’t love me.” I am warning against weaponizing empathy and manipulating others with it.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, 103.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Abigail Dodds, “From Empathy to Chaos: Considerations for the Church in a Postmodern Age,” *Abigail Dodds*, 18 June 2019, <https://hopeandstay.com/2019/06/18/from-empathy-to-chaos-considerations-for-the-church-in-a-postmodern-age/>; Abigail Dodds, “The Beauty and Abuse of Empathy: How Virtue Becomes a Tyrant,” *Desiring God*, 14 April 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-beauty-and-abuse-of-empathy>; Joe Rigney, “Killing Them Softly: Compassion That Warms Satan’s Heart,” *Desiring God*, 24 May 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/killing-them-softly>; Joe Rigney, “The Enticing Sin of Empathy: How Satan Corrupts through Compassion,” *Desiring God*, 31 May 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-enticing-sin-of-empathy>; Joe Rigney, “Dangerous Compassion: How to Make Any Love a Demon,” *Desiring God*, 18 January 2020,

I am warning against being oversensitive about what you perceive as micro-aggressions with the result that you are so easily “triggered” that you cannot live out what the NT says about loving your neighbor—for example, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8). Bitterness is a cancer that will destroy you.<sup>54</sup>

In vi. below, I argue that any person of any ethnicity can be guilty of showing ethnic partiality. That means that any person of any ethnicity may be a victim (or a perceived victim) of experiencing ethnic partiality. Some whites in America right now may be tempted to feel sinfully bitter about how others show a type of ethnic partiality against them—for example, accusing them of “whiteness” and having “white privilege” and being guilty of “white supremacy” and “white fragility.”<sup>55</sup> Christians who are victims of ethnic partiality must not nurture resentment or show ethnic partiality in return.

**v. Christians should show compassion to people who have experienced ethnic partiality.**

Listen. Sympathize. Lament. “Weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15b). Carson explains,

Because of the many legal sanctions now in place, some forget the bitter degradation of the Jim Crow culture. The *attitudes* wedded to the Jim Crow culture have not everywhere been expunged. I suspect that most European-Americans have very little understanding of the cumulative destructive power of the little degradations that almost all

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<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/dangerous-compassion>; Joe Rigney, “Do You Feel My Pain? Empathy, Sympathy, and Dangerous Virtues,” *Desiring God*, 2 May 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-feel-my-pain>; Kevin DeYoung, “Sympathy Is Not the Point,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 10 March 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/sympathy-is-not-the-point/>.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Keith Ferdinando, “The Ethnic Enemy—No Greek or Jew ... Barbarian, Scythian: The Gospel and Ethnic Difference,” *Them* 33.2 (2008): 48–63.

<sup>55</sup> On defining and evaluating these terms, see Neil Shenvi’s “Antiracism Glossary”: <https://shenviapologetics.com/an-antiracism-glossary-whiteness/>, <https://shenviapologetics.com/an-antiracism-glossary-white-privilege/>, <https://shenviapologetics.com/an-antiracism-glossary-white-supremacy/>, <https://shenviapologetics.com/an-antiracism-glossary-white-fragility/>.

African-Americans, especially older African-Americans, have experienced—to say nothing of the less common but still too frequent threats, racial profiling, and frankly illegal (to say nothing of immoral) injustices they have suffered.<sup>56</sup>

**vi. Any person of any ethnicity can be guilty of showing ethnic partiality; it is not only those with more power who can be guilty of showing ethnic partiality.**

Any person of any socio-economic status can be guilty of showing partiality (see the previous point regarding James 1:26–2:13). That is, it is not just rich people who can be greedy; poor people can be greedy, too. Similarly, any person of any ethnicity can be guilty of showing ethnic partiality. Showing ethnic partiality is the opposite of treating all ethnicities justly or impartially. Racism, explains D. A. Carson, refers to “*all* patterns of exclusion of others grounded in *race or ethnicity*.”<sup>57</sup> Some people reject that definition. Carson explains why:

Many African-Americans do not accept this [and many Whites and others agree with them]. They think that racism is the sin of the powerful, the sin of the overlord; they think of racism as the sum of racial prejudice plus power. By definition, then, they cannot be racists since they do not have the power. I do not see how thoughtful Christians, black or white, can accept such a definition.<sup>58</sup>

From the point of view of many Blacks [and many others], if Whites prefer their own company and entertain stereotypes of Blacks, it’s racism; if Blacks prefer their own company and entertain stereotypes of Whites, it’s both understandable and deserved.<sup>59</sup>

A common way of viewing all relationships today is through the lens of power. In other words, there are two basic groups: those with more power (the oppressors) and those with less power (the oppressed). The

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<sup>56</sup> Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, 94. See also Denny Burk, “Can We Weep with Those Who Weep?,” *Denny Burk*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.dennyburk.com/can-we-weep-with-those-who-weep/>.

<sup>57</sup> Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, 88.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>59</sup> D. A. Carson, “The SBJT Forum: In Your Book *Love in Hard Places* You Gave Us Some Reflections on Racism. Summarize Some of the More Uncomfortable Thoughts That Spring to Your Mind When You Think about This Subject,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8.2 (2004): 75.

label that best describes this way of thinking is *critical theory*. The most helpful analyses of critical theory that I have encountered are by Neil Shenvi.<sup>60</sup> Critical theory separates people into two basic categories—the oppressors and the oppressed—and insists that the oppressed (e.g., ethnicities with less power economically or socially) cannot be guilty of oppression; that means that by definition ethnic minorities cannot be guilty of racism.<sup>61</sup> Below are two charts published in books that present critical theory as the truth:

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<sup>60</sup> See <https://shenviapologetics.com/critical-theory-all-content/>. I suggest starting with Neil Shenvi, “Intro to Critical Theory,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 20 March 2019, <https://shenviapologetics.com/intro-to-critical-theory/>. The following talk is especially helpful: Neil Shenvi, “Social Justice, Critical Theory, and Christianity: Are They Compatible?,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 5 January 2020,

<https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-1-2/>, <https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-2-2/>,

<https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-3-2/>, <https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-4-2/>,

<https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-5/>, <https://shenviapologetics.com/social-justice-critical-theory-and-christianity-are-they-compatible-part-6/>. See also Robert S. Smith, “Cultural Marxism: Imaginary Conspiracy or Revolutionary Reality?,” *Them* 44 (2019): 436–65.

<sup>61</sup> See Rosaria Butterfield, “Intersectionality and the Church,” *Tabletalk*, 1 March 2020, <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/posts/intersectionality-and-the-church-2020-02/>. Neil Shenvi summarizes four central premises of contemporary critical theory: (1) *Social binary*. “Society can be divided into dominant, oppressor groups and subordinate, oppressed groups along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, and a host of other factors.” (2) *Oppression through ideology*. “Traditionally, ‘oppression’ is understood to refer to acts of cruelty, injustice, violence, and coercion. But critical theorists expand this definition to include ways in which the dominant social group, imposes its norms, values, and ideas on society to justify its own interests.” (3) *Lived experience*. “‘Lived experience’ gives oppressed people special access to truths about their oppression. ... Privileged groups tend to be blinded by their privilege.” (4) *Social justice*. Critical theory defines social justice “as ‘the elimination of all forms of social oppression’ whether it’s based on ‘gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation,

Figure 1. Matrix of Oppression<sup>62</sup>

**Matrix of Oppression**

Social Identity Categories	Privileged Social Groups	Border Social Groups ↔	Targeted Social Groups	Ism
Race	White People	Biracial People (White/Latino, Black/Asian)	Asian, Black, Latino, Native People	Racism
Sex	Bo Men	Transsexual, Intersex People	Bo Women	Sexism
Gender	Gender Conforming Bo Men And Women	Gender Ambiguous Bo Men and Women	Transgender, Genderqueer, Intersex People	Transgender Oppression
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual People	Bisexual People	Lesbians, Gay Men	Heterosexism
Class	Rich, Upper Class People	Middle Class People	Working Class, Poor People	Classism
Ability/Disability	Temporarily Able-Bodied People	People with Temporary Disabilities	People with Disabilities	Ableism
Religion	Protestants	Roman Catholic (historically)	Jews, Muslims, Hindus	Religious Oppression
Age	Adults	Young Adults	Elders, Young People	Ageism/Adultism

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physical or mental ability, or economic class.” Shenvi, “Social Justice, Critical Theory, and Christianity.”

<sup>62</sup> See Neil Shenvi, “Short Review of Adams’ *Teachings for Diversity and Social Justice*,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 17 January 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/short-review-of-adams-teachings-for-diversity-and-social-justice/>.

<b>Minority/Target Group</b>	<b>Oppression</b>	<b>Dominant/Agent Group</b>
Peoples of Color	Racism	White
Poor; Working Class; Middle Class	Classism	Owning Class
Women; Transgender; Genderqueer	Sexism	(cis)Men [i.e., biological males who identify as men]
Gays; Lesbians; Bisexuals; Two Spirit	Heterosexism	Heterosexuals
Muslims; Buddhists; Jews; Hindus; and other non-Christian groups	Religions Oppression; Anti-Semitism	Christians
People with Disabilities	Ableism	Able-bodied
Immigrants (perceived)	Nationalism	Citizens (perceived)
Indigenous Peoples	Colonialism	White Settlers

Figure 2. Group Identities Across Relations of Power<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Özlem Sensoy and Robin J. DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, 2nd ed., Multicultural Education Series (New York: Teachers College, 2017), 64.

According to critical theory, ethnic minorities are the oppressed and therefore cannot be guilty of racism. But according to the Bible, any person of any ethnicity can be guilty of showing ethnic partiality.

**vii. When pursuing justice in society, Christians must distinguish between straight-line and jagged-line political issues.<sup>64</sup>**

For a straight-line issue, there is a straight line between a biblical text and its policy application. For instance, the Bible explicitly teaches that murder is sinful; abortion is a form of murder, so we should oppose abortion. That is a straight line. Accordingly, our church would initiate the church-discipline process with a member who is advocating for abortion—such as encouraging a single pregnant woman to get an abortion or supporting Planned Parenthood.

For a straight-line issue, there is a straight line from a biblical or theological principle to a political position. But for a jagged-line issue, there is a multistep process from a biblical or theological principle to a political position. Fellow church members should agree on straight-line political issues, and they should recognize Christian freedom on jagged-line political issues.

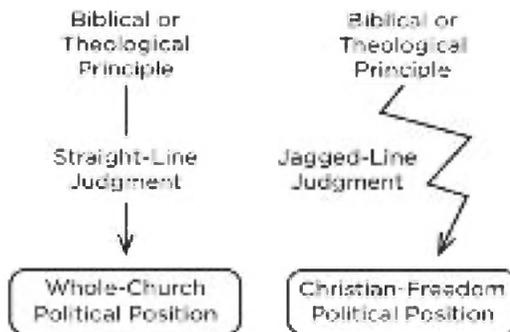


Figure 3. Straight-Line vs. Jagged-Line Political Issue<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> The first part of this section condenses Leeman and Naselli, “Politics, Conscience, and the Church,” 20–22.

<sup>65</sup> This figure is from Jonathan Leeman and Andrew David Naselli, *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?*, 9Marks: Church Questions (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 41.

Most political issues are not straight-line issues. Most are jagged-line issues and thus belong to the domain of Christian freedom.

This distinction between straight-line and jagged-line issues comes from Robert Benne, a conservative Lutheran scholar who specializes in how Christianity relates to culture. In his book *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics*, he argues that treating most issues as straight-line harmfully fuses what is central and essential to Christianity with particular political policies.<sup>66</sup> The problem with saying there is a straight line from the Bible to specific policies is that while the goal (pursued by the policies) may be a straight line, the policies may not.

In short, it is critical to distinguish between straight-line issues (which can lead to what we might call *the* Christian position) and jagged-line issues (whose policy judgments belong to the domain of Christian freedom). It is right for churches to take institutional stands on straight-line issues through preaching and membership decisions, but church leaders risk being sinfully divisive by taking those institutional stands on jagged-line issues.

The above directly applies to how we pursue justice for those who experience ethnic partiality. More and more people in our culture are imbibing and embracing the worldview of critical theory,<sup>67</sup> which at its heart opposes and mocks historic Christianity. Even atheist scholars are alarmed at how widespread and destructive critical theory is!<sup>68</sup> The worldview of critical theory is seeping into the church, and one of my burdens as a pastor is that we not let a “woke” Social Justice Movement take the church off mission *by treating jagged-line issues like straight-line issues*. Christians care about ethnic harmony because God cares about it.

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 31–38.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Alex Tabarrok, “A Visual Demonstration of How Fast the NYT Got Woke,” *Foundation for Economic Education*, 10 June 2019, <https://fee.org/articles/a-visual-demonstration-of-how-fast-the-nyt-got-woke/>. That article graphs trends for terms such as social justice, diversity and inclusion, whiteness, white privilege, systemic racism, white supremacy, and micro-aggressions. Since about 2010, the *New York Times* has used those terms in off-the-chart numbers.

<sup>68</sup> See Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020).

The Bible must drive us—not our culture, which is increasingly viewing ethnicity through the lens of critical theory.

Fellow Christians will inevitably disagree over what it means to make a righteous judgment for specific issues regarding ethnicity in our society. And that is OK. What is not OK is to fail to acknowledge leeway on jagged-line issues. This is why a 2018 article by Kevin DeYoung is so helpful. With DeYoung’s permission, I have adapted his article below in the format of this table without changing his wording.

Table 1. Kevin DeYoung’s Analysis of What We (Mostly, Almost) All Agree On regarding Ethnicity and What We (Likely) Still Don’t Agree On<sup>69</sup>

Topic	Agree	Disagree
1. Racism	All people are made in the image of God and deserving of honor, respect, and protection. Every notion of racial superiority is a blasphemous denial of the <i>imago dei</i> (Gen. 1:27). There is no place for racial prejudice and ethnic favoritism in the church (Gal. 3:28; James 2:1). Where bigotry based on skin color exists, it should be denounced and repented of (Eph. 2:14; 1 John 3:15).	What else counts as racism or the degree to which our cultural, civic, and ecclesiastical institutions are basically race-blind, racialized, or outright racist.
2. Racial Disparities	There are deep and disturbing differences between Blacks and Whites when it comes to a variety of statistical measurements, including: education, employment,	The reasons for these disparities, whether they are owing to personal choices, cultural values, families of origin, educational opportunities, structural

<sup>69</sup> Kevin DeYoung, “Racial Reconciliation: What We (Mostly, Almost) All Agree On, and What We (Likely) Still Don’t Agree On,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 17 April 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/racial-reconciliation-mostly-almost-agree-likely-still-dont-agree/>.

	<p>income, incarceration, home ownership, standardized test scores, single-parent households, and participation at the highest levels of leadership in business, academics, athletics, and politics.</p>	<p>racism, legacy of oppression, or a combination of these and other factors. Likewise, we do not agree on the best approach to closing these gaps. Some favor political measures, others focus on educational reform, others emphasize church planting and discipleship, while others work for cultural renewal and community development. Many Christians see the need for all of the above, but even here there is disagreement about what the church's focus should be.</p>
<p>3. Martin Luther King Jr.</p>	<p>MLK was a courageous civil-rights activist worth remembering and celebrating. MLK was used by God to help expose racial bigotry and overturn a corrupt system of Jim Crow segregation. King's clear-sighted moral convictions about racism, his brilliant rhetoric, and his example of non-violence in the face of intense hatred make him a heroic figure in American history.</p>	<p>How gospel Christians should celebrate this legacy. While most people acknowledge that King held unorthodox theological positions and was guilty of marital infidelity, we are not of one mind on how these matters should be discussed or how they relate to his overall contribution to American and ecclesiastical life. In a similar vein, we do not agree on how to evaluate the legacy of clay-footed theologians like Jonathan Edwards or Robert Lewis Dabney.<sup>70</sup></p>

<sup>70</sup> See John Piper, "Should We Stop Reading Dead White Guys?," *Desiring God*, 28 October 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-we-stop-reading-dead-white-guys>; Kevin DeYoung, "Can We Give Thanks for Flawed Heroes?," *The Gospel Coalition*, 16 November 2019,

<p>4. American History</p>	<p>Our history has much to celebrate: far-sighted leaders, Judeo-Christian ideals, commendable heroes, technological innovation, and military sacrifices. There are many reasons we can be proud to be Americans.</p>	<p>Whether our history should be remembered chiefly as one of liberty and virtue (spotted with tragic failures and blind spots) or whether our national story (despite many noble exceptions) is more fundamentally one of hypocrisy, prejudice, and oppression.</p>
<p>5. Current State of Affairs</p>	<p>Race relations have come a long way in the past 50 years. Things are better than they used to be. We also agree that racism still exists and that even if we play by the rules and pursue the American Dream with the same effort, we do not all begin at the same starting line or experience the same success.</p>	<p>Whether our cultural, political, and academic institutions are basically fair (with exceptions) or basically rigged and in need of structural change (with repentance for the majority's part in perpetuating systemic bias). For example, in just the last year I read a thoughtful book by a white man arguing that the deck is stacked (by Whites), and has always been stacked (by Whites), against African Americans. I also read a thoughtful book by a black man arguing that racism is largely a thing of the past and that focusing on Black victimhood is self-defeating. (I realize, of course, that neither book is representative of the way most Whites and Blacks think, respectively, of the issue.)</p>

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<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/can-give-thanks-flawed-heroes/>.

<p>6. Corporate Responsibility</p>	<p>It is appropriate, in some situations, for Christians, for Christian institutions, and for churches to be rebuked for corporate sins and to repent of corporate failures. The Old Testament prophets often denounced the nation of Israel, even though individuals within the nation were certainly living in holiness and integrity. Likewise, we see that Daniel offered a prayer of confession for his people, even though he likely was not personally guilty of all the sins he confessed (Dan. 9:1-19). In the New Testament, we see that the Jews were held responsible for Christ's death, even though some Jews followed Jesus and lamented his death.</p>	<p>When and how—and in many situations whether—this corporate accountability and repentance should take place. We do not agree on how (or if) the passage of time, racial identity, and ecclesiastical affiliation should shape these matters. Similarly, we do not agree what should be done, if anything, beyond repenting for corporate sin.</p>
<p>7. Politics and the Church</p>	<p>The church of Jesus Christ must not be beholden to any political party. We agree that the church is neither competent nor called to offer opinion on the specifics of every political debate or policy discussion. Preachers should, as a general rule, preach verse by verse through the Bible, letting God's word set the agenda, rather than riding hobby horses or trying to respond to the latest controversy. At the same time, we agree that</p>	<p>How the "spirituality of the church" applies in every situation (or if it is a biblical idea in the first place). At its best, the "spirituality of the church" roots us in the explicit teaching of Scripture and helps us keep the main thing the main thing. At its worst, the "spirituality of the church" has been used to ignore evil in our midst and sidestep issues of biblical obedience. While we recognize that the gospel is of first importance and that the</p>

	<p>Christians, churches, and pastors should not be silent on matters of justice about which the Bible clearly speaks.</p>	<p>gospel has public ramifications, we do not always agree on how these two convictions play out side-by-side in real time. There is little agreement on which issues are “moral” and “biblical” and which are merely “political.”</p>
<p>8. Systemic Injustice</p>	<p>Sin is not just a matter of individual responsibility. It is possible for systems and structures to be unjust even when the people inhabiting those systems and structures may not have personal animus in their hearts.</p>	<p>Whether disparities themselves indicate systemic and structural injustice (see above). Likewise, we do not agree on the best remedies for institutional racism where it exists.</p>
<p>9. Police and Judicial System</p>	<p>Our country imprisons far more of its citizens than any other nation does. We also recognize that minorities are imprisoned at rates disproportionate to their population as [a] whole. The presence of mass incarceration has a deleterious effect on many minority communities and families, as well as in the lives of those who are imprisoned.</p>	<p>The reasons for mass incarceration or whether the disproportionate imprisonment of minorities is a sign of entrenched bias. We do not agree on the nature of policing nor on the state of our judicial system, whether both are (largely) fair and colorblind or whether both are prejudiced (intentionally or unintentionally) against persons of color. By the same token, we often respond differently to stories involving the police and African Americans, either siding instinctively with law enforcement officers or assuming that each questionable encounter is</p>

		another example of pervasive police brutality.
10. Sunday Morning	The biblical vision of heaven is a glorious picture of a multi-ethnic throng gathered in worship of our Triune God. We would rejoice to see our churches reflect this biblical vision more and more. To that end, we lament our cultural blind spots (and don't know we have [them]!), which make it more difficult for people unlike us to feel at home and be in positions of leadership and influence in our churches.	To what degree this "segregation" on Sunday morning is the result of present sin, historical sin, personal preference, unfortunate cultural ignorance, or understandable and acceptable differences in worship and tradition. We do not agree on whether all churches must be multi-ethnic, should at least strive to be multi-ethnic (as their location allows), or whether there are ever justifiable reasons (and if so, what those reasons are) for a church to be entirely (or nearly) mono-cultural. And if the pursuit of racial diversity is desirable, we do not agree on whether this multi-ethnic vision is just for predominately White congregations, conferences, and communities or if it also applies to historically Black churches, conferences, and communities.
11. The Church and the World	The Bible calls the church to be honest about its own sins (1 Peter 4:17) and to keep itself unstained from the world (James 1:27). As salt and light, we should be distinct from the world, while at the same time having a salutary effect on the world.	Which is the more urgent need of the hour, to repent of our sin and renew our witness in the world, or to spotlight sin in the world and keep ourselves free from its corrupting influence. We know both are necessary, but our personal and corporate

		<p>inclinations often lean in one direction more than the other. Likewise, we often disagree on what urgency looks like in racial reconciliation and whether this conversation should or shouldn't take precedence over other moral issues like protecting the unborn and defending biblical marriage and sexuality.</p>
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DeYoung concludes,

Maybe a list like this can help us put our arguments in the appropriate categories. Let me be clear: all of the disagreements above are important, and Christians should be engaged in all of these debates. By laying out these disagreements, I'm not suggesting we now ignore them or act as if no answer is better than another. And yet, we ought to recognize that some of these disagreements are biblical and theological (e.g., the nature of corporate repentance, the entailments of the gospel, the dignity of all image bearers), while others are matters of history or policy, while still others require a good deal of expertise on sociology, law, economics, and criminology. By more carefully isolating our real disagreements we will be better equipped to talk responsibly, listen respectfully, find common ground, and move in the direction of possible solutions.

The ethnicity issue is so challenging because it involves many questions that we cannot easily answer from our theological doctrinal statements and traditions. We joyfully affirm that God created us in his image, that we must bear with one another and forgive one another, and that a multiethnic heaven will be glorious. The disagreement arises when we try to apply our shared theology to American history, economic disparity, police shootings, critical

theory, and so much more.<sup>71</sup> That is why a figure like this “White supremacy iceberg” is unhelpful:<sup>72</sup>



Figure 1 White supremacy iceberg

<sup>71</sup> See Kevin DeYoung, *Faith Seeking Understanding: Thinking Theologically about Racial Tensions* (Matthews, NC: The Gospel Coalition, 2020), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/thinking-theologically-about-racial-tensions-series/>. This 21-page PDF compiles five of DeYoung’s 2020 articles.

<sup>72</sup> Ben Lindsay, *We Need to Talk about Race: Understanding the Black Experience in White Majority Churches* (London: SPCK, 2019), 12. Lindsay’s book focuses on the Black experience in the UK.

In the above figure, Christians should agree that the examples of “overt racism” are sinful. But Christians reasonably disagree on the examples of “covert racism” because ethnic partiality may not be the only factor, the main factor, or even a factor at all that accounts for some of those disparities.<sup>73</sup> If that is the case, then the figure is reductionistic, misleading, and divisive.<sup>74</sup>

I have convictions and opinions about such controversial issues (e.g., in the figure above and in DeYoung’s article).<sup>75</sup> And I must distinguish between straight-line issues and jagged-line issues. As a pastor, I must not bind your conscience on a jagged-line issue. I may try to *persuade* you on a jagged-line issue, but I must not say that a particular view is *the* Christian position for a jagged-line issue.

It is OK if a church has pastors and members who do not agree across the board on jagged-line issues regarding ethnicity. The more important issue is how Christians respond to that disagreement. Are you going to let it sinfully divide your church? Are you going to vilify anyone who disagrees with you? Are you going to schismatically crusade for your views on jagged-line issues in your various relationships and on social

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<sup>73</sup> See Greg Morse, “Seeing the World in Black and White: How Much Do Assumptions Divide Us?,” *Desiring God*, 8 July 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/seeing-the-world-in-black-and-white>.

<sup>74</sup> When Anthony Bushnell (a civil trial attorney) shared feedback on a draft of this document, he commented here, “For instance, it ignores questions of cause and effect and questions of motives and intentions. It also generalizes to the point that it’s easy for reasonable people to read the categories and think of very different experiences, and thus get into disagreements in which they are talking past each other.” Theologian and ethicist John Frame argues that the term *racism* can be a wax nose: John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 662–67.

<sup>75</sup> E.g., see Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Do Whites Need Corporate Repentance for Historical Racial Sins?,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 5 August 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/do-whites-need-corporate-repentance-for-historical-sins/>; Neil Shenvi, “Does ‘Systemic Racism’ Exist?,” *Neil Shenvi—Apologetics*, 17 June 2020, <https://shenviapologetics.com/does-systemic-racism-exist/>; R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Systemic Racism, God’s Grace, and the Human Heart: What the Bible Teaches about Structural Sin,” *Public Discourse*, 25 June 2020, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/06/65536/>; R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Black Lives Matter: Affirm the Sentence, Not the Movement,” *Public Discourse*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/06/65132>.

media? Or are you going to prioritize loving others over convincing them that your convictions about jagged-line ethnic issues are right?<sup>76</sup>

Leeman and I conclude our article on politics, conscience, and the church by suggesting six specific ways to love another.<sup>77</sup> This applies to how we can love fellow church members who disagree about jagged-line issues regarding ethnicity:

1. Welcome those who disagree with you as Christ has welcomed you (Rom 14:1; 15:7).
2. “Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19). Why? “Because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:20 NIV).
3. Pray with affection for those who disagree with you.
4. Respectfully think about those who disagree with you.
5. Do not use the label *gospel issue* for a jagged-line political judgment that you think is an implication of the gospel.
6. Exult with one another that we can trust our sovereign God when politics tempt us to be sinfully anxious.

### **Concluding Prayer**

Merciful God, thank you for creating every human in your image with equal dignity and worth. Please forgive those of us who are guilty of showing ethnic partiality. Thank you that Jesus died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Please help us love the nations like you do. Our hearts soar when we think about worshipping you with fellow image-bearers whom the

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<sup>76</sup> When Anthony Bushnell shared feedback on a draft of this document, he commented here, “This doesn’t mean we give up on trying to persuade each other or understand each other’s concerns and positions. It means we prioritize continuing to love and welcome each other even when we still disagree. I think it’s easy for people to get the impression that applying the lessons here means we just ‘agree to disagree’ and resign ourselves to being divided on these issues.” Cf. Jared C. Wilson, “5 Better Ways to ‘Argue’ about Social Justice ... or Anything Else Online,” *For the Church*, 17 September 2018, <https://ftc.co//resource-library/1/3956>.

<sup>77</sup> Leeman and Naselli, “Politics, Conscience, and the Church,” 29–31.

Lamb ransomed for you from every tribe and language and people and nation.

Please help us love our neighbors across ethnic lines—even when that love is costly and sacrificial and inconvenient. Please help us maintain the unity in the church that Christ powerfully created. Please help us welcome ethnic diversity in a way that pleases you and that loves our neighbors. And please help us to love justice and to respond to ethnic partiality in Christ-like ways.

We ask for the fame of Jesus's name. Amen.