

# Race, Nationality, Class and Culture

## INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

How important are factors of race, nationality, class and culture in determining our sense of personal identity?

Why do people want to establish their identity in their race, nationality, class or culture?

How does the fact that people find their sense of identity in their race, nationality, class or culture affect the way that they view and treat others?

In what ways might Christians find their identity in their race, nationality, class or culture?

## RACE AND NATIONALITY

### (1) Race and nationality in the purposes of God

The Bible teaches that differences of race and nationality were purposed by God as part of the way in which he has created and ordered human society. As such they are not bad in and of themselves. God works through nations, and individuals are identified by their race and nationality. However whilst acknowledging the fact of distinctions of race and nationality the Bible also teaches the fundamental unity of the human race as a single family.

*Read: Act 17v 24-27*

Why, according to these verses, are men and women divided into nations?

How do these verses acknowledge the fundamental unity of the human race?

## **(2) Sinful abuse of distinctions of race and nationality**

Whilst God instituted distinctions of race and nationality, these distinction came to be distorted through sin. Men and women of particular nations or races thought themselves superior to other races and nations, leading to the pride and arrogance of racism and nationalism. Israel was especially guilty of this pride, because they were God's chosen people, but too easily forgot that they had been chosen so that nations would be blessed through them (eg Genesis 12v1-3).

How are you aware of racism or nationalism in our society?

Do you think that there is racism or nationalism in the church?

What effect does this have on the Christian community?

## **(3) Race and nationality in the light of the gospel**

Through this series we have seen that Christians are to find their primary sense of identity in Christ. One effect of the gospel is to radically transcend distinctions of race and nationality. Through the gospel God is gathering a people for himself from every tribe and nation. The new covenant community is both multiracial and multinational (eg Revelation 7v9). Christians should therefore find their primary identity in Christ, not in their race or nationality.

*Read: Galatians 4v26-29; Colossians 3v11*

What effect does the gospel have on issues of race and nationality?

How can this be reflected in the Christian community?

*Read: Phillipians 3v4-8; 2 Corinthians 11v21-22 & 30*

How did Paul's sense of identity change when he became a Christian?

#### **(4) Race and nationality and our identity**

Christians need to ensure that they do not allow their race and nationality to determine their identity. Instead their identity in Christ should determine the way that they view their race and nationality. They may need to repent of a misplaced pride in their race or nationality, and any sense of superiority to others. For example, whereas Romans were extremely proud of their citizenship, Christians are called to recognise that their citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3v20). There is no place in the church for racism and nationalism, which have done tremendous damage to the cause of Christ in the past.

### **CLASS AND CULTURE**

#### **(1) The fact of class and cultural distinctions**

Whilst distinctions between races and classes have been established by God, distinctions of class and culture are a product of human society. Class and cultural distinctions determine a person's 'place' in society, i.e. their status in the social hierarchy. Class and cultural distinctions may be brought about by factors of birth, wealth or education.

*Read: 1 Corinthians 1v26-31*

How does Paul acknowledge the reality of distinctions of class and social status in these verses?

## **(2) Sinful abuse of class and cultural distinctions**

Those who are higher up the social order may tend to look down on those who they consider to be below them. Snobbery and social climbing result when people seek their identity in their class or culture. These problems are identified in the Bible. For example, the Greeks thought themselves intellectually superior to others (1 Corinthians 1v22). People tended to treat the rich as more important than the poor (James 2v1-4).

How are you aware of cultural or class snobbery in our society?

Do you think that there is cultural or class snobbery in the church?

What effect does cultural or class snobbery have on the Christian community?

## **(3) The effect of the gospel on class and culture**

Just as distinctions of race and nationality are transcended by the gospel, so too are distinctions of class and culture. Colossians 3v11 makes clear that in Christ there is no 'Greek or...barbarian' and no 'slave or free.' Social and cultural distinctions are broken down. Christians are not to seek their identity in their class or their culture, but in Christ. This will radically affect the way that they see themselves and treat others.

*Read: 1 Corinthians 1v26-31; James 2v1-5; 1 Timothy 6v17*

What kind of people has God chosen to be Christians?

Why has he chosen them?

How should those of higher social status change the way that they think about themselves and others?