

The New Covenant and Race

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In recent months, the media has been filled with headlines of racially motivated murders, racial profiling, racial slurs, and a flag that many find racially offensive.

What are we, whose minds are supposed to be regulated by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, to think? Are the races equal or are some inferior? Should they, in any case, be kept separate? Are segregation and apartheid "God's established order" as some claim? Why did God separate people at the Tower of Babel, and why did Abraham not want his children marrying Canaanites? These questions must be addressed because there are people claiming to be followers of Jesus Christ who stand at opposite ends of the spectrum to each other when it comes to their attitudes towards race.

The Old Testament: We Are One Family

The Old Testament is often used to support opposing views towards race because, it can seem contradictory. We will find, however, that it is not contradictory. There are rational reasons for the stands it takes, and they are in harmony.

Foundational to any understanding of race are Genesis 1:26 and 3:20. Genesis 1:26 says, "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 sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Genesis 1:26). Although the Hebrew word for "man" is *'âdâm*, the Bible shows that this does not apply to just the one man, Adam, by saying, "and let *them*...." God made Adam in His image, and all mankind shares that image.

Genesis 3:20 says, "The man called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). Eve comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to live." The Bible says she is the mother of all living, obviously meaning all humans. We don't know what Adam and Eve looked like, but that's not what is important. Adam and Eve had the genes for all of the races. All of the races come from the same parents. We are all made in the image of God, and we are all related.

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Genesis 6:17-18 and 1 Peter 3:20 tell us that God saved only eight people through the Flood. They were Noah and his wife, their three sons, and their sons' three wives. Everyone alive today is descended from this one family unit. Obviously, then, these eight people together had all of the genes necessary to produce all of today's races. So, once again, we see that everyone alive today, whatever their color, is related. If we stopped our survey of the Old Testament right here, it would be impossible to make a case for treating one race differently from another or for keeping the races separate.

The Old Testament: Curses

As we continue looking at the Old Testament, however, we will begin finding Scriptures that seem like they might support separation and distinction between peoples. Certainly, some people have taken them that way.

Noah's Curse on Canaan: A passage that came to be called the *vade mecum* (handbook or field guide) of slaveholders is Genesis 9:20-27:

Noah began to be a farmer, and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and got drunk. He was uncovered within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it on both their shoulders, went in backwards, and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were backwards, and they didn't see their father's nakedness. Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his youngest son had done to him. He said, "Canaan is cursed. He will be servant of servants to his brothers." He said, "Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem. Let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth. Let him dwell in the tents of Shem. Let Canaan be his servant."

One of the myths of this passage is that Noah's curse on Canaan is black skin. I outright call it a myth because it is so certainly derived from someone's imagination and not the Bible. Absolutely nothing in these verses or anywhere else in the Bible states or implies that black skin comes from Noah's curse on Canaan. It is a ridiculous notion, and I'm going to simply dismiss it. Another fancy that comes from this passage is that Noah cursed Canaan partly because Canaan's father, Ham, had married into the black race of Cain (Cain's blackness, according to this tale, being the mark God put upon him—Genesis

4:15). This was taught by Nathan Lord, who served as president of Dartmouth College from 1828 to 1863 (see *A Northern Presbyterian's Second Letter to Ministers of the Gospel of All Denominations on Slavery*) (<https://goo.gl/GRuJ2w>). But the Bible neither says that Cain's mark was black skin, nor that it was an inheritable racial characteristic, nor that Ham married a descendent of Cain, nor that such a marriage—had it actually happened—would have been wrong. It's all entirely made up.

Robert L. Dabney (1820-1898)—theologian, pastor, and Stonewall Jackson's chief of staff—claimed that this passage explained the origins of what he called "domestic slavery" (the enslavement of Africans in America), which he said was a result of "peculiar moral degradation" (*A Defense of Virginia, and Through Her, of the South, in Recent and Pending Contests Against the Sectional Party*, 103) (<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/imgsrv/download/pdf?id=miun.abt6096.0001.001;orient=0;size=100>, this opens a pdf file). Even the *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, commenting on Genesis 9:25, says, "Cursed be Canaan—This doom has been fulfilled in the destruction of the Canaanites—in the degradation of Egypt and the slavery of the Africans, the descendants of Ham."

This view, that capturing and using Africans as slaves is the result of, and therefore justified by, Noah's curse on Canaan, is taught by some people even today. But there is a problem with this notion. Canaan was not the father of the black Africans. The Canaanites migrated to Palestine, and they were still living there when Joshua led the Israelites into the land, which was called the land of Canaan. Yes, Canaan was cursed, but that curse was fulfilled, not by African slavery, but by the Israelites (descendants of Shem) and other peoples encroaching into the land of Canaan and eventually taking it over and subjugating the Canaanites. That curse is now long fulfilled and past. Black Africans are likely descended from Cush, a brother of Canaan (Genesis 10:6). Yes, a brother is close, but, as the saying goes, close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades, not curses. Mizraim was also a brother of Canaan, and he was the father of the Egyptians who were certainly no one's slaves. The "degradation of Egypt" that Jamieson-Fausset-Brown speaks of is vague. Every nation has its times of "degradation."

The Tower of Babel: In Genesis 11 is the account of the Tower of Babel. The chapter begins by telling us, "The whole earth was of one language and of one speech. It happened, as they traveled east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they lived there" (Genesis

11:1-2). Everyone on the earth spoke one language, and they all lived and traveled together until they came to Shinar. There they built a city and began to build a tower to make a name for themselves and to prevent their being scattered (verse 4). The fact that they thought they might be scattered indicates they saw being scattered as a real possibility. Someone, perhaps Nimrod (see Genesis 10:9-10), had the idea that a big public works project would be just the thing to hold the people together.

God was not happy with the scheme (Genesis 11:6-7). Why? In Genesis 9:1, God had commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (*Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*). Staying in one city to build a tower is not obeying the command to fill the earth. In fact, when you think about it, you see that the very purpose of the project was to defy God's command: the people did not want to be scattered, which is another way of saying they did not want to fill the earth. Not only that, but instead of honoring God, they wanted to make a name for themselves. So, to keep people from sinfully and pridefully disobeying His order for that time to fill the earth and from concentrating their powers into idolatrous projects that dishonor Him, God divided them into smaller groups by confounding their language.

This incident is sometimes used to support the view that God wanted to separate the races. But, as we've just seen, race had nothing to do with it. Besides, the races had likely not even fully developed yet.

Genesis 11:8 tells us that the Lord "scattered them abroad from there on the surface of all the earth." The Bible doesn't tell us how the races actually developed. It is possible, however, that, now that marriages would take place within the smaller, more isolated groups, certain genes dominated in each of the groups. This would lead to racial distinctions.

The question now arises, Did God want the races kept distinct and preserved for their own sake?

The Boundaries of their Dwellings: In answering this question in the context of the Old Testament, there is a New Testament verse we must examine. Paul, in Acts 17:26, says, "He made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the surface of the earth, having determined appointed seasons, and the boundaries of their dwellings." This verse affirms that everyone descends from Adam and Eve. But it also says that God set boundaries for each nation. Does this mean that each nation and/or race is supposed to stay within a certain boundary

and not mix with others? Many people have said that is exactly what they think Paul meant. In 1960, evangelist and founder and first president of Bob Jones University, Bob Jones Sr. (1883-1968) preached,

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth...." But do not stop there, "...and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." Now, what does that say? That says that God Almighty fixed the bounds of their habitation. That is as clear as anything that was ever said.... If we would just listen to the Word of God and not try to overthrow God's established order, we would not have any trouble. God never meant for America to be a melting pot to rub out the line between the nations. That was not God's purpose for this nation. When someone goes to overthrowing His established order and goes around preaching pious sermons about it, that makes me sick—for a man to stand up and preach pious sermons in this country and talk about rubbing out the line between the races—I say it makes me sick.... If you are against segregation and against racial separation, then you are against God Almighty because He made racial separation in order to preserve the race through whom He could send the Messiah and through whom He could send the Bible. God is the author of segregation. God is the author of Jewish separation and Gentile separation and Japanese separation. God made of one blood all nations, but He also drew the boundary lines between races....

Now listen, the time has come when we ought to sit down and go to thinking some things through in this country. And you colored people listening to me and you white people listening to me ought to keep your heads cool and your minds clear and your hearts warm and keep up these friendly relations we have had through the years.... But racially we have separation in the Bible. Let's get that clear. Any race has a right to come to America. We do not mean that when we came over here we wiped out the line between races.... We had planned to build a school, just like Bob Jones University, here in the South for colored people. We wanted to build it.... We wanted to build a great school where colored people could come and get all the culture that we offer here at Bob Jones University. We

would not have faced the problems that are faced where there is integration....

When they tell you that God Almighty is not the author of the boundaries of nations, you tell them that is wrong. You tell them it is perfectly clear in the Bible that God made of one blood all nations but that He also fixed the bounds of their habitation.... Whenever you get a situation that rubs out the line that God has drawn between races, whenever that happens, you are going to have trouble. That is what is happening today in this country.... You can be a Christian and have fellowship with people that you would not marry and that God does not want you to marry and that if you should marry you would be marrying outside the will of God. Why can't you see that?... When you run into conflict with God's established order racially, you have trouble.

"Is Segregation Scriptural?"

(<http://www.drslewis.org/camille/2013/03/15/is-segregation-scriptural-by-bob-jones-sr-1960/>)

In this sermon, Jones firmly based his belief in racial segregation and apartheid on Acts 17:26. He takes the verse to be a statement of God's established order that the races are supposed to remain separate. Is that what this verse says?

Looking at the context, we see that Acts 17:26 is part of Paul's talk at the Areopagus, sometimes called Mars Hill, in Athens. He was trying to reach these philosophers, who knew little or nothing about the true God and the Hebrew Scriptures. So Paul announces to them that the unknown god to whom they have erected an altar, the god they don't know, is the God he is going to reveal to them (verse 23). He tells them this God is the Creator of all things, He doesn't dwell in man-made temples, and He doesn't need anything because He is the Giver of everything (verses 24-25).

Then, continuing to speak of how God, unlike the pagan gods of the Greeks, is in need of nothing but is the Creator of, Sustainer of, and Sovereign over everything, Paul tells his listeners that God made from one bloodline all people of all colors and all nations. Paul next says that God has "determined appointed seasons." What does that mean? The Greek is "*horisas prostetagmenous kairous*." *Horisas* means "fixing," or, "delimiting," or, "demarcating." *Prostetagmenous kairous*

is "the preappointed times." So, Paul is saying that God has fixed the preappointed times. Paul adds, "and the boundaries of their dwellings." That is, God has also fixed the "boundaries of their dwellings."

The Greek for this is *horothēsas tēs katoikias autōn*, the "boundaries of their *katoikias*." *Katoikias* specifically referred to settlements or towns in newly conquered territory. Does this mean that God has set people someplace where they can never move and never intermingle with other nationalities and races of people? How could that be? All through history, people have migrated, conquered new territory, and mixed with other people. Understood in context, we see that Paul is not saying that people would not move. He is saying that God has set when—"the preappointed times"—and where—"the boundaries of their dwellings"—they would move. God has predetermined the migrations of peoples and the expansion and contraction of empires. He has predetermined history.

Now, continuing on with verse 27:

...that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also his offspring.' Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold, or silver, or stone, engraved by art and design of man. The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked. But now he commands that all people everywhere should repent.

Acts 17:27-30

I especially want to point out the end of verse 28 and all of verse 29. "For we are also his offspring" may be something that several of the Greek poets said, but Paul treats it as a truth. He even goes on to say that because we are God's offspring, we ought not to think of God as something that can be crafted by men. If we are thinking, rational beings, and we are God's offspring, then we should think of God as a thinking, rational being.

Bob Jones Sr. asserted, "People come along and say, 'Well, God is the Father of everybody.' No, He is not. God is the Father of born-again people.... Do not let people run over you by coming along and talking about the Universal Fatherhood of God and the Universal Brotherhood of man. There is no Universal Fatherhood of God and Universal Brotherhood of man. There is not a word about that in the Bible" ("Is

Segregation Scriptural?" (<http://www.drslewis.org/camille/2013/03/15/is-segregation-scriptural-by-bob-jones-sr-1960/>).

It is true that *spiritually*, only those who are born again are the sons of God. It is also true, as I point out in "The Parable of the Tares of the Field," that the human race is divided between the elect—who are the seed of kingdom—and the reprobate—who are the seed of the wicked one (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/par2tares.htm>). But *physically*, Acts 17:28-29 clearly teaches that all humans on the face of the earth are God's offspring. This is because we are all the descendents of Adam, and, since Luke identified Adam as the son of God (Luke 3:38), physically speaking all humans are sons of God and we are all brothers and God is everyone's Father.

By denying the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man, Bob Jones Sr. was denying a biblical truth that was staring him in the face when he read Acts 17—"For we are also his offspring." It was a biblical truth that, had he accepted it, would have destroyed the racial discrimination and segregation that he so desperately wanted to hold on to. Tragically, Jones's teachings, and teachings of others like him, still infect people today.

The Old Testament: Separating a People for a Specific Purpose

Beginning with Abraham, we begin to see God separate a people from the rest of humanity. Abraham made sure that Isaac did not marry one of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom they lived, but instead Isaac married someone from his own bloodline. Jacob also married into that bloodline. Was God teaching a universal truth that we must keep the races pure and that racial intermarriage is a sin? Not at all. In later generations, we see prominent Israelites marrying Canaanites, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Moabites, and so forth. So why the racial purity in earlier generations? Because God had promised Abraham that He would give the land of Canaan to his descendants (Genesis 15:18-21; 17:8). If there was too much Canaanite blood in Abraham's line, it would have been impossible for God to take the land from the Canaanites and give it to Abraham's descendants. They would have all been the same people.

God also did not want mixed marriages when they threatened to turn Israel to other gods. But this had nothing to do with race. It was a matter of religion. Because I fully explain the topic of racial intermarriage in "Is interracial marriage right or wrong?"

(<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/InterracialQA.htm>), let's leave that topic here and go on to the New Testament.

The New Testament: A Covenant of Love

"Peter opened his mouth and said, 'Truly I perceive that God doesn't show favoritism; but in every nation he who fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him'" (Acts 10:34-35). This may have been news to Peter, but the truth is, God never did show true favoritism toward nations or races (Isaiah 40:15). God chose Israel to be His Old Covenant people to demonstrate that He could take what was small and despised and make it great (Ezekiel 16). This pictured what He could do spiritually for anyone who believed on His Son as Savior (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Israel's position as God's people was typological, picturing the New Covenant body of believers. Beginning at the Cross, the New Covenant believers, who are taken from all races and nations, have taken their position as the fulfillment of the shadow that was national Israel. Believers, not a physical nation, are God's people. The type/shadow has been fulfilled, and we now have the reality.

There are many Scriptures, such as Romans 10:12 and Galatians 3:28, which say that there is no distinction between nationalities and races. But there are people who say, Sure, believers of all races and nationalities are one, holy, spiritual nation in Christ. But they are still separate races and nationalities physically, and they should stay that way. And, they would say, nothing has changed for unbelievers. They are not one; they are separate, and God wants them that way.

These people are right in one point. The unity spoken of in the New Testament Scriptures cited above is the spiritual unity of the holy nation of believers. Yet, there is still most certainly a serious problem with the stance taken by those who want segregation of the races. We have seen nothing in the Old or the New Testaments that supports segregation. Nothing says, Keep the races separate. The burden is on them to produce Scriptures that support their cause, and they have never been able to do this. Every Scripture they have ever used has been shown by sound exegesis to not promote racial segregation, the superiority of one race over another, or the idea that God is concerned about race.

Finally, "the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14). This is more than loving your believing brother. This includes loving everyone. Under the New

Covenant, our love is to be all-inclusive (Matthew 5:43-48). To hold back on that, to not love someone as ourselves, is to disobey our Lord and violate the covenant He bought with His blood. Jesus died on the Cross so that we could love others *as ourselves*.

Now, how can you love your neighbor as yourself while saying, "You can't be my neighbor because you're a different color"? How can you love your neighbor and then say, "You can't go to my school. Your kind need a separate school"? Bob Jones Sr. may have been happy with the racial conditions of the Old South, but then he was a white man. If you read his entire talk, you will see that he claimed to have friends among black people. But were those black people his friends in an equal relationship, or were they acting under the fear of reprisal if they weren't friendly and respectful? Bob Jones Sr. may have thought it an act of love to build the black people their own school. But it wasn't loving them *as himself*. It wasn't fulfilling "the royal law, according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (James 2:8).

Racial segregation, prejudice, bigotry, and supremacy are all contrary to love. They are forms of hatred, and, as such, God despises them. Whatever our race, when we look at another human being, we should not see skin color. We should instead see another soul like us, made in the image of God, with many of the same problems and trials, hopes and dreams we have. We should see someone to love.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good.... Repay no one evil for evil. Respect what is honourable in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men.... Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:9, 17-18, 21