



## IDENTITY- Nuncios to the nations

May 19, 2024

Glenn Garvin



---

### • BIG IDEA – Unity in Diversity Is God’s Plan.

#### Ambassadors to the nations!

**scripture focus - Acts 2:5-12 NLT** At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and **they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. They were completely amazed. “How can this be?”** they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee, and **yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!**” They stood there amazed and perplexed. “**What can this mean?**” They asked each other.

- 
- **We are created on purpose for purpose.**
  - Our **free choice shattered what** we see as the image of God in us and in others.
  - **Life is a miracle.**
  - **We’re crafted to connect.**
  - **Nuncios** (ambassadors) to the nations.

**Acts 2:1-4 NLT** **On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place.** Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And **everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.**

This Sunday is Pentecost Sunday! What is Pentecost Sunday? It is the ancient Jewish holiday called, Shavuot.

[Shavuot, the Jewish Pentecost](#), is a holiday that today commemorates the single most important event in Israel’s history: the giving of the Torah (the first five books in the Hebrew Bible) to Moses at Mount Sinai.

The most amazing part of the Shavuot, a.k.a. the Feast of Weeks is that all Jews were commanded to travel to Jerusalem to commemorate that feast. Pentecost is the Greek translation for the Hebrew Shavuot. **The New Testament Pentecost is the Old Testament Feast of Shavuot.**

**Why is that important in our current series of IDENTITY?** Because the Day of Pentecost as seen in Acts 2, is **the** object lesson picture of what God intended the Church to look like in representing His own image.

**[Acts 2:5-12 NLT](#)** At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and **they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. They were completely amazed. “How can this be?”** they exclaimed. “These people are all from Galilee, and **yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!**” They stood there amazed and perplexed. “**What can this mean?**” They asked each other.

**The Holy Spirit’s presence does not bring confusion, it brings curiosity!**

**Why is that important in our current series of IDENTITY?**

Because Pentecost as seen in Acts 2, is the object lesson picture of what intended the Church to look like in representing God’s own image.

**The people of Acts 2 were multinational, multiethnic, and multilingual.**

There were [15 Nations](#) mentioned in Acts 2:9-11.

The [15 Nations background](#).

[HiRes Map](#) of Countries in Acts 2

**The Diaspora (dispersion) of the Jewish people.**

Of the Jews of the Dispersion there were four classes:

- **Eastern or Babylonian Jews**, corresponding in the list to Parthians, Medes, Elamites;
- **Syrian Jews**, corresponding to Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia;
- **Egyptian Jews**, corresponding to Egypt and the parts of Libya over against Cyrene;
- **Roman Jews.**

**The long promise of the Holy Spirit!**

God said this kind of day would be coming way back in the Old Testament.

**Jeremiah 31 is filled with future promises.**

- **In that day**
- **For I will bring them from the north and from the distant corners of the earth.**
- **The Lord, who scattered his people, will gather them and watch over them as a shepherd does his flock.**
- **They will come home and sing songs of joy on the heights of Jerusalem.**
- **Your children will come back to you from the distant land of the enemy. There is hope for your future,” says the Lord. “Your children will come again to their own land.**

**[Jeremiah 31:31-34 NLT](#)**

The day is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife,” says the Lord. “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,” says the Lord. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, ‘You should know the Lord.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,” says the Lord. “And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.

**Pentecost is the mental tapestry of what the image of God looks like and sounds like is vastly more colorful and harmonious than we imagined!**

**And the fulfillment of God's promise to pour out His Holy Spirit on all flesh was first of many waves of that uniquely powerful day of Pentecost.**

This picture, this holiday event of the Jews, is the perfect way to discuss our **IDENTITY as seen as unity within our diversity.**

**Ethnicity is the eternal expression of God!**

Finally, because of businesses like [23andme.com](http://23andme.com) or [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com), we can actually find out about our diverse ethnicity. Many folks discover the bulk of their heritage comes from European descent.

**Why is it so hard to have race conversations. Why is it so difficult to treat others, who look different or sound different, right?**

Our discussions are normally polarized into categories of either being woke or racists. They are also politized, we are either Democrat or Republican, and yet these discussions are very personal – because we all have personal stories.

**Through the painful history in our country. We feel unprepared, unequipped Biblically or theologically. Because of it we feel “off” emotionally, and even relationally.**

As we explore our IDENTITY, being made in the image of God, it is a perfect place to find out what the Bible says about the human race.

**Genesis starts as a marriage story** more than it does a racial story. They are without a race or ethnicity. They are neutral. **All nationalities came from Adam (humankind) – Acts 17:26 From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth.**

**Still, there is no direct reference to ethnicity.**

**But somewhere between Genesis and Adam & Eve's kids and Revelation there is a massive amount of ethnicity written about.**

Jesus tells us that marriage motif will end – “**For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven.**” **Matthew 22:30.**

**But in the discussion of new heaven and new earth, ethnicity is identified! “After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.” [Revelation 7:9](#)**

**Ethnicity is the eternal expression of God!**

**Three things about ethnicity:**

- 1. Ethnicity is to be enjoyed, not eliminated or exalted.**
  - a. It demonstrates the creativity of God. Look at the plants and animals and the massive differences. How many are there?
  - b. **Think about your parents, your family upbringing, the foods, the celebrations, and stories. This is how we perceive how life and family works!**

- c. **Now, think about another person's family – their upbringing, foods, celebrations, and stories. What happens when those friends and families are from a completely different ethnic experience? Our perceptions of life and family should expand, not shrink.**
- d. **Jesus transcends our ethnicity, but he doesn't eradicate our ethnic identity.**
- e. Jew, Greek, Male or Female. Paul doesn't eliminate the fact that there are ethnic or physical differences he highlights the neutrality of all of us being made right with God. Identity in Jesus doesn't eliminate identity it **informs** our ethnic identity! It makes ethnic identity a discipleship journey! **We shouldn't have to feel shame for being white, black, red, brown, or yellow – it's the image of God in us.** It's God's creativity. To say, "oh, I don't see color," or I am ethnically "color blind," isn't just untrue. **It is saying that we don't see the full image of God spectacularly displayed in our humanness! We see the differences as flawed, instead of seeing them as bonus features! We shouldn't exalt ethnicities.** Mistreating other ethnicities is a misstep of our Christian identity **it is a sin to judge someone by their skin color or their God given expression of humanness.**
- f. **Jesus entered our world with an ethnicity!** Jesus came into the world Jewish. He wasn't ethnically neutral. He was born, lived, died, and resurrected as a Jewish Man! He was raised from the dead as a glorified Jewish Man. Not exalted, not eliminated, but celebrated!

## 2. **Unity in diversity is God's plan.**

- a. God's plan is to unite different ethnicities together as a family.
- b. Adam is all of humanity.
- c. Abraham "all peoples on earth," promise blessing – [Genesis 12:1-3](#).
- d. The story started with **one human**, then it was through **one nation**, yet other people, other ethnics were a part of the story. Joseph married an Egyptian. When Israel left Egypt, they did so in mixed multitude ([Exodus 12:38](#)), Moses married a Cushite, a Black African, Rahab, Canaanite, Ruth, Moabite. Would be a part of Israel. What about the commanded inner-marriage of the Jews? That was more about mixing idolatry than it was race or bloodline.
- e. Jesus own ministry led him to Tyre, Sidon and Samaria. Some of most profound statements of faith were made when Jesus complimented Gentiles. Jesus spoke with Roman leaders, Israel's apparent enemy.
- f. Ephesians vertical reconciliation with God and horizontal reconciliation with other ethnicities – Jews and Gentiles. [Ephesians 2:13-19](#). The gospel creates the church. Beliefs from all different backgrounds. **"Christians of other races are not just equal to us; they are joined to us. We are both part of the same body, united by the presence of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us both."**
- g. Fulfilled in the end. "All nations, tribes, people and languages" is repeated 7 times in Revelation. **Emphatic representation forever!**
- h. **This was plan A all along. God always wanted diversity.**
- i. GenZ (born after 1996) is the most Racially Diverse generation in the history of the U.S. **83% said that a company's commitment to diversity and inclusion was an important factor in choosing an employer.** As a generation, GenZ cares about unity and diversity.

## 3. **Unity in diversity requires the resources of God.**

- a. First unity requires choice. In order for diversity to unify must be strong enough to endure differences, hurts and conflicts – it requires a power source to bring them all together. The person of Jesus has the power to pull all of this together. Common interests can help, but it is not as powerful. Unity requires a source.
- b. **You have more in common with a believer from another country than you may have with your own neighbor who looks like you, votes like you – but does not yet believe in Jesus!** Jesus is that powerful.
- c. Preserving that unity that requires a strategy!

- i. **Church fellowship is more helpful than cultural framework** and thinking. Doing real life in real time is more beneficial. A weakness. A cultural framework of being “colorblind” we are all the same as a beautiful melting pot. A melting pot ends up making every component **the same**, taking on the predominant color or cultural flavor – like mixing all the watercolors together – it just makes for a mushy brown. Rather than enjoying the uniqueness. Another cultural framework. That of power. Either with power to oppress or without power to be oppressed. No one is truly on level ground. Koinonia – fellowship or partnership means mutual or shared accountability. Salad bowl of humanity, not melting pot. 70 one anothers.
- ii. **Biblical language is more helpful than cultural language.** Cultural buzzwords come and go. They change and they mean different things to different people. For example, using the Biblical word “Ethnical” vs “Race.” Race is not based in biology; it is a social construct. Ethnicity is based on nations, people groups, values, language, geography, religion, dialect. “Race” is polarizing. Using cultural words carry multiple meanings and perceptions.
- iii. **Gospel-centeredness is more helpful than cultural outrage.** Jesus beats social media. Jesus, full of grace and truth defeats the anger, anxiety, and outrage of social media. It allows us to listen and lament with the hurting, rather than rushing to a cultural narrative! Listen, learn, grieve, and leave celebrating God's way.

**The Apostle Paul, in his gifting and calling as an Apostle did a fantastic job teaching the Church how we should view ethnicity through the lens of God's image showing through our own identity as a follower of Christ.**

[Ephesians 2:14-18](#) For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. **Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.** He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

As believers, as image-bearers of God, our identity of what we believe and how we behave should be synchronized by this simple idea:

**There is Unity in Diversity in God's Plan. And, we are Nuncios** (ambassadors) to the nations, reflecting that **Ethnicity is to be embraced - not erased nor exalted.**

In reminding us of our mission to be one and make one, I want to emphasize this. I don't want our Sunday gatherings to be the time and place where we come together and just constantly ask more of each other. **Most of us don't need “more” to do and certainly can't handle another layer or list of things we are not doing right!**

**I can't process listening to a new truth every week and then be expected to put it into practice immediately. I know that many of you are working on being a disciple of Jesus as well as making disciples of those who do not yet know Him. Thank you!**

**I also know that some of us are saying, “I am not doing any of this.” “My life is fine and full, and I don't want or need to make more friends or be a witness for Jesus.” I understand that as well.**

**Today is not another layer of ToDo's. My job is to bring the Word of God that shows us what He is up to and what He is doing in His Kingdom. Am I challenged by God to not judge people based**

on their skin color or culture? Absolutely. Am I challenged to be more open to relationships, even friendships with people that are different than me, not just in ethnicity, but in background, family, even food? Definitely.

**But, if I have learned anything over the past four years, it's this: We must be led by the Holy Spirit and be obedient to what God is saying.**

**Although it seems that I am asking more and more each week, I am really just showing us opportunities where God wants to show us and invite us into what He is doing. Just be open to God. Just keep yourself ready to see these opportunities as they come and say YES instead of NO!**

---

## NOTES

### Scriptures

[Acts 2:1-4 NLT](#) On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

[Acts 2:5-12 NLT](#) At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean? They asked each other.

### [Jeremiah 31:31-34 NLT](#)

The day is coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the Lord. "But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the Lord.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already," says the Lord. "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.

[Acts 17:26](#) From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth.

[Matthew 22:30](#) NIV At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.

[Revelation 7:9](#) After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.

[Ephesians 2:14-18](#) OFor **Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.** He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. **Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.** He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

## Reconciliation to All Nations

We live in a racialized culture. From news pundits to social media users, the ongoing noise of the clashing cymbals of opinions, theories, and questions rage on. Our culture craves a transcendent unity, yet also appears to thrive off the very division it bemoans. While this is of no surprise to God, it may be surprising that the current cultural climate is not how things will always be.

The Creator of the Universe breathed the universe into existence with a vision for human flourishing as people experience a divine unity in diversity. This vision set sail even before human history began and is on course to arrive at its destination no matter history's treacherous waters. There will come a time when "every nation, tribe, people, and language" will stand together in the uniqueness of color and culture before Jesus, who unites them all. There will be no more warring, dividing, discriminating, or demeaning. The people of God will treat one another perfectly as one because they are one.

The hope of the Church today is to "pull the future into the present" by honoring the image of God in every race in sacrificial love for one another. This is not easy to do. Humility is required and discomfort will be common. There will be moments when it feels like too great of a mountain to climb. It's in these times, however, that the Church can remember how Jesus climbed down from Heaven's throne to unite us to Himself and to one another. The astounding gospel of Jesus Christ motivates and strengthens followers of Jesus to move forward before a divided and watching world.

## Surprising Love

Jesus did many things that surprised and shocked His contemporaries. The religious constituencies of His day—the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes—were continually offended by the holiness and righteousness of Jesus, which showed up in ways outside of their perfunctory boxes. These self-righteous religious leaders, however, were not the only ones Jesus surprised. His own disciples were caught off guard by His actions—namely who Jesus was willing to associate with, befriend, and fellowship with publicly and privately.

Jesus was willing to associate with the lowly of Israel—tax collectors, prostitutes, and "sinners." Jesus was also willing to associate with those who were racially and ethnically different. This was a social scandal in Jesus' day. Social relationships were religiously, socially, and politically charged due to Israel's history with Gentiles (non-Jews). Jesus still boldly made conversation with those who did not look like Him.

Today, we see an example of this in a story of Jesus interacting with someone whose ethnic identity was considered detestable according to first-century Jews. This story invites us to reflect, wonder, and consider our personal application.

**READ John 4:1-10.**

[John 4:1-10](#) Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee. **He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar**, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?" Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

**Focus on verses 7-10. What does the response of the woman say about her culture's view on race? What does the initiation of Jesus say about the Kingdom's view of race?**

The Samaritan woman was surprised that Jesus would speak with her. His initiation, humility, and love for her surprised her. What a beautiful and wonderful surprise—one needed more often in our world today. Today's world is one where we are surprised by the outrage or the lack of outrage from what's happening all around us. We are addicted to controversy, anger, strong opinions, or the complete opposite—distance and apathy. This story invites us to be surprised by the wonderful, initiating love of our Savior, but also to imitate His love in a way that surprises our neighbors and our world.

**Q: In what ways are you encouraged by our passage? In what ways are you challenged? What kind of questions arise in you? Write them below.**

**PRAY** and ask the Lord to reveal more of His surprising love to you and that you would reflect that surprising love to your neighbor and the world.

## Every Nation

We may be tempted to see issues of diversity and ethnicity as "modern" issues, as if diversity conversations are a byproduct of the sophistication of modern thinking. But this is not the case, biblically speaking.



According to the Scriptures, God has always had a robust view of diversity and ethnicity. This is true not only according to the New Testament and the work of Jesus in salvation, but also the Old Testament. God is intensely concerned with the nations and the outworking of His redemption plan through His chosen people. God has never lost sight of the nations He cares to bless through His chosen seed, Jesus. When a people, nation, tribe, or tongue is forgotten, this is on account of the short-sightedness of humans, not the God of creation.

In today's reading, we see God's passion for diversity throughout biblical history juxtaposed with the short-sightedness of humans in the diversity conversation.

**Read the following excerpt from *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* by J. Daniel Hays:**

"...the kingdom of Cush...was a Black African Kingdom along the Nile River just south of Egypt. The terms Cush or Cushite appear 54 times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, indicating that the Cushites, an African people, play a fairly significant role in the Old Testament story. The term Hittite...is similar in frequency, occurring 61 times.... The terms Arab, Arabs, or Arabia appear less than 20 times. Neither the Sumerians nor the Hurrians are mentioned directly in undisputed biblical texts. However, scholarly discussions practically always devote much more time to discussing the Hittites, Hurrians, Sumerians, and Arabs than they do the Cushites, if they discuss the Cushites at all" (p. 26). "a civilization that stood as one of the major powers in the Ancient Near East for over 2,000 years; a civilization that appears again and again in the biblical text." (36)

**Summarize the point of the excerpt in your own words below.**

**Q: What does the remarkable history of the Cushites tell you about God, diversity, and biblical history, and how does this encourage and challenge you?**

**READ Revelation 7:9-11.**

[Revelation 7:9-11](#)

After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from **every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb**. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God.

The Cushites will be represented alongside every other ethnicity in the New Heavens and New Earth. This is the beautiful plan of God from beginning to end.

**Write out a prayer below asking God to help you to read the Bible with a greater lens of His passion for unity in diversity—that we would see what He sees, not just what our preferences and cultural lens would see.**

We worship and follow a God who is concerned with every nation, caring for people of every ethnicity. Applied today, we can say that God sees and cares about every single ethnic group in our culture. Not one people group is forgotten or disregarded by God. Every ethnicity stands equally created in the image of God. This is the heart of God for people, and He invites us to share in His heart.

**PRAY** a prayer that you would see others the way God sees them. Pray that God would form in you a heart that cares for those who others are willing to forget about.

## The Gospel and Its Implications

*"Christians of other races are not just equal to us; they are joined to us. We are both part of the same body, united by the presence of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us both."*  
Daniel Hays

Good news often comes with many implications. The same could be said about the gospel, the greatest news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. On one level, Jesus' work on the cross on our behalf has vertical implications regarding our relationship with God. The gospel makes us right with God, wiping away the penalty of our sins, bringing us into a relationship with God the Father, and giving us the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in us. But on another real level, the gospel impacts our horizontal relationships in the context of God's family, specifically in breaking down walls and creating unity amongst God's people, regardless of ethnic background.

Paul was an apostle, brilliant theologian, and ministry practitioner who experienced and wrote about these things.



Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Summarize the passage in two sentences below.

[Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

**Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.** But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that **even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead.** (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. **So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.** God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

[Ephesians 2:11-22](#)

**Don’t forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews,** who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. In those days you were living apart from Christ. **You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope.** But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. **Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.** For Christ himself has brought peace to us. **He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.** He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. **Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us. So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.** And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

**Q: In your own words, how does Paul seem to understand how the gospel impacts relationships in the family of God which may consist of different ethnicities?**

The Church—the Body of Christ—is a beautiful and remarkable spiritual organism in which different kinds of people come together in true unity because of the saving work of Jesus.

**Read this excerpt from Jarvis. J. Williams in his theological work, *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*.**

“God’s kingdom is a multiethnic kingdom, with a brown-skinned Jewish Messiah reigning as king, filled with diverse people, diverse dialects, with multiple immigration statuses in different countries, and with diverse stories—people who have tasted by faith the soteriological work of the one God, one Lord, and one Spirit and have participated in the one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6) because of their participation in the death and resurrection of the one Christ....”<sup>1</sup>

The local church you’re currently attending may not be very diverse due to sociological or geographical reasons. But the Scriptures demonstrate that God’s people in the New Heavens and New Earth will be a unity of different cultures worshiping together in the person of Jesus. In the meantime, we’re invited to see followers of Jesus who may be a different ethnicity than us, as our own brothers and sisters who are part of the same spiritual family. If you’re currently attending a church with a variety of cultures and ethnicities, you’re invited to see it as a gift, since this is a foretaste of eternity with God’s people. The Church is a place where diversity and cultural differences become tools, not threats, to help encourage and challenge one another to better follow Jesus.

**Describe your local church community.**

**Q: What are your hopes for your church? What are your fears?**

**PRAY** and thank God for the beautiful diversity of His Church. Pray that you would both be blessed by others and be a blessing to others in the Body of Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Jarvis J. Williams, *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 117.

## Shared Accountability

[Galatians 2:11-14](#)

**But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish believers followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.** When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel message, I said to Peter in front of all the others, "Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions?"

In this passage, Paul is recounting a time when **he confronted Peter on [ethnocentrism](#)**. You read that correctly: a Bible-authoring Apostle confronted another Bible-authoring Apostle because of his treatment of others on account of their ethnicity.

**To provide context, Peter fearfully withdrew table fellowship from non-Jewish Christians because of the presence and potential judgment of the "circumcision party"** (v. 12) or Jewish believers. Peter's actions hurt the Gentile believers, but also deterred the mission of the Church because his actions led Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians to also avoid social interaction.

Though Peter's actions were wrong and later made right, we receive valuable insights on how to live thoughtfully and lovingly in order to have productive relationships and meaningful conversations when it comes to loving our neighbors of different ethnicities.

**Q: In Galatians 2:12, how does Paul understand the heart and emotions of Peter, the perpetrator? Write below.**

**Q: In Galatians 2:14, how does Paul describe the predominant action of Peter?**

**Q: What does he say they were deviating from? Write below.**

**Q: In the same verse, how does the text describe how Paul confronted Peter? Write below.**

What's remarkable about the way Paul talked to Peter was the way he approached it as a shepherd. Paul talked to him face to face, understanding what drove Peter, namely fear. Paul then placed the gospel at the center and as the core issue of the matter. In other words, Paul didn't try to talk to convince him through a social media comments section, but pursued relationship. Paul didn't thump Peter over the head with self-righteousness, but shepherded Peter's heart. Paul didn't use cultural outrage to motivate Peter but pointed to the gospel as the highest reason for loving our neighbors.

**Q: How does this account show why the Church should be the best place to grow in conversations around ethnicity? Write below.**

Read the following excerpt from George Yancey in his work, *Beyond Racial Division*:

*"A mutual accountability model is about finding win-win solutions...In other models we are asked to accept preordained answers...When individuals are convinced, they already have the right answers, they feel justified using legal, political, and cultural power to enforce those answers...But collaborative conversations emphasize moral suasion rather than power. The focus is on community building rather than winning the racial war."<sup>1</sup>*

There is no better context for “mutual accountability” than the relationship of God’s people. The Church of God is equipped to handle conflict, misunderstanding, and the pains of a community better than any other institution or society.

**Write below a prayer for yourself and for your church. Pray that the Lord strengthens you and gives you wisdom and resilience to be a counter-narrative in a world that can be so divided and angry.**

---

1 George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Division: A Unifying Alternative to Colorblindness and Antiracism* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022), 57-58.

## Summary of teaching outline

- **Ethnicity Is to Be Enjoyed, Not Eliminated or Exalted**
- **Unity in Diversity Is God’s Plan**