

Race and Christianity I

What's the problem?

Depending on whom you ask, racism is either still a really important problem that the church urgently needs to address or it's a marginal issue that once was important but now it's largely been solved, and the only problem is the people who keep talking about it. Historically, racism has been a huge problem in the church. Even faithful, Jesus-following disciples promoted a theology that justified slavery. How did they come to such conclusions?

Two goals: (1) Debunking poor theology and (2) promoting a positive theology on multi-ethnicity

Debunking poor theology:

(1) Curse of Ham

Genesis 9:20-25

20 Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. 21 He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. 22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. 23 Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. 24 When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said, **“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.”**

(2) Early Israel was an ethnic community

Genesis 41:50-52

50 Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara priest of On, bore them to him. 51 Joseph called the name of the firstborn **Manasseh**. “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house.” 52 The name of the second he called **Ephraim**, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

Exodus 12:36-38

36 And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. 37 And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. 38 **A mixed multitude also went up with them**, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds.

(3) Intermarriage is frowned upon

Deuteronomy 7:1-4

7:1 “When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, 2 and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. 3 You **shall not intermarry with them**, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4 for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

Numbers 12:1, 6-10

12:1 Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of **the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman...** 6 And [God] said, “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. 7 Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” 9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed. 10 When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow. And Aaron turned toward Miriam, and behold, she was leprous.

Promoting a positive theology:

(1) Our primary identity is in Christ

Ephesians 2:13-19

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who **has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility** 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might **create in himself one new man in place of the two**, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are **no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints** and members of the household of God,

Galatians 3:25-29

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 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. 29 And if you are Christ's, then **you are Abraham's offspring**, heirs according to promise.

(2) The early church was multi-ethnic

Acts 2:5-12, 40-41

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, **devout men from every nation under heaven**. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 **Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians**— we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”... 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 **So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.**

Acts 13:1-3

1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, **Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch**, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

(3) At the climax of history, there will be a multi-ethnic congregation worshipping around the throne

Revelation 7:9

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, **from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,