

Series: All Peoples	Reference: <i>Various Passages</i>	Title: Focus	Date: 08.02.2020
Website Writeup:			
In a world where the temptation is to be dragged away & enticed by our desires, or to be blown & tossed by every wind of teaching, we need to FOCUS. To focus on God's Word to us, Jesus, the leading of the Holy Spirit pursuing unity as the church in faith & practice.			

We've been ending most of these sermons with a statement. Let's begin with one today...

We affirm all men & women are uniquely created in the image of God with equal dignity & worth. God shows no partiality based on our ethnicity. Therefore, we vehemently deny any worldview that sinfully denigrates any language, tribe, nation, or people-group in individual or collective value. This value is intrinsic to all humanity & not based upon whether one is a Christian or American.

Why do we say this? It's necessary in the current social climate to define the Christian worldview as it originates & is defined by God's Word, since we see these truths all throughout Scripture, beginning in Genesis 1:26a & 27, which says...

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..."²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male & female he created them.

Christians, basing their beliefs & values on Scripture, realize a few things about the human race. The first is stated here, we're all created in the image of God, all peoples, languages, nations & ethnicities. The human race, as descended from Adam & Eve, in its diversity, created in the image of God. All with the divine stamp which brings intrinsic value. This is how we allow Scripture to define our worldview of others.

This Divine Image was so important God even says in v6... "*Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.* So if you kill or denigrate a human being, you kill or denigrate something very special, something uniquely different than all other created beings.

But last week we said, we deny that ethnicity is unimportant or that our goal's to become colorblind, ignoring race altogether. I'm not a fan of Bill Nye the Science Guy, but he did a recent [video](#) outlining how the human race came out of Africa & spread across the world. And in that, we had certain changes occur in our physical makeup to adjust to various environments. He was saying, we're the same species - the human race. Maybe Bill will one day accept the Creation account in Genesis! But...that'd be a true miracle.

So, as we said last week we've always believed that distinct cultures, colors & languages of God's multiethnic Church are both redeemed by the blood of Christ & preserved as such into eternity. Since this is God's will, we aim to be a growing multiethnic congregation, representing the future Kingdom to come here on Earth as it is in Heaven. But our ultimate identity as Christians is most deeply rooted, not in ethnicity or national identity, but in our union together as one in the global Body of Christ.

Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility, Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, claims that we as religious people say 'spiritually' we're all the same &

although she may agree that's intrinsically true, she doesn't see us operating in the spiritual realm, so she can't begin with that standpoint. This is something with which I strongly disagree. Everything's spiritual, and we have to begin with the conviction everyone's an equally valued creation of God, physically & spiritually, or we'd never value other ethnic groups as such - our initial view of humanity is a spiritual issue with very real practical implications. She draws a distinctive line between the natural & spiritual world which Francis Shaeffer called the line between nature & grace. But Christians can't separate physical reality from spiritual reality; we're embodied spiritual beings made in the image of God.

She also claims, due to socialization, we're incapable of being taught to view everyone with equal value, again in light of what Scripture teaches, I can't agree. Remember, by saying we're all one in the eyes of God isn't to deny diversity. Christians see ethnicity as important, our goal's not to be colorblind, ignoring race altogether. She sets up an atmosphere through her writing & speaking operating out of Critical Theory in which those who're viewed as 'in power' can't defend themselves, since in her view, those in power are incapable, due to Implicit Bias, to understand the plight of the Minority or Oppressed. Implicit Bias is defined as the unconscious attribution of particular qualities by an individual to a member of some outside social group. It's a very nihilistic position she puts people in. She claims our family upbringing can't even teach us equal value, whereas the Christian sees the nuclear family as the place where socialization of value-development happen most strongly. But there's a push to demolish the traditional nuclear family in our current social narrative, so apparently, she's the only one who can teach since she's the new Gnostic or Intellectual Elite.

Again, like we said two weeks ago, Critical Theory says the Oppressed are considered absolutely innocent, totally right & the Oppressor's nothing but wrong. It shuts down all conversation & denies very real complicated issues involved on all sides. The hands of those perceived to be in power are tied, they can't engage. Their only choice is to enter social purgatory, suffering for their perceived wrongness until they become the new enlightened beings through the lens of Critical Theory & Intersectionality as we sit at the feet of new socially acceptable prophets like Robin. Nice lady, but reckless & grossly misguided & her views do a lot of damage. But...I'm a white guy swimming in Implicit Bias, what do I know? I'd say, I know Jesus, I know Scripture & on this solid rock I stand being transformed by the renewing of my mind & not conforming to the patterns of society as I submit myself to Christ (Rm 12:1-2).

Secondly, Genesis 1 informs us on the issue of gender, that God made humanity male & female. That gender's tied to biological makeup, the two genders have differences & uniquely reflect God in their own way & in coming together in marriage make even a more complete image of God & His people in relation to Him. Scripture in no way gives room & speaks against defining our sexuality divorced from biological makeup. It claims physical & social unions, outside of what God deems healthy & good, as damaging to the human race created in His image.

Thirdly, we realize Scripture says, as in the Creation account & stated clearly in Romans 1:20, that Humanity can understand & see God in Creation, *since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power & divine nature—have been clearly*

seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. So, in part, we can understand God from the surrounding world & are responsible to glorify Him with that knowledge.

Fourthly, this is balanced with Christians maturely allowing Jeremiah 17:9 to also inform their self-image, which says...*The heart is deceitful above all things & beyond cure. Who can understand it?* Wisely we don't fully trust our own understanding, due to our sinful nature, bringing about a need for God's detailed moral standard (Law) to be revealed in His Word - and how important it is for us to hold fast to Scripture in unity to attain to God's call of purity & holiness as one body. Since without it we're dragged away & enticed by our desires, or tossed back & forth by every wind of teaching.

This tells us, concerning our view of all peoples, that we first & foremost regard them as God's creation, made in His image with absolute intrinsic value, and that we can be taught to do so if our thinking is misguided - the best place for that to happen is within the nuclear Christian family supported by the local church. It says, although we can derive some things about God & people from Creation, we need Him to define values, morals & purpose more clearly, since we're prone to be 'blown & tossed by every wind of teaching' without the solidity of Scriptural guidance. This includes ideologies which sound good by usurping spiritual language advocating for things actually counter to God's leading. We addressed some of those a few weeks back.

History can be deceptive, and as a result Christianity's become suspect. The Smithsonian Institute recently came out with a list of aspects of white culture, in context suggesting these attributes to be indicative values of white supremacy. Notice though, white supremacy & racism have been redefined in the current cultural narrative. As a matter of fact white supremacy is replacing the term racism, since it's seen to have a more comprehensive covering of Implicit Bias & White Privilege.

The thought is, the term racism's too linked with individuals & individual racist acts, and is harder to get people to think about their Implicit Bias as a group.

The Smithsonian said things like hard work, individualism, the nuclear family, independence, objective rational linear thinking, hard work ethic, the scientific method, respect for authority, history, delayed gratification, planning for the future, the value of time, protestant work ethic, religion (specifically Christianity), our legal system, decision making (but only when whites have power to make the decisions), and more, are now basically marks of whiteness & in context white supremacy.

Thankfully there was push back & they retracted, but their thinking flowers in the garden of Critical Theory, fertilized by words from people like Robin DiAngelo.

Apparently, if I counsel people to seek delayed gratification for spiritual formation, or work hard & think about their future, I'm a white supremacist. Although, I believe these to be healthy biblical practices & values, but remember, Christianity itself is on that list.

Now the NY Times magazine has instituted the *1619 Project* which claims our country was established as a "slavocracy" with *The Constitution* written as a reinforcement to prop-up the evil. Revisionist history & a denial of good words that all peoples were created equal in our Constitution, which although haven't always been followed well by some, still stand as true no matter what individuals have done. Now it seems the

Smithsonian would suggest Christians as a whole group are downright complicit in this development of a slavocracy across the board & even guard it today, which is unfair & absurd.

There may have been people in the past who claim to be Christians practicing widespread racist acts, attitudes & systematic racism, but to say Christianity as a group is implicit flies right in the face of Scripture. We can't denounce Christians, or Christianity as a group, rather we look at the belief system & judge individuals on their practice of it. Being aware, not everyone claiming to be of Christ is of Christ, nor is everyone on the same level of spiritual maturity. We're all learning, growing, being transformed & at times in need of correction & conviction.

We've all seen the horrific pictures of fellow human beings being hung in towns in America, or videos of people being beaten & hosed down during the peaceful civil rights movement of the sixties. Or, the more recent video of George Floyd. None agree with these. The problem with looking at these things through the current social lens of Critical Theory is, we tend to make assumptions on whole groups. Assumptions are being drawn now that whiteness means Christians as a group agreed, sometimes participated, or that we guard systems of inequality to keep others down now...we are certainly being blown & tossed by every wind of teaching!

It views Christianity as progressive in nature, that we were stupid back then, have grown some, but still have a long way to go. Christianity isn't progressive in nature, the Bible was written thousands of years ago, has not & cannot change, and begins & ends with people valued as God's creation. It's philosophically impossible to think during large parts of history Christians as a whole group 'just didn't get it'. And even if that could be true, Christianity as a theological construct has always equally valued all peoples.

Viewing those images & videos in that way gives no room for the nameless person, or groups of people in a photograph from decades ago standing on the sidelines who did not agree & either did something about it privately, or felt powerless to act in such vitriolic instances themselves. We end up judging hearts from a distance of time & history without realizing, Christianity has always upheld life & equality from the Scriptures & that mature Christians understood this & have always acted on it.

People like Corrie Tenboom who came to the aid of Jewish peoples. Or Christians who provided freedom for slaves in the underground railroad. Or Christians who took in babies discarded on the trash heaps of the Roman Empire raising them on their own. Or the fact that when I sit in training rooms for foster care & adoption, those rooms are populated by Christian families there to adopt & take in kids of any ethnicity to give them a chance at life. Not that non-Christians don't adopt, but there's a great imbalance in favor of Christians in that area due to our worldview. The website adoption.org claims that twice as many Christians adopt & 38% of Christians have seriously considered it, which is greatly higher than non-Christians. Many of those adoptions cross ethnic & cultural lines.

AntiChristian sentiments have always contended that Christian mission is just another form of imperialism or colonialism where we seek to take over & erase cultures to make them like us. As a former cross-cultural missionary, with almost a decade on the field, I can say nothing could be further from the truth! You may not realize, Christian

missionaries work very hard to respect local culture & custom, and to *only* bring Jesus to other peoples believing wholeheartedly, God created everyone, wanting us all to have full life with Him & glories in the diversity He created. We believe the human race originates from God & ultimately to whom we return as His beloved Creation - hence the unified vision of the multiethnic church in Rev. 7:9-10.

You may've never heard of the term *contextualization*, a concept with which Christian missionaries constantly wrestle. It asks the question, how do we contextualize the Gospel to other peoples in order that it's understood & only that which we bring, honoring all the God given diversity within these people groups. Missionaries seek to work with local populations when they see a group of people coming to Christ by asking them, what do you have to throw out, what can you keep & what needs to be changed of your culture in order to walk with Christ.

If a culture practiced child sacrifice, or temple prostitution, or subjugation of women, we address these as things which need to be changed or thrown out. But certain styles of dress, worship, language, or foods & the like are typically innocuous & can be kept. We usually find people in cultures coming to Christ typically go farther in throwing out or changing forms of their culture more than a missionary would, since they know the deeper meaning of them & don't want to compromise their walk with Christ.

It honors the cultural differences while bringing life to peoples in Christ, embracing Him from within their own culture.

Christian missionaries have great appreciation for their host cultures. They're excited about the food, wear their clothing, talk favorably about cultural practices & learn the languages! Seeking to preserve culture while bringing Christ to people.

Hudson Taylor, the founder of *China Inland Mission*, assimilated to the point in China of growing a long braided pony tail, shaving his forehead & adopting Chinese dress to show appreciation & communicate the gospel. He & his wife adopted Chinese children & raised them. In my area of work in southeast Asia we did much of the same as we wrangled over forms of worship, dress & language in order to bring the Gospel in a respectful way to the people group we served.

But no matter what we do, someone still blames us for colonialism & imperialism, since they don't view the world through a Christian Worldview which says God created & loves all peoples & seeks to draw them back into relationship preserving them forever! But Christians stand with Paul in Romans 1:16...*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

Paul did this in Act 17:26-28 as he contextualized the gospel through the poets of Greeks on Mars Hill, expressing the gospel to them - he said...*From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history & the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him & perhaps reach out for him & find him, though he's not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live & move & have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'* (Ac 17:26-28)

They were able to hear the gospel more easily since he showed respect & used a cultural point of their own to clarify the Gospel.

Peter learned the lesson of how God values all people in Acts 10, when he was called in a vision to visit a Gentile home & eat whatever was before him - which he considered to be wrong at the time. But he was obedient to the Lord & at the time he said...*“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism ³⁵ but accepts from every nation the one who fears him...(34-35a).*

We do have lessons to learn, but we *can* learn them & learn them best through our unified Christian nuclear families, our assimilation of God’s word, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in shared unity with the church.

Now’s the time for us to focus, to get serious about our walk with Christ. To not be blown & tossed by every wind of teaching. To not be dragged away & enticed by our desires. We place ourselves under the authority of Christ obedient to His guidance by ingesting the Scriptures, adjusting thinking to them, staying in fellowship & seeking the leadership of the Holy Spirit in unity within church & family.

The cultural wind’s blowing, you’ll experience persecution, but this Christian life isn’t about our comfort, it’s about the Glory in Christ among all nations - God’s Glory & God’s Mission. To focus ourselves on the Great Commission call in Matthew 28:18-20, no matter the cost.

So, I leave you today with that word...FOCUS. It’s not a time for passivity, but of engagement with Jesus, His word, the Holy Spirit, and to seek unity of message with the church in thought & practice. Train up your kids well, stay in fellowship with the church, pursue Jesus in unity unmolested by the cultural winds of our time.

Let’s end by rereading our statement from the beginning of the sermon today...

We affirm all men & women are uniquely created in the image of God with equal dignity & worth. God shows no partiality based on our ethnicity. Therefore, we vehemently deny any worldview that sinfully denigrates any language, tribe, nation, or people-group in individual or collective value. This value is intrinsic to all humanity & not based upon whether one is a Christian or American.