

“Christian Generosity and Bringing the Nations Together (Part 1)”

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

It's great to see you this morning. We have been studying 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 and we will begin there this morning and the sermon next week will end there. Along the way, however, we are going to be flipping around in our Bibles a lot because we have to understand the larger biblical context of something Paul says at the end of 2 Corinthians 9 in order to grasp the beauty of what he was anticipating.

The sermon series is called “The Andrew Challenge” because we began by looking at the disciple Andrew’s tendency to see the value of, in the words of John MacArthur, reaching out to individual people, offering up insignificant gifts, and engaging in inconspicuous service. Those are the three themes we have been looking at in this series. So we spend several weeks on the topic of outreach. We have now spent several weeks on offerings. We will turn our attention to obscurity in a couple weeks.

This week and next we are actually going to see how the topics of offering and outreach connect in an interesting way. I have to warn you it will probably take you sitting through next week’s sermon for you to feel a sense of closure. We really are going to do a whole sermon that stems from a short phrase and then summarize a ton of background to help us understand how crazy that one phrase is. You’ll see what I mean as we go along.

We have been looking at Paul’s teaching on Christian generosity from 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Let’s pick up where we left off in verse 14...

“while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.” (2 Corinthians 9:14)

So we considered this verse last week by focusing on how the recipient of the gift would pray earnestly for the giver. That’s a beautiful thing. But notice how strong and affectionate the language is. Their affection is not just seen in their prayers. It’s also seen in the way *“they long for you.”* Our whole sermon today (and next week) is a long reflection on that one phrase.

We have a tendency to just glide past that statement as though it was just some logical outcome. “Of course,” we think, “the person you help would feel affection for you and long for you.” But if you remember who is on both ends of the collection that Paul is facilitating, you realize there is something far more radical at work.

The whole reason that Paul is bringing up generosity in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is because he is asking the Corinthians (just like he asked their other Greek neighbors) to give money towards a collection he was gathering for the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem. Therefore, this is an offering that was being collected from predominantly Gentile Christians for the sake of predominantly Jewish Christians. The Bible throws around the word “Gentile” a lot and it simply means people from the nations. What nations? Any nation not named Israel. So there were the Israelites (the Jews) and there was everyone else (the Gentiles). So we, in this room, would be considered Gentiles.

The church in Jerusalem though consisted of predominantly Jewish. And Paul just said that, in response to this offering, which flows from God's grace, these Jewish Christians are going to "*long for*" these Gentile Christians. Such a thing may never have been said in the history of the world up until this point in human history. This is huge. This was unexpected. Jews didn't long for Gentiles. This is radical. And Paul is saying that God will use this offering to help accomplish it. So you might say that Paul is demonstrating that when we embrace the call of Christian generosity it leads to a third kind of harvest...

A Harvest of Unity

I have been building to this unity sermon for weeks, as you know. I've mentioned it a lot in previous weeks. I didn't schedule it for this week. But the unity in question may not be the unity that you were expecting. We're talking the unity between Jew and Gentile. Unity, in God's church, of all the nations. Paul can simply make that statement—that "*they will long for you*"—and the Corinthians get how radical and unheard of that was. We, on the other hand, have trouble grasping it because we are thousands of years removed from that historical and cultural context.

So for us to understand what Paul is saying we need to take a step back and think about the larger biblical context and since this is a topic that most of the New Testament touches on in one way or another we are going to look at several representative passages that can give us some perspective. We will focus primarily on the Old Testament today and then turn our attention to the New Testament next week. You know how much preachers like myself, who typically work verse by verse through biblical books, hate jumping around in topical sermons. But this unity is one of the most talked about subjects in the Bible and we need to see that. And since it relates to issues like race, we need to explore what the Bible has to say about that too so we don't read the wrong ideas into the text. So we are going to be all over the place this week and next, but by the end of next week, I'm confident you'll see how it all fits together. You may even have one of those "aha" moments.

When we are talking about the relationship between Jew and Gentile please understand we are talking about virtually every kind of division you can imagine. Jews and Gentiles didn't mix. It was a racial issue. It was an ethnic issue. It was a social issue. It was a cultural issue. They didn't look alike, dress alike, eat alike, enjoy the same things, frequent the same places, etc. They were divided along virtually any line of division you can imagine and this separation, along with all the unfortunate prejudices that were often attached to it, was reinforced, particularly for the Jews, for generation after generation after generation. These things were practically so engrained that they felt intrinsic to what it meant to be Jewish.

How did that happen? Well, it relates to how the Jewish people understood the teachings of the Old Testament. Again and again in the Old Testament, God told His people to avoid certain Gentile people groups and even not intermarry with certain people groups who were known for their idolatry and immorality. The intent of these commands was to keep the Israelites set apart. God didn't want His people drawn into sin and away from Him because they subjected themselves to the influence of idolatrous people. So the Jewish people heard those commands to be separate and ran with them, particularly after the exile, and, as much as possible, they therefore avoided every Gentile because the Gentiles of their day were every bit as much caught up in false worship as, say, the Canaanites of old.

Here's the problem. God *did* say those things, *but* there were other things that God said as well that the first century Jews had forgotten. Those things were in the same Scriptures they possessed. But it was as though they were hidden from them in plain sight. And because of that ignorance of what God said they were ill equipped to handle what God was doing among them through Christ in the first century.

What kinds of things did they overlook? The same kinds of things you will be talking about in most of your Sunday School classes this morning as it turns out (how is that for timing! I didn't plan that. God did). They missed that God's intentions always involved bringing every kind of people group into the people of God, which He made clear at the outset when He first called out Israel's forefather Abraham. He told Abraham "*in you all the families of the earth will be blessed*" (Genesis 12:3). That was always the plan. He was calling out Abraham to bless him with descendants and through those descendants God would bless all the people groups on the planet in time. How? By sending God's eternal Son, Jesus Christ, who the first verse of the New Testament calls "*the son of Abraham*" as if to signal—Here is the descendant of Abraham God had in mind to bless and bring in the nations! That idea is hinted at throughout the Old Testament, but that covenant with Abraham is key to the way the New Testament describes the fulfillment. Listen for that in Sunday School today.

So the Jews knew what the Scriptures said about separation, but they forgot what God said about uniting all people under this descendant of Abraham. And that ignorance led to all kinds of prejudices and sins that kept the earliest Christians (who were Jewish by descent) from immediately welcoming Gentiles into the people of God when they became followers of Christ. The book of Acts really describes how God worked to do away with their ignorance and change the hearts of these first Christians. But it was a process.

Before we get to that though let's just pause and consider (with most of our remaining time) how churches in our historical setting are susceptible to these same tendencies. Think about what was happening in the first century church. You had the earliest Christians, coming from a Jewish background, were somehow overlooking what the Scriptures taught on certain things. This oversight led to certain prejudices and those prejudices led them to keep certain people at bay, when God was actually bringing them in. So it is worth asking, "Are there examples in our own day where people overlook or misunderstand Scripture, resulting in prejudices and sinful attitudes, when in turn lead them to keep people away from the church when God means to bring them in? Sure there are. It happens in ever generation.

We too can be oblivious to what the Bible actually teaches and through that biblical ignorance leave space for all sorts of prejudices and sins to well up, keeping God's people separate instead of together. We all have sins and prejudices by the way. This happens to all of us, just like it did to the early church. It happens because of false teaching, our upbringing, and biblical illiteracy. We, like them, simply forget or have never been shown what the Bible actually teaches on things and so our thinking on some subjects is not always godly. All of us.

This is one of the reasons expository preaching and working through books of the Bible is so important for a church (ironic: more topical today). We have to get the full counsel of God. If all we have are teachers who preach sermons on topics that address our felt needs, then people will go their whole lives without hearing sermons on subjects they need to hear because they are not the subjects we naturally gravitate to. Subjects like the diversity that God is, through Christ, bringing into His church. Subjects that touch on topics like race. Remember, the Jew/Gentile thing is about diversity in the church. We tend to think about diversity in racial terms and that's part of it, though it's much bigger than that as we will see next week. So it's a topic that comes up regularly in the Bible, yet how many of us have been taught a biblical theology of race? I think most of us would admit that such topics are avoided in the church for the most part. No wonder, then, that there is so much racial tension in society these days. You can blame the police or the politicians, but I am inclined to blame the church. We are supposed to be salt and light. We are supposed to be a preservative in society and counteract moral decay. So if the meat is going bad, I don't blame the meat. I blame the salt!

I have had so many people tell me over the years, when God has given me opportunity to speak on such things, that they had no idea what the Bible actually said on the matters because no one ever talked about them in church. So prejudices thrived, confusion abounded, and church's witness suffered.

I encountered this at the first church I pastored in a little country church in Arkansas. There were so many great people there and we have lifelong friends we love dearly. But they would be the first to tell you that no one really talked about issues like race and diversity (even those these issues are at the heart of the Jew/Gentile discussion), so they had certain prejudices they had to repent of *usually* related to leadership and marriage. We had some many conversations about these things because they genuinely wanted to think about life the way God wanted them to think about life, but they were shocked at certain things they learned about God's Word. [cf. Personal remarks about our family's apprehension about coming to East Texas and a majority white congregation since we have black children]

Like what? Well, let's tackle the leadership issue first. Some of them (like some, maybe many of us) just assumed that pretty much everyone in the Bible was White. Nope. Moses didn't look like Charlton Heston. More than likely all the people from the Old Testament that are coming into your mind right now are what people in our setting would label as "minorities." And that is also true of...wait for it...Jesus!¹ Guys, Jesus was not a Caucasian American or European. He would have checked the "other" box on His paperwork.

We tend to assume that Ancient Israelites are exactly equivalent to modern Israelis in every way. Not so. Hands down, the best book on the subject and the most widely read one among Evangelical scholars was written by a former professor of mine named J. Daniel Hays. I'm really indebted to him for opening my eyes on the topic of race in the Bible. My wife was actually his teaching assistant for a while. At the end of a long discussion on the matter, he writes,

"What did the ancient Israelites actually look like? Most probably they looked very similar to other Semitic-speaking people of the area in and around Canaan...For Anglo-European Christian readers, it is crucial to come to grips with the fact that these people were not blue-eyed, blond-haired Caucasians; they did not look like White Americans or White Britons. They looked more like modern Arabs."²

So when you picture the biblical characters, how often do you visualize them as Arabs? Not often. Why? Because we are unfamiliar with the cultural background of the Bible and so our culture, like every other culture, tends to fill in the gaps of our ignorance with ideas that are most familiar to us. It's why you encounter images of a Black Jesus in Africa, and an Asian Jesus in Asia, and a White Jesus in Europe and America (blonde hair with product, clean shaven, etc.). It just happens. It gets accepted. But that doesn't make it reality.

If you really want to find White people in the Bible, you would have to find them in the enemies of God's people. The general consensus among scholars is that nations who would have most closely resembled American and European Caucasians were the Hittites (who occupied the land of Canaan) and the Philistines. So think Goliath, the giant who King David killed. Come to think of it, the only godly example of one of those lighter skinned people that comes to mind was Uriah, who David also killed [cf. Sunday School lesson today]. Yet, Hays writes, "even the individuals of these ancient [people] groups probably resembled the people of modern Greece or Turkey more than they resembled the people of modern England and mid-western America."³

You do however find prominent Black people in the Old Testament, even in leadership. Most notably was a guy named Phinehas (no relation to Ferb). Most scholars believe he was likely of mixed race, but Black

in appearance. In fact, his name means, literally, “the Black one.” You see, the translators of the King James Version didn’t know Egyptian and thus they didn’t recognize that his name, like so many others in the Old Testament, was an Egyptian loan word. In Egyptian the “ph” sound serves as the definite article “the.” The second half of the name is an Egyptian ethnic term used for those people from a region in Africa that the Hebrews usually called “Cush.”⁴ Black people were the primary inhabitants of Cush. So when you encounter “Cushites” in the Bible, they are most certainly Black. So Phinehas’ name was probably given because his mother was likely a Cushite and he took after his mom.⁵

I wish we had time to look at his story because a major role in the leadership of Israel, but let me just hit the highlights. Phinehas was the great nephew of Moses. Aaron had a son named Eleazor who had a wife named Putiel (also an Egyptian name) and she gave birth to Phinehas. Do you remember in Exodus 6 when we saw the genealogy of Aaron? If so, you’ll remember that it stresses the line of Levi and it culminates with Phinehas. He’s presented as one of the most central figures of Israel’s priesthood.

You can read Numbers 25 and 31 and Joshua 22 to see how God used him to deliver and revive Israel. In that last text, we see that God bestowing the priesthood on Phinehas and his descendants so all the priestly factions down the line (i.e., the Aaronites, Levites, and Zadokites) must be related to him. And the book of Joshua sets him up as a model for the future generations. In fact, in Psalm 106, it is Phinehas who is put alongside Moses as Israel’s two greatest intercessors in that day.⁶

Furthermore, we all love that verse, Genesis 15:6, that says that Abraham “*believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness*” and the New Testament writers loved it especially because they quote it again and again to help us understand that salvation is given to us through faith in Christ’s work and not by our works. But did you know, in the Old Testament, the only other time that expression occurs it is used in reference to Phinehas. Psalm 106, after reminding Israel of Phinehas’ faith that prompted him to take a stand for what God said, the Psalmist writes, “*And that was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever*” (Psalm 106:31).

So you see, Phinehas was kind of a big deal and one of Israel’s most significant leaders (not an obscure figure), and he was probably the child of what we would think of as an interracial marriage and most likely had dark complexion. They didn’t call him “the Black one” for nothing. So imagine the different direction American Christianity would have traveled in the King James Version translators had known Egyptian and translated his name in a way that didn’t obscure its meaning. It would have been difficult for some of our ancestors to have defended slavery and the superiority of certain races, if they had read that God made an eternal covenant with a Black man, that all legitimate priests in Israel were descendants of this man, and that God credited him with righteousness.⁷ Do you see the danger of biblical ignorance?

Related to that is the confusion of interracial marriage. We have already seen that Phinehas’ parents are probably an example of this in the Bible and it is not presented in any way that suggests that it is wrong. Nothing in the Bible does in fact. In the first church I pastored though there was a lot of confusion on this matter because no one had ever really talked about what the Bible says and if they had they had mishandled the text.

It was quite common for me to hear in those days that when Paul says that a Christian should not be “unequally yoked” in marriage that this was a prohibition against racially mixed marriages. They would point out, sincerely, that Paul does ask later in the verse “*what fellowship has light with darkness?*” They were taught that Paul was referring to light and dark races. But all you have to do is read Paul’s writings to see that he never uses the language like that and he consistently uses the language to represent spiritual realities—light associated with God and darkness with that which is apart from God. And Paul is quite

explicit in that verse what he has in mind. He said, “*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.*” It has to do with Christians marrying unbelievers. They shouldn’t. And Paul reiterates that in the next verses.

Similarly, it is often suggested that all those commands in the Old Testament that instructed the Israelites not to marry certain people groups were because God didn’t want the races to mix. Not so. That too was about marrying unbelievers. The Old Testament says that again and again. In Deuteronomy 7:4, it warns that if Israel’s children married these unbelievers, “*they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you...*” The same warnings are given elsewhere (e.g., Exodus 34:15-16; Joshua 23:12). It’s clear, God didn’t want his people marrying anyone, regardless of ethnicity, who worshiped idols because He knew that those idolaters would lead His people into sin and away from Him. It wasn’t a race thing. It wasn’t a color thing. It was an idolatry thing. Pigment doesn’t lead people away from the Lord. Idol worshipers do.

This is further confirmed by all the examples in the Old Testament of individuals from those people groups, repenting of their idolatry, and becoming followers of the one true God. When this happens, they were welcomed into the people of God. They became part of Israel. And they even married in. In fact, you will see several examples of this in Sunday School today because you’ll be studying the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 (another God thing with the timing of this sermon!). If you look closely you will notice that there are three women in there from the other people groups who married into Israel and are part of the line that God arranged for Jesus Christ. Rahab (Matthew 1:5) was a Canaanite who married an Israelite. Ruth was a Moabite who married an Israelite (1:5). And Bathsheba was likely a Hittite or considered a Hittite because she was “the wife of Uriah”, a Hittite who David killed before subsequently marrying his widow (1:6). So there are three examples *in the line of Jesus himself* of Gentile women, made part of Israel, through intermarriage.

So, in short, there is nothing in the Bible that forbids interracial marriages, but there is much that forbids marrying people who are not worshipers of God. In fact, if there were ever a passage that deals with the matter of interracial marriage directly it’s an oft-neglected passage in Numbers 12 that tells us that Moses married a Cushite, which means his wife was Black.⁸ The text says (and stresses) that Miriam and Aaron didn’t like that fact. Why? It doesn’t say explicitly, but given the fact that the text emphasizes the ethnicity of Moses’ wife and given the way God responds, many, if not most, scholars agree that their issue with her had to do with her ethnicity.

Miriam in her anger starts talking about how God speaks through her too, not just Moses, and her pride starts bubbling up. So God reacts. It’s as if He said, “Let’s nip this in the bud right now.” The Lord brings Aaron and Miriam before Him and basically says that He can choose to speak through whomever He wants, but He has chosen to speak to Moses in a special way that they know nothing about, so they need to back off. And then the text says, “*the anger of the LORD was kindled against them*” and He leaves them (12:9).

But, as He leaves, He judges Miriam by giving her leprosy and the text says that she turned white “*like snow.*” So many, over the years, have suggested that the punishment seems to fit the crime. She has an issue with the ethnicity and skin color of Moses’ wife, so it’s as though God was saying, “well then I’ll just remove your color and let you try on leprous skin for a while” and she was exiled outside the city for seven days. Needless to say, they stopped complaining about Moses’ marriage to a Black woman from that point on. What is clear from that account is that Moses had an interracial marriage and, if that’s the reason Aaron and Miriam were upset, we don’t have to wonder which side God takes in that debate.⁹

But here’s the thing, all of this was new to many people I encountered at the first church I served as pastor and all of this was new to me when I first began studying these things under the direction of Dr. Hays. If

we are being honest, much of this was probably new to some of you too. Raise your hand if you learned something new in this discussion that you didn't know already?

If you find that some of what we have seen so far in God's Word goes against the way you were raised or even some of the prejudices you have deep down in your heart, know that you are not alone. We all have blind spots. We all have aspects of our worldview shaped by our background, upbringing, history, culture, and circle of influence that lead us in a way contrary to God's Word. We all will struggle with our flesh when God exposes that to us. We all have prejudices that we need to repent of when God's Word shines the light of truth. If it can happen to a prophetess like Miriam or even Peter (cf. Galatians), then it can happen to us. It matters not what you knew before. What matters is what you do in light of what you know now.

When our flesh pulls us one way and God's Word pulls us another, we feel this struggle within. But the Christian is the one who acknowledges that when we have a disagreement between our flesh and God's Word, God is right and we are wrong. Every time. And the Christian should desire repentance. We may wrestle and struggle with it. We may find certain beliefs difficult to shake or lay aside because of our background and upbringing. We may relapse again and again into sin and sinful thinking, but the Christian says, "God is right and I am wrong." That's essential to repentance.

Repentance is not the absence of struggle (struggle could be the evidence of a desire to repent). Repentance is not perfection and the end of our struggle. But repentance is the absence of settled defiance.¹⁰ Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a new disposition to God and our sin. So we may struggle and even relapse, but our desire is to repent.

The Christian is *not* the person who is corrected by God's Word and says, "yeah I see that, but I don't care. This is what I think and that settles it." Nope. That's not what the Christian says. That's what the unrepentant lost person says. That's what settled defiance looks like. And that should make you wonder if you are really a follower of Christ. If your mindset is, "I will follow Jesus wherever He wants, except where I don't want to go", then you are not following Jesus as you ought...

But, as I said earlier, shifting our worldview in light of God's Word is every bit as much a process for us as it was for the early church. It was a process for them because they, like us, either forgot what the Scriptures taught about such things or they were altogether ignorant of them because of their upbringing through no fault of their own. They were in process, just like us.

But the social vices we see in the early church playing out in their aversion to Gentiles, existed because they were oblivious to or had forgotten what God's Word said. The earliest believers didn't want to let people like us into the church because *we* were so different. And they resisted embracing us for a time because they forgot what God had said. All those examples that we just went through could be examples of the same sort of thing, playing in out in different directions, in our own day. People don't know those things or were taught differently. But that doesn't change what God has said and if we chose to ignore it then we are doing the same thing the Lord was correcting in the early Church. And thank God He did or else people like us (Gentiles) would never have been welcomed among the people of God.

But imagine the process from the Jewish Christian perspective. It started with them wanting nothing to do with Gentiles. Then God started saving Gentiles and pouring out His Spirit on them too. The Jewish Christians could no longer deny this. They realized that God's redemption was not just for the Jews. It was for the nations too. So the logical implication was that Gentiles were part of the people of God as well. But their upbringing still led to some resistance among the Jewish Christians.

So how did God overcome these things? That's what the book of Acts deals with and that's where we will pick up next time. By the way, I am teaching through Acts on Sunday nights so if this is interesting to you, consider joining us tonight. We have a good time learning together. End of commercial.

They began welcoming the Gentiles in but only if they met certain conditions. They had to eat like Jews. They had to embrace the customs of Jews. They had to lay aside certain aspects of their culture that may not have been sinful but were not part of their Jewish heritage. They had to get circumcised like Jews. In short, many of the earliest Christians were saying, "You Gentiles can come into the church and we will accept you, but you need to become like us before you do." The problem with that is clear. Those were manmade conditions. God didn't have those conditions.

Let me just say it again though. You really need to be here next week. It gets us to the heart of the Jew/Gentile unity issue and it will help us see that the idea of the Jew "*longing for*" the Gentile, while shocking to the world, is completely understandable in light of the Gospel. This sermon needs some closure and will make much more sense in light of next week's sermon. We are going to see one of the most powerful things about the Gospel and how it relates to Christian community. It is a topic explored in virtually every book of the New Testament. It is so important. It's beautiful. And it may be eye opening. So be here. Seriously, make every effort to be here. You won't regret it.

Let's pray...

¹ J. Daniel Hays speaks to the way the culture contributes to this misunderstanding: "For centuries, in art as well as in other media, the people of Western Europe and North America have portrayed the individuals in the Bible as Europeans or North Americans. Thus not only does Michelangelo paint twelve Europeans sitting down at a European table for the Last Supper, but the fair-haired American Charlton Heston portrays Moses in *The Ten Commandments* and the blue-eyed Briton Richard Harris plays the title role in TNT's television movie *Abraham*. Even though most scholars know that few, if any, characters in the Old Testament looked much like Charlton Heston or Richard Harris, the average church member—indeed, probably the average pastor—consciously or subconsciously assumes as much. Such images play powerful roles in shaping popular perceptions about the Bible, and these popular perceptions in turn have a serious impact on the theology of the Church." J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 25.

² Ibid., 34.

³ Ibid., 44. This he stated after the following comment: "Thus, if today's readers of the Bible want to find people of 'Caucasian' appearance in the Old Testament, the Indo-European Philistines and Hittites are probably the closest."

⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁵ Remember there was a "mixed multitude" that came out of Egypt with Israel (Exodus 12:38) and this woman would not be the only Cushite mentioned in the Scriptures (cf. Moses' wife).

⁶ Cf. Psalm 106:30-31 and 106:23, 32-33.

⁷ That is a softer way to make Hays' point: "Imagine the different route American Christianity might have travelled if the translators of the King James Bible had known Egyptian and had thus translated 'Phinehas' as 'the Negro'. The early Americans would have read that God made an eternal covenant with 'the Negro', that all legitimate Israelite priests are descended from 'the Negro', and that God credited righteousness to 'the Negro'. With

such clear texts available, it would have been extremely difficult to defend slavery of to maintain any type of superiority-inferiority racial views.” Ibid., 85.

⁸ For a detailed discussion on Cushites, see Ibid., 34-39.

⁹ “What theological conclusions should we draw from this text? I would suggest that *interracial intermarriage is strongly affirmed* by Scripture. Marrying unbelievers, on the other hand, is strongly prohibited. The criteria for approving and disapproving of our children’s selected spouses should be based on their faith in Christ and not at all on the colour of their skin. The theological affirmation should have profound implications for the Church today. White families frequently rise up in arms when their children want to marry Blacks, regardless of how strong the chosen person’s Christian faith is. On the other hand, White Christian young adults can marry other Whites with little opposition even if the faith of their selected mate is virtually non-existent. Such behavior reflects the Church’s weak theological understanding of Scripture on the subject. Furthermore, the common cultural ban on intermarriage lies at the heart of the Black and White racial division in America. Isichei (1995: 107) writes, ‘Inter-ethnic marriage is the litmus test of racial prejudice.’ White Christians who say that they are not prejudiced but who vehemently oppose interracial marriages are not being honest. They are still prejudiced, and I would suggest that they are out of line with God’s revealed will. This theology applies equally to intermarriages between any two ethnic groups within the Church throughout the world: Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Hausa, Yoruba, Fulani, or any other....*all* Christians are brothers and sisters in the family of God. Marrying outside the family is forbidden, but clear biblical definition of family is based on faith in Christ and not on race or descent. Interracial marriage between Christians is clearly supported in Scripture.” Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁰ J. D. Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 57-71.