

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Volume 64, Number 4

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Publisher ~ Doug Twaddell

April, 2022

Identity

Louis Garbi

Our identity is who we are. Assimilation is a matter of losing one's identity and being absorbed into another. For example, people whose identity is closely bound with their nation guard the distinction between themselves and other nations. This is seen among individuals who take pride in their national heritage. For some, it has to do with keeping one's identity. Having a strong sense of identity is key to avoiding assimilation.

Other things factor into our identity. The following are a few: intelligence, gender, skin, ancestry, eyes, hair, the place of birth – whether town, city or state. These have to do with origins from natural birth, those fleshly distinctions that contribute to individuals' uniqueness. Some of these things are more important to us than others. For example, many of us are not so associated with our town, city, or state that we cannot take residence elsewhere. However, one might be like Robert E. Lee, who counted being a Virginian more important than his sympathy for the North. With any of these things, we can lose our balance and become something other than who God wants us to be. If left unchecked, these identity markers can become a hotbed for the pride of life and the death of the soul.

Our earthly origins and dispositions are peripheral to who we are, not the core.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

We are made in the image of God. This is the substance of our identity. Therefore, the concern about assimilation must be on this point. To move away from this is to be absorbed into the world.

We were innocent when we came into this world. The beauty of it is seen in children. In the process of time, we lose our innocence because we are weaker than Satan. We sin: "*it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me*" (Romans 7:17). Hence, through sin, we lose our identity. We are renewed through faith in Jesus Christ.

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become

children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:11-13).

Identity begins with being a child of God. Here is the ground we must guard. It is the only part of our individuality that matters.

God's design and what matters to us can be opposites to each other. In this world, we have two sides to life: "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*" (John 3:6). God has placed emphasis on the spiritual side. One can be successful in the world with a name, wealth, attractiveness, and intelligence, yet be a scoundrel. By the same token, one can be a failure, unnoticed, poor, plain, and unimaginative, but decent, honest, and just. Which identity is worthy of God? Which has spiritual success? Our origins from natural birth often vie with our spiritual life. Thus, we are commanded,

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish (Galatians 5:16-17).

The most important marker of who we are is found in our character. Character comprises attributes of behavior that demonstrate our spirit. Consider this example. Two disciples of Jesus were on the road to Emmaus as recorded in the book of Luke. Jesus accompanied them in a different form, and they did not know it was their friend. After He revealed Himself and departed, they marveled:

their eyes were opened, and they knew Him, and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:31-32).

They said their hearts burned within them. This expression shows how, on some level, they recognized Jesus, though His appearance confounded their understanding. This demonstrates the true nature of identity. Jesus' form was fluid. He was raised from the dead with a body of power. He was the same man they knew before His death and resurrection; He just had a different appearance. His character remained the same. He was still the Son of God. We, too, as God's children, must maintain our God-given character lest we become assimilated into the world of death. In such a state, we would be unrecognizable by God.

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Race Relations

Tad Morris

Race relations is a dominant topic in our national discourse. American society is flooded with theories, movements, and protests, all demanding extermination of institutionalized racism and injustice. These waves of activism press us with difficult questions: Does racism persist in America? Is institutionalized racism real? What causes differential outcomes between ethnic groups?

This article aims to answer the more important question: What does God say about race relations? Biblical concepts on race relations can be organized into seven general themes.

God created the diversity of all people.

To degrade any person for their ethnic heritage or God-given biology is to degrade the creation of God and degrade your brother in the human family.

Paul makes this point:

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27).

There is only one human family. We are all the offspring of Adam and children of God.

Some segregation is providential.

Oppression and racism are evil, but the organization of people into different nations and even different social groups is a work of God. There are divine processes at work.

This point is evident in the tower of Babel. God intentionally broke apart the people to protect them from themselves.

And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one, and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city (Genesis 11:6-8).

What's the point? Pursuing perfect human unity is not a realistic goal. This does not give us authority to oppress or exclude, but it should temper our expectations.

Prejudice and discrimination are real human problems.

This can be observed over and over in the Bible. No one should feel immune to racism. What did Nathanael say when Philip told him the Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah? "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" (John 1:46). How did

the Jews in Jerusalem respond when they heard that Cornelius and other Gentiles had been converted by Peter? There was no celebrating.

Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went into uncircumcised men and ate with them!" (Acts 11:1-3).

This must be the worst form of prejudice and discrimination. If these Jewish Christians were susceptible to racism, surely we are as well.

Racial discrimination is a sin.

Prejudice or preferential treatment based on race, ethnicity, or any other (amoral) social status is absolutely forbidden by the laws of God. It is blasphemous to the gospel of Christ when Christians perpetuate any form of bigotry.

Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality (1 Timothy 5:21).

This is not a negligible issue. **James 2:8-9:**

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Racial boundaries become meaningless in the church.

The Bible makes no distinction, and neither should we.

Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all (Colossians 3:9-11).

There should be no racial discrimination in who we share the gospel with, no need for racial discrimination in who we marry, and no need for racial discrimination in who we have as friends. Anyone who draws lines of race within the church is sinning against God. Rip out every last thread of racism and prejudice in your mind and fill the voids with the love of God.

Justice is a responsibility of Christians, assuming we define it correctly.

"Social justice" is a phrase that captures many Christian ideas and some explicitly anti-Christian meanings. For example, Black Lives Matter promotes a lot more than racial equality. They also advocate for increased abortion access and disruption of the nuclear family structure. These same movements demand that we accept LGBT lifestyles as normal and healthy. This is not social justice. This is evil. This version

of social justice has no place in the church or the Christian life. To avoid this confusion, it might be better to avoid the phrase “social justice.”

Justice in the Bible looks more like this:

- Doing good without discrimination and ulterior motives (**Matthew 6**)
- Acting with integrity and fairness in our dealings (**1 Timothy 5:21**)
- Sharing the gospel without partiality (**Acts 10:34-35**)

The Word of God offers the only real, sustainable solutions.

Correcting injustice starts with acknowledging that humanity is broken and Jesus is the cure. Human solutions for human problems will always fail. Any proposal for racial equality and justice that subtracts God from the equation is destined for failure. Only God is just.

*For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He. They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their blemish: a perverse and crooked generation (**Deuteronomy 32:3-5**).*

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Glory to God!

The brethren in **Brookfield, MO**, welcomed **Denise Harris** as a member of the church in November 2021.

The **Pleasant Street Church of Christ**, Laclede, MO, rejoiced when **Tonya Wood** obeyed the gospel on February 12.

The **Chapel Glen Church of Christ**, Indianapolis, IN, praised God when **Seth Owens** was buried with Christ on February 27.

The **Riverside Road Church of Christ**, Ozark, MO, welcomed as members the four members of the **Jason Franklin family** on February 27.

Blessed Are the Dead

Rick L Hudson, 68, of Bloomfield, IN, passed away Wednesday, May 5, 2021. Rick was born August 17, 1952, to **Rex and Shirley (Auten) Hudson**. He married **Nancy Jane (Floyd) Hudson**, August 19, 1973. Rick was a member of the **Bloomfield church of Christ**, member of the Bloomfield High

School class of 1971, and a 1975 Indiana University graduate. After ten years of teaching and coaching, he owned an insurance agency for over twenty years. He and Gregg Orman established Greene County Sports Network (GCSN). Rick truly loved broadcasting and being involved in covering athletic events for all Greene County student-athletes. He is survived by his parents and his wife as well as his daughter **Carla (Ryan) Priest** and son **John Hudson**; five grandchildren, as well as many other family members. Your editor apologizes for not including Bro Rick’s obituary in past issues of *The Gospel Message*.

Bonnie Lee Morgan, 94, of Holt, MO, passed away Tuesday, Nov. 23, 2021, at her home, with her family at her side. Bonnie was born March 26, 1927, in her grandmother’s house in Holt, MO. She married **Leo Roy Morgan** on Decemeber 9, 1945. Bonnie was best known for her faith in God. She was a long-standing member of the **Church of Christ at 505 Elms Blvd., in Excelsior Springs, MO**. Bonnie shared the gospel with all those who would listen, studying the Bible long after she had lost most of her eyesight to macular degeneration. Her Godly influence impacted the lives of so many over her lifetime, especially her husband, Leo, leading him to the Lord in his later years. She is survived by her six children, **Rox Roy (Johanna) Morgan, Ellisa Lynn (Ron) Foster, Rex Rey (Lisa) Morgan, Christina Louise (Darrell) McClung, Loren Lee Morgan, April Marye (Tom) Peacher**; eighteen grandchildren, thirty great-grandchildren, and two great-great grandchildren.

Mary Crown, 89, of Bakersfield, CA, went gently to the Lord on February 6, 2022. Mary Oxley was born on March 23, 1932 in Almartha, Missouri. The Oxley family moved to Bakersfield, CA, in 1944. Mary was baptized into Christ in her teenage years and was a faithful member of the church in **Bakersfield, CA**. In 1948 Mary met her one and only love, **Gerald Crown**. They married January 21, 1951. Mary's true life's purpose was being a wife to Gerald and a mother to their children. She invested her heart, soul and time into their family and home. Gerald and Mary were hardworking and generous. Mary worked alongside Gerald and they brought a uniquely fun, lighthearted spirit to every work day that was contagious and impactful. Mary cherished her faith and loved God deeply. To her final day, she sang hymns from memory, even when other memories had long faded. She was preceded in death by her beloved Gerald and by three of her children, Connie, Peter and Jane. We rejoice that she sings with them again in heaven. She is survived by her children and their spouses **Diana (John) Caldwell, Catherine (Michael) Manning, Andrew Crown, Lonnie Stilwell** and **Lori Crown**, eleven grandchildren, and eighteen great-grandchildren.

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Continued from page 3: "Blessed are the Dead"

Erma Elaine Mallett, 87, of Pleasant Hill, MO, passed away peacefully February 26. Erma married her loving husband **Charles** on September 5, 1954. Erma and Charles were blessed with three children. As they were raising their biological children, Charles and Erma also adopted two children. They settled their family in Lee's Summit, MO where Erma made their home a welcoming place to all. She hosted Sunday dinner every week. Friends could be found laughing over her dining room table. Teenagers gathered at her home for games and pool parties. And, eventually, there were grandchildren to spoil. Erma's influence stretched far beyond her family. She was a faithful member of the church of Christ throughout her entire life, including the **Gregory Boulevard** congregation, and helped establish the **Smart Road** congregation. Erma was an example to all and the unofficial grandma to everyone in her later years. She taught children's classes and encouraged generations of young women and mothers. Erma is preceded in death by her parents, her brother, her son **Mark Mallett**, and her grandson **Jeremy Flippin**. In addition to Charles, she is survived by her children **Connie (Mark) Hinton**, **Carla (David) James**, **Melinda** and **Gerald Clevenger**, **Angela Weaver**, **David Mallett**; nine grandchildren, and thirteen great-grandchildren.

Nora Lee Ingle, 95, of the **Pleasant Hill, IA Church of Christ**, went to be with Jesus on March 6. Nora Lee Sherwood was born May 20, 1926 in Knoxville, IA. She married **Vern Ingle** on March 10, 1945. Nora Lee had no formal education but authored three books. She wrote weekly newspaper columns, had a monthly newsletter, was the editor of the *Marion County News* and a feature writer for the *Altoona Herald*. During her retirement years, she presented a slide show of her growing up years to elementary schools and senior centers. Nora Lee was buried in baptism in 1945. She was a faithful member of the church and served as an elder's wife for over 35 years. Her Bible is worn from her reading & studying it daily. Nora Lee wrote letters and cards to brethren all over the United States. Nora Lee was preceded in death by her husband **Vern** and her son **Ned**. She is survived by her children **Suzanne (Bruce) Harvey**, **David (Joyce) Ingle**, and **Cindy (Mark) Morris**; thirteen grandchildren, thirty-six great-grandchildren, and one great-great grandson.

Here and There

Three new officers were ordained to serve as officers of the **Riverside Road Church of Christ, Ozark, MO**: **Clayton Cooper**, elder; **Benjamin Morris**, deacon; and **James Welte**, deacon. May God bless the congregation and help these good brothers fulfill their ministry!

Special Meetings

2022 Meetings

June 11-12.....Vandalia, IA
July 4-8.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
July 24-29.....Excelsior Springs, MO
September 3-4.....Pleasant Hill, IA
Sept 30-Oct 2.....North MO Fall Campout, Unionville, MO
October 15-16.....Nixa, MO

The Gospel Message

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THE GOSPEL MESSAGE (USPS:576-040) (ISSN:1054-7991) is published monthly for \$7 per year by **THE GOSPEL MESSAGE**, 1700 S. Ann Ct., Independence, MO 64057. Periodicals Postage Paid at Independence, MO. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to **THE GOSPEL MESSAGE**, 1700 S. Ann Ct., Independence, MO 64057