

Summer Sessions 2022

Ethnicity in the New Testament

“The Holy Spirit emerges as the central figure in the formation of a new social identity that affirms yet chastens and transcends ethnic identity.”

- Aaron J. Kruecker (The Spirit and the “Other”)

Rules of the Road

DSBC is made up of a bunch of misfits, from different walks of life, with different backgrounds, convictions, and perspectives. These differences are gifts... opportunities to grow into a deeper understanding of God and his world. Conversations like these can be difficult and sometimes divisive, and so we ask that you follow these rules of the road:

1. Recognize that Jesus, the master 'M.C.' brought us together and is **present with us now**.
2. Please approach others with **curiosity instead of suspicion**
3. Strive to practice the **fruit of the Spirit** (love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.)
4. Recognize that **renewing our minds** is a mark of maturity.
5. Be **quick to listen** and slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Approaching Complex Topics

When approaching complex topics, keep these principles in mind.

1. Recognize the story of the cosmos and where I am in it.
Creation – Fall – Redemption – Restoration
The Kingdom of God is here, but not in its fullness.
2. The scriptures are ancient wisdom literature (Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:15-16) and are sometimes hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16). Understanding them and applying them requires humility, patience, and the power of the Holy Spirit (John 15:26-27). ***There are rarely easy answers to the questions we bring to the text.***

The Big Idea

The bible does not promote ethnic erasure¹ (e.g., “I don’t see ethnicity”), rather, it points toward the **ultimate redemption of all ethnic groups and celebrates the diversity of humanity** as a feature designed by God.

What is Ethnicity?

A nation, a people, a large group based on various cultural, physical or geographic ties²

For the ancients, one’s ethnicity (*greek = ethnos*) was **core to their existence**³, shaping their politics, economics, daily practices, family life and religion. The designation of people into *ethnos* is a key way they communicated about themselves.⁴ They were powerfully aware of their *ethnos*⁵ and formed much of their life around it. Ethnic identity allowed a person to know which group(s) they belonged to, which group(s) they were excluded from, and which people(s) they should stay away from.

Examples of Ethnic identities in the New Testament: Jews, Greeks, Syrophoenician, Romans, Samaritans, Cretans, Barbarians, Scythians, Ethiopian, Persian (Magi), Canaanite, Syrian etc.

“Gentile” – An unhelpful translation?

The word usually translated as “Gentile” is *ethnos* (sometimes *Hellēnistēs*). ‘Gentile’ (*gentilis*) is a Latin carry-over word meaning “of a family or nation, of the same clan.” The Latin Vulgate used it to translate *ethnos* but in English it has come to be understood mainly as “non-Jew.”

A better translation for *ethnos* would be “**Ethnic other.**” Though, on occasion, there is a derogatory nuance (slander?), thus “**Ethnic outsider**” may sometimes be preferable.⁶

¹ Mark Brett notes “‘Paul does not, I believe, ‘erase’ or ‘eradicate’ cultural specificities, but relativize them. Paul never loses his respect for Judaism, even for circumcision, which he regards as a sign of advantage for the Jews (Rom 3:1-2)... It is important for him that Christ was a Jew and thus a ‘servant of the circumcised, to fulfil the promises to the patriarchs’ (Rom 15:8). But it is also important that Christ is now the Lord of both Jews and Gentiles, who call on him in faith on the same terms, whatever their cultural identity. **Thus Jews and Gentiles are simultaneously affirmed as Jews and Gentiles and humbled in their cultural pretensions**”

² James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

³ Kuecker, Aaron. *The Spirit and the ‘Other’: Social Identity, Ethnicity and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts*. London: T & T Clark International, 2011.

⁴ Smith, Mitzi J. 2012. *The Literary Construction of the Other in the Acts of the Apostles: Charismatics, the Jews, and Women*. ISD LLC. p. 2

⁵ [4] Kuecker, Aaron. 2011. *The Spirit and the “Other”: Social Identity, Ethnicity and Intergroup Reconciliation in Luke-Acts*. Bloomsbury Publishing. p38

⁶ I am thankful to DSBC Strategic Partner and Wycliff Bible translator, **Ben Kuwitzky**, for his help in this translation.

The Gospels Assume a Working Knowledge of Ethnic Tension & Taboo

Syrophoenician Woman: Matthew 15:21–28

21 Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.”

23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, “Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us.”

24 But He answered and said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

25 But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

26 And He answered and said, “*It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.*”

27 But she said, “Yes, Lord; *but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.*”

28 Then Jesus said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once.

Good Samaritan: Luke 10:30-33

30 Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.

31 “And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 “Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 “But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion,

Decapolis / Legion: Mark 5:1-3

1 They came to the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gerasenes.

2 When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, 3 and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain;

Jesus The Samaritan?

John 8:48-52

The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that **You are a Samaritan** and have a demon?”

49 Jesus answered, “**I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.**

50 “But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges.

51 “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.”

52 The Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.’

Wayne Meeks notices: "Moreover, as 'Galilean' could be a taunt directed by 'the Jews' against a sympathizer with Jesus (7:52), '**Samaritan**' is a taunt hurled at Jesus himself (8:48).

Furthermore, while the accompanying taunt, '... And you have a demon,' is denied, **the accusation that Jesus is a Samaritan is passed over in silence** (8:49)... "Yes, the Johannine community did include marginalized Samaritans, whom Jesus loved so much that he **was willing to be identified with them by name.** Jesus, too, was a marginalized Samaritan."⁷

The Good News for All Ethnicities

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the **ethne**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

⁷ 'Jesus and the Marginalized in John's Gospel' (Robert Karris) Pg 71.

The Spirit Moves Towards the Ethnic Outsider

(see attached study in Acts 1-8)

The Multi-Colored (Manifold) Wisdom of God

Ephesians 3:1-10

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you **ethnon** — 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 **to be specific, that the ethne are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body,** and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the **ethnesin** the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the **manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church** to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

The Shocking Inclusion of all Ethnicities in the Kingdom of God

Acts 10:34-45⁸

Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,
35 but in every **ethnei** the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.

36 “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (**He is Lord of all**)— 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all **Judea**, starting from **Galilee**, after the baptism which John proclaimed.

38 “You know of Jesus of **Nazareth**, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

39 “We are witnesses of all the things He did **both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem**. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.

40 “God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible,

41 not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

42 “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

43 “Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.

45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Ethne** also.

⁸ Eung Chun Park notes: “there is a striking similarity between the opening of the **story of Jonah** in the Old Testament and that of Peter in Acts 10. Both Jonah and Peter hear a command from God, which has something to do with the relation of Jews and Gentiles. This connection to the question of Gentiles is stated overtly in Jonah 1:1 and covertly (but unmistakably implied) in Acts 10:11-3. In both cases **the command of God runs counter to the traditional understanding of the place of Gentiles in God's dealings with humans**, and for that very reason, neither Jonah nor Peter obeys it.”

The Growing Pains of the Multiethnic Church

Acts 15:22-29

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, 23 and they sent this letter by them, “The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from **the *ethnon***, greetings. 24 “Since we have heard that **some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words⁹**, unsettling your souls, 25 it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 “Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 “**For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: 29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well.** Farewell.”

Colossians 3:9–14¹⁰

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— 11 a renewal in which there **is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman**, but Christ is all, and in all. 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

1 Peter 2:9–10¹¹

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, **a holy *ethnos***, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy

⁹ The conflict seems to be primarily regarding ethnic identity markers such as circumcision.

¹⁰ See also Romans 3:9 and 10:12; Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 1:22–24, 7:18–22 and 10:32; and Ephesians 6:8

¹¹ Consider Peter’s growth in this area as he had previously succumbed to ethnic exclusion at table fellowship (see Galatians 2:11-13).

The Promise of a Multiethnic Future

Revelation 7:9-10

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every **ethnous and all tribes and peoples and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Revelation 21:22-27

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

24 The **ethne** will walk by its light, and the **kings of the earth will bring their glory into it**.

25 In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed;

26 and they will bring the **glory and the honor of the ethnon** into it;

27 and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Appendix 1: Why we talk about racism so much

On occasion we get the question “Why do we talk about racism so much at DSBC?” This brief article lays out a brief answer to that question and gives the ‘why’ behind the reason why we frequently engage this topic head on.

1. Jesus’ vision and design for the church is that it would be a **diverse, multi-ethnic community**, with members serving as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, living in accordance with Kingdom values and to providing their community a “taste” of what the Kingdom of God is like. ^[1]
2. Racism is a **demonic force** designed to, among other things, propagate division and inequity within a given culture and is a direct assault on the mission and purposes of Jesus’ body, the church. ^[2]
3. While many Jesus-followers have fought against it, many in the American church have propagated this great evil through **apathy, passivity, compromise** and frequently in our history, outright endorsement. ^[3]
4. For those of us that come from a culture that has tolerated, endorsed and even propagated racism, we must humbly recognize that we too, are **not above the sin of racism**. ^[4]
5. Though the church is, by design, an ethnically diverse organism, the **American church continues to be segregated** ^[5] and **homogenous** ^[6]. One of the chief causes of this continued failure to reflect the Kingdom of God in the local church of America is racism, whether it be systemic or individual.
6. It is therefore good for us to consistently renounce racism in all of its forms, and pray that God would “**search us and know us**” and convict us of sin, whether sins of commission or omission ^[7] as it relates to this great evil.
7. It is good for us to be a people of confession and repentance. This includes **confession** and **repentance** of the ways our church family, and the Christian community within Phoenix, has been either actively or passively involved in the spread of the evil of racism. ^[8]
8. The local church can and should be a space where, by the power of the Spirit, Jesus followers pursue the **ministry of reconciliation** around ethnic/racial divisions in our community, the church family and the broader church in Phoenix. ^[9] This process requires patience, humility, truth-telling, confession, repentance and forgiveness.

Which is why we talk about it so much.

[1] Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 4, Galatians 3-4, Colossians 3, Ephesians 2, Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, 17:15

[2] 1 Cor 1:10-13, 1 Cor 11:18, Titus 3:9-11, Rom 16:17-18, Acts 10:34

[3] Tisby, Jemar. The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism. Zondervan, 2019.

[4] Galatians 6:3, Jeremiah 17:9, 1 John 1:8,

[5] Emerson, Michael O., and Christian Smith. Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

[6] Edwards, Korie L. The Elusive Dream. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. p8

[7] Psalm 139, James 4:17, Luke 10:30-37, Matthew 25:44-45, 1st John 3:17-18

[8] 2 Chron 6 & 7, Daniel 9, Nehemiah 9, Ezra 9 & 10, James 5:16, Hosea 14:2

[9] 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, Ephesians 3:2-13, John 17