

## Identity Politics – Sunday School – 28 Jan 24

### What Is Identity Politics?

1. Identity politics is politics organized around identity groups.
2. Identity politics rejects “a universalized moral order”<sup>1</sup> and adopts moral relativism. “Identity politics views most or even all of human life and truth as socially constructed.”<sup>2</sup>
3. “Identity politics comes with a basic worldview in which nearly everything in life is measured in terms of power generally and the division of groups between oppressor and oppressed specifically.”<sup>3</sup>
4. Identity politics adopts a certain version of *intersectionality*. This version is used to “emphasize that different forms of oppression reinforce each other. [Proponents of this form of intersectionality] then draw the inference that effective action against one form of oppression requires effective action against all.... [Thus,] would-be activists who agree with the adherents of the identity synthesis on one issue to accept the orthodox views on all other issues to become—or remain—members in good standing.”<sup>4</sup>
5. Fifth, the goal is not integration or rectification of wrongs but redistribution of power.
6. Identity politics is not limited to the left. These ideas are making inroads in certain sectors of the right. Some right-wing proponents of identity politics identify Christianity as the root of leftism and call for a return to Europe’s pagan past. Others are self-identified Christian nationalists.

### An Initial Critique

- The Bible teaches that there is a universal moral order—God’s law.
- Truth is not socially constructed; truth is conformity to the reality that God has created and providentially superintends.
- The Bible recognizes that oppression and abuse of power exists, but it also recognizes that all people, not just a given group, are sinners and tempted to abuse power. Therefore, redistribution of power will not rectify injustice; often it will perpetuate it.
- Christians must make a distinction between identities that are God-ordained (e.g., male and female, age, ethnicity) and identities that are sinful (e.g., homosexual, transgender).
- Christians are desirous of reforming social structures that are sinful and unjust, but Christians reject deconstructing social structures that are God-ordained (e.g., the family as consisting of a married father and mother with children).

## A Biblical View of Identity

### *Biblical Identity Markers*

- Sex. God made man male and female (Gen. 1:27).
- Family. The Bible regularly identifies people as the son or daughter of someone.
- Ethnicity. The Bible often identifies people Israelite, Egyptian, Cushite, Persian, Greek, etc.
- Age. “The Bible highlights two age brackets as especially significant for personal identity: youth and old age.”<sup>5</sup>
- Wealth or poverty, occupation. The Bible will identify people as wealthy or poor; it also identifies people by their occupation.

None of these identity markers is ultimate, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for all are one in Christ” (Gal. 3:28). **United to Christ** is the Christian’s ultimate identity marker, and it is the foundation for Christian unity. **Made in God’s image** is the universal human identity marker that undermines identity politics.

### *Conclusions about Identity Markers*

- Some identity markers are legitimate, essential, and unchangeable: image bearer, male or female.
- Some identity markers are legitimate and changeable: age, marital status, socio-economic status.
- Making even legitimate identity markers ultimate, as identity politics does, is idolatry.
- Identity politics often champions illegitimate, sinful identities.

## A Biblical View of Ethnic Identity

- All humans are descended from Adam and Eve, and all humans bear the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 28; 5:3; 9:6; Jas 3:9). Thus, “We should treat all human beings with dignity and respect: ‘Honor *everyone*’ (1 Pet. 2:17); ‘Show perfect courtesy toward *all people*’ (Titus 3:2).”<sup>6</sup>
- Nations or ethnic groups are God’s creation: “**and He made** from one man every nation of mankind” (Acts 17:26). Nations/ethnic groups persist into the new creation (Rev. 7:9; 21:24-26; 22:2).
- Ethnicities are not static. Acts 17:26 says, God “determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitations.”
- In John 4 Jesus is a member of the majority culture who asks a member of a minority for help. He initiated the relationship-building. Unlike the identity politics model Jesus, “as a member of the majority, called a member of the minority to account for her sins.”<sup>7</sup>

- In his relationship with the Romans Jesus was a member of an oppressed minority group. He helped Romans, like the centurion, and did not focus on Jewish grievances against Rome, he paid his taxes, and he did not encourage a revolution against Rome.<sup>8</sup>
- The church should be a model of ethnic unity by rejecting all ethnic discrimination (Col. 3:11; Jas. 2:1, 9). Bringing people from different ethnic backgrounds into the church brings glory to God (Eph. 3:1-10).
- Acts 6:1-6 recounts a division in the church regarding concerns that the Hellenized Jewish widows were not being properly cared for. “It is observable, that the names of all these deacons are Greek names; from whence, it seems, that they were of the Grecian or Hellenistic Jews; so that the church thought fit to chose men out of that part of them which made the complaint, in order to make them easy; which is an instance of prudence and condescension, and shews of what excellent spirits they were of.”<sup>9</sup>

### **An Apologetic Note**

Critics of Christianity often claim that since American Christians were wrong about the Bible supporting American slavery and segregation, they are now wrong about the Bible opposing homosexual lusts and behaviors or transgender identities.

The reality is that those who accommodated their interpretation of Scripture to support antebellum slavery and post-bellum segregation were conformed to the world—just as those who seek to accommodate their interpretation of Scripture to support LGBTQ+ positions are conforming to the world.

### **A Biblical View of Sexual Identity**

- God created humans with bodies that either male or female (Gen. 1:27; 2:7, 21-22).
- The Bible requires that a person’s gender expression match their created sex (Dt. 22:5; 1 Co. 6:9).<sup>10</sup>
- Homosexual desires and relationships are contrary to God’s creational design and are sinful (Gen. 1:28; Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

### **A Biblical View of the Church and Politics**

- In one sense the church is political. It is a gathering of citizens of heavens who affirm their allegiance to King Jesus above all authorities. It proclaims God’s law to nations and to rules who seek to break free from its restrictions (Ps. 2).
- The church is a gathering of pilgrims. We are not at home in this present evil age. We do not advance Christ’s kingdom by the sword, or by our political acumen (John 18:36).

- The family, the church, and government are all distinct God-given institutions. Though their spheres of authority sometimes overlap, it is important that these institutions not abandon their God-given roles and encroach on the mission of the other institutions. The state is not to pay pastoral salaries, decide which ministers serve in which assemblies, determine what doctrine is orthodox, or exercise church discipline. The church does not formulate public policy, organize voters, or support specific candidates since the Bible never authorizes these activities. It may, and at times ought, to identify unbiblical policies, candidates, and political viewpoints. This is part of its discipleship mandate.
- Christians can participate in the politics of their country not only as individuals but also as part of institutions.

### **Recommended Resources on Identity Politics**

Shenvi, Neil and Pat Sawyer. *Critical Dilemma: The Rise of Critical Theories and Social Justice Ideology—Implications for the Church and Society*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2023.

Trueman, Carl R. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Trueman, Carl R. *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022.

The sources cited in the endnotes and the recommended resources are helpful but not infallible resources. They should be read with discernment.

All Scripture quotations are from the NASB, 1995.

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<sup>1</sup> George M. Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 67.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Leeman, “Identity Politics and the Death of Christian Unity,” <https://www.9marks.org/article/identity-politics-and-the-death-of-christian-unity/>

<sup>3</sup> Leeman, “Identity Politics.”

<sup>4</sup> Yascha Mounk, *The Identity Trap: A Story of Ideas and Power in Our Time* (New York: Penguin Press, 2023), 70.

<sup>5</sup> Brian S. Rosner, *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 53. The reflections on biblical identity marks draws broadly on Rosner, pp. 41-60.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 641.

<sup>7</sup> George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 116; cf. Grudem, 647.

<sup>8</sup> Yancey, 119-22.

<sup>9</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 2:191.

<sup>10</sup> Note that the KJV and NASB are superior to other translations in retaining *effeminacy* as one of the sins that keep people from the kingdom of heaven.