

7 Reasons an Ethnocentric Gospel Can Be Downright Demonic

To start this article, I will say up front that God is not colorblind, and neither should we be.

God created humankind as a beautiful mosaic of colors, personalities and various cultures (replete with divergent modes of dress, food, currency, ways of living and perceptual values).

However, not everything in every culture is healthy, godly or compatible with Christian values.

(For example: The tradition in some parts of India of burning a wife alive when her husband dies, polygamy in some African tribes, some unhealthy food traditions that cause premature death, cannibalism among some in Papua New Guinea, tribal warfare and any ethnic view of race supremacy to name a few.) However, since Christ broke down the wall of hostilities that divide humanity—the gospel focuses on the miracle of the “one new man” the church becomes in Christ (see Eph. 2:13-16). In spite of this, much of the church mimics the world and is often as divided as secular society when it comes to ethnic divisions and posturing (I don’t use the word “race,” since there is only one human race, according to Scripture in Acts 17:26).

Not only that, many Christian leaders have couched the gospel into an ethnocentric faith that caters to those who fit their cultural criteria instead of preaching a universal gospel that appeals to people from all backgrounds. (One time a prominent Christian leader in New York City actually told me that ethnic groups should not mingle in events. Of course, I pushed back respectfully against this statement.) Now, in the context of

this article, by “ethnocentric,” I am not referring to preaching the gospel in a certain language or with a particular cultural nuance in order to reach a particular community. After all, we have to contextualize the gospel to connect to all different people groups as Paul did (see 1 Cor. 9:19-23). What I am referring to is when the gospel is distorted to reflect the political, material, social and ideological desires of an ethnic group above the fundamental principles of Scripture (even if a policy advocated is good, it should never transcend the essence and primary purpose of the cross of Christ and His kingdom).

I have seen some Christian movements and associations garner churches and crowds around a policy issue (that may be good) but supplants the gospel of Christ—causing an “us against them” mentality that polarizes, rather than reconciles ethnic people groups. We see this from both the radical right and progressive left; for example, in the past several years some fringe Black Lives Matter marchers shouted “death to the cops,” and most recently we witnessed neo-Nazi white supremacist groups coming out of the woodwork to protest the removal of Confederate monuments. (I’m sure there were those in both movements who identified themselves as Christians. Also, I doubt most Black Lives Matter protesters agreed with those few rallies that shouted such vitriol, and I guess there can be some foolish white Christians advocating the preservation of their Southern history regarding the monuments who found themselves marching with neo-Nazis. How they can be so ignorant and/or foolish is something I cannot explain.”

Also, to further complicate the problem, there are some policy issues that are so central to the Christian faith we can sometimes seamlessly integrate them with the gospel for cultural application without compromising the whole counsel of God and His kingdom. (Policy issues like fighting racism, slavery, unfair immigration, abortion, sanctity of life, traditional marriage, sex trafficking and empowering the

poor.) However, we can also become unbalanced and unwise when we solely focus on one important policy issue in our church if it ever marginalizes the redemptive message of the cross. Although, not every person espousing an unbiblical view is personally “demonized”—ideologies and/or teachings that divide the body of Christ usually emanate from the evil one (believers are called to tear down these ideological strongholds by thinking and preaching biblically, according to 2 Cor. 10:3-5).

The following are seven reasons I believe an ethnocentric gospel is demonic:

1. It is man-centered, not Christ-centered.

When a church focuses merely on and or for its own primary ethnic group when they have the capacity to reach other ethnics in their community—then they limit the reach of the cross of Christ.

2. It majors on skin color, not blood.

Scientifically, I can get a blood transfusion from any human irrespective of their ethnicity. The reason for this is because God made humankind from one set of parents and one blood (Acts 17:26). When we major on skin color in our preaching, we abrogate the scientific and biblical facts of our ancestry.

3. It majors on what divides us.

The power of the cross is to unite us in spite of our natural distinctive/ the goal of the evil one is to separate us because of our differences. God has given the church the ministry of reconciliation not division (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

4. It falls into the hands of identity politics.

Political parties and leaders from both the left and right often promote ethnic divisions so they can cater to their base

and garner more votes. By putting one group against another, they maintain more control over their so-called base. This is called “identity politics” (something mainstream media utilizes to its economic advantage all the time). Christians are always called to promote biblical values above loyalty to a particular political party. Christians are also called to have discernment so they do not succumb to the groupthink perpetuated by mainstream media.

5. It lifts up one ethnic group above others.

Since all people are descendants of Adam and Eve, we are all brothers and sisters irrespective of skin color and culture. When we lift up one ethnic group above another we fall into the ideological lie of Charles Darwin, who denied the biblical narrative of creation and taught that some races were more evolved than others through natural selection (Darwinism was the ideological foundation of white supremacists like Margaret Sanger and Adolf Hitler).

6. It does not reflect our heavenly family.

The biblical book of Revelation 7 shows that God’s family is comprised of every nation, tribe, language, kindred and tongue who worship before His throne. Jesus taught us to pray for His kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven (Luke 11:2-4); hence, the church should seek ethnic reconciliation, not ethnic division. Furthermore, Jesus prayed for His church to be one so that the world would believe He was sent from the Father (see John 17:20-23). Ethnic supremacy denies this great desire and plan of God in Christ and is thus demonic.

7. It caters merely to fleshly ambition and desire

When a church focuses on issues that are only skin-deep—to the exclusion of the full gospel—it puts the desires of the flesh above the things of God. It also caters to the hopelessness of those without a transcendent sense of purpose as a child of God, thus they have nothing else to cling to for their

identity other than their ethnicity. This can cause great polarity in society because it has the potential to lift one's ethnicity above all others because ethnic centrality gives them a greater sense of value, meaning and belonging.

In closing, my prayer is that the body of Christ will shine as the heavenly city on a hill as a model of reconciliation for all ethnic peoples, cultures and nations.