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THE BIBLE TEACHING ABOUT RACE

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'THE CHRISTIAN FAITH'

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The word "race" in its current use is modern. The Bible term is nation; another synonym would be culture. All three words "race", "nation" and "culture" refer to the fact that people form themselves into groups round a common centre of loyalty; they identify themselves with the group. People who live in the same territory identify together and form a nation or race and often develop a distinctive culture which strengthens the concept of being members of the one group. But there are other centres round which people group themselves, such as religion. The Jewish race or nation is an example of this. But more frequently, language is added to religion and historical background to become the centre round which the group forms, as in the case of the French-Canadians where language, religion, common ancestry and all living in the same locality combine to form a very self-conscious centre of loyalty. And when colour of the pigment of the skin and different physiognomy of the face are added as well, there is a very strong and distinct unifying force to keep the group conscious of itself. The true centre of loyalty for every man created in God's image is Christ. But even Christians form sub-cultures making their own denomination a centre of loyalty and so cutting themselves off from fellowship with other fellow Christians. How much more, then, those who are regenerate by the Spirit of God form strong and exclusive centres of loyalty round the group with which they identify. Thus, they form races or nations.

The nations, in their separateness as we know them today, is God's judgement on the sinfulness of man; this is clear from Genesis 11. Not that nations, that is to say, groupings, are in themselves wrong, for in fact they are natural developments of family

descent. But their isolation and division through the growth of self-centred loyalties is the result of sin. Nevertheless God uses this separateness as a way by which the world is able to continue on in some sort of peace, in order that the Gospel might have time to be preached to win men and women to Christ the true King.

Genesis 10, verses 5, 20, 25 and 31, together with Acts 17:24-27 make clear that the separation of the nations into geographical units each in its own territory and land is the will of God. It is part of God's providential order by which He governs the world. All God's providential government takes into account sin in the heart of man and is for the purpose of providing an opportunity of the Gospel, that man may be saved. The division of the nations into separate units, each in its own geographical area is an example of this, for without this geographical separation there is bound to be unbearable friction. Even with this geographical separation it is difficult enough to get the nations to live peaceably together. It would be much worse without it. We have a simple illustration from ordinary life. If three or four families live in the same house it is difficult to keep the harmony, even among friends, for each family is its own centre of loyalty, and members of each family will be in friction with each other and be jealous of each other. They will criticise each other and quarrel with each other. If, however, you separate the families into three or four houses next door to each other then there is the possibility of true relationship developing as people talk to each other across the back fence, help each other, bring each other's washing in, and exchange plants for each other's gardens and so on. The same is true of the nations. Thus, God has ordained that national groups should occupy their own geographical areas. Now if one group wishes, by force of arms, to settle down in the territory of another group, the

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latter group has the right to resist this invasion, and it is normally assumed that this settling down of one national group in the midst of another can also be lawfully prevented by immigration regulations. In fact, every country has immigration laws to prevent another nation taking over a country by swamping it with migrants even though it is not a deliberate policy. Australians need to ensure that our migration policies are wise enough to forestall the destruction of our homogeneous society as a result of the development of unassimilatable groups in the same geographical area.

But what is to be done when this situation has already come about; that is, when one national group, one culture, one race finds another race occupying the same geographical area. If it were possible to assimilate the two together, this, of course, would be the solution. But human nature being what it is, each group will fight tenaciously for its own continuance as a cultural unit and will resist assimilation if possible. When one group is small compared to the other the two may live at peace, though perhaps not without friction. When the two groups approach one another in size there is a real problem generated by fear of each other. In past history, this problem has been solved by mass expulsions or even by massacres of one group by the other. These solutions are forbidden to a Christian Government for we must always remember that justice is the only rule by which we are to regulate our relationships and our actions towards others, even towards our rivals and our enemies. Nevertheless, unscrambling the situation by designating different geographical areas for each group to settle in does not seem, in itself,

to be an unjust solution, so long as it is carried out justly and fairly, and it is to this that Christians should direct their criticism. This separation or apartheid has a biblical precedent. When Abraham separated his family from the family of his nephew Lot, because of the quarrels that arose between the two groups, he offered Lot the best land to settle in, himself taking the poor hill country. This is the example to be followed when a governing group separates another group from its own territory. It is not the policy of geographical separateness that Christians should condemn but any injustice in applying the policy, such as keeping the best for oneself. Christians also need to be on their guard lest they hastily conclude that things are unjust when they are not really so. For example, inequality in the vote is not in itself an injustice; but genuine injustice needs to be fearlessly condemned. For no policy that is a right one ever requires acts of injustice for its implementation. The object of life is fellowship with God through the Gospel. The facilitation of fellowship should be the object of government. Barriers to fellowship should not be tolerated, unless they are temporary measures designed to assist a policy for greater and more permanent fellowship.

There is a final word which the Bible has to say about the nations. On the eve of his ascension Jesus told his disciples to baptise the nations with the Gospel, to make them Christ-centred rather than self-centred. (Matt. 28:19,20). But it does not seem that this will be completed till the City of God descends from heaven when we read that the nations will be healed by the tree of life which grows in the paradise of God. This promise of healing is an acknowledgement that the separateness of the nations, the races, the cultures, is a con-

sequence of the sinfulness of mankind. But their very separateness will in the end turn to a blessing as the nations bring their own distinct contributions, their different cultures, backgrounds and insights to enrich the one unified people of God inhabiting the City of God, that is the heavenly church. This will take place at the regeneration of nature when Christ returns as Judge and King. We read this in Revelation 22. Meanwhile, the separateness of the nations is God's will and will continue on till the Coming of Jesus. But both within the nation itself and in a nation's relationship with its neighbour nations, the principle must always be that of justice, treating people as persons and giving them what is due to them and being in true relationship and fellowship with them. Only those who are regenerate in Christ will be able to achieve this truly and that is why we must bend our prayers and our efforts to increasing the knowledge of God and of Christ throughout the world.

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