

Equality, Identity and Unity: Basic biblical thinking about human relationships

Mark Thompson, The Priscilla and Aquila Centre launch conference, Feb 7, 2011.

1. *Equality* one of the most treasured values of our time and yet so imprecise.
2. *Unity* is almost as highly prized and yet the discussion is often just as confused.
3. Is there anything about us that is 'the same'? *Identity* as a third debated concept.
4. The focus of our debates and questions is not always the focus of the Bible's concerns.
5. EQUALITY: there is no single Hebrew term for equality but this does not mean the concept is absent from the OT. But equality is more often an inference than explicit teaching.
6. A traditional anchor point: the image of God in creation — men and women together are created in the image of God. Implicit rather than explicit?
7. Sharing the image of God does not do away with a number of critical differences (some of which are picked up by Paul in the NT).
8. The Fall does not erase the image or undo a created equality: it introduces behaviour which denies this truth.
9. Another route: the covenant of God with Israel — a relationship of mutuality? Made with the entire people of Israel.
10. Another element: Leviticus 19 — responsibility to the poor, an equality of accountability, loving your neighbour as yourself.
11. Equality in the NT: the terminology not used of human relationships
12. Jesus' teaching — all brothers (Mtt 23:8); the priority of service (Mtt 20:25–28).
13. The example of Jesus — humbling himself to serve (Phil 2; Mk 10)
14. The same approach to all: the inclusion of the marginalized, including women.
15. The core of the gospel: justification by faith. Romans — all stand as accountable, condemned and unable to save themselves; none have anything to plead; all can only be saved by faith apart from works.
16. There is no basis for suggesting one person is superior to another in Scripture. This fundamental equality does not do away with differences at a range of levels.
17. IDENTITY: the language of the same

18. To a certain extent implied alongside equality: the same creator, the same dominion, the same blessing
19. Adam's delight: at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh — recognizable sameness and yet difference
20. The same Spirit (Pentecost + Cornelius); servants of the same Lord who bestows gifts on those who call on him (Rom 10:12)
21. Sameness and difference alongside one another (the body image — diverse gifts from the same Spirit)
22. An exhortation to sameness: have the same mind, judgement and love (1 Cor 1:10; Phil 2:2)
23. The same message — one gospel for all (Rom 1)
24. Identifying what is the same rather than insisting everything is.
25. UNITY: the basic concern of the NT in particular
26. Jesus' prayer for unity (patterned on the unity of the Father and Son)
27. Unity created by the Spirit (Eph 4:3); unity of faith (Eph 4:13); a unity of mind (1 Pet 3:8)
28. Unity which is nourished by diversity (1 Cor 12) — dissolved when all want to be the same
29. The unity which is generated by a common fellowship (1 Jn 1:3)
30. A wholistic biblical picture is always better than a distorted emphasis on one element of the biblical witness.