

The Dividing of Man

by Chard Berndt

Mankind is truly man-*kind*, as the Creation account explains. We are all descended, according to the kind, from Adam. This reality struck Adam enough that he named his wife Eve (*Chavvah* in the Hebrew), because, according to Genesis 3:20, “she would become the mother of all living.”

It is striking then, how quickly men divide among themselves, eagerly tagging the rich, poor, black, white, uneducated, elite, blue-collar, white-collar, and so on. Mankind seems dedicated to typing each other into categories that are meaningless as compared to how God sees us. Camps of distinction even become militant concerning trivial poles of preference: Hondas versus Harleys, Pepsis or Cokes, Wranglers against Levis, and the like.

Why do we do this? Perhaps men tend to divide each other because they wish to ignore what man has in common: a sinful nature. All mankind shares a rocky history—the Fall and the judgment of the Flood—and also shares the destiny of an inevitable future judgment. Divisions, types, and categories are a distraction from this reality—a distraction rooted in the same pride that brought on our condition in the first place.

So, do any divisions of man matter at all, or does God see all men the same? In truth, some distinctions do matter. Ethnicity, for example, is the direct result of God’s dispersion of man at Babel, both linguistically and geographically. Ethnicity is a composite of language, geography, traditions, and bloodlines. It is often marked by skin color, but concerns much more. Yet God did not do this so as to mark any one ethnic group as superior. In fact, through Babel, and also by designating the Jewish people through the Abrahamic covenant, God performed a grander purpose. Acts 17:26-27 explains that “from one man he made every nation of men...so that men would seek Him, and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though he is not far from every one of us.” Ethnicity is God’s strategic work to bring about salvation, and *among unbelievers*, it matters to Him, but only in serving this purpose. Mission organizations are realizing this increasingly, working in alignment with God’s strategy. Astute ones are focusing on unreached peoples, and working to plant indigenous churches that nurture the gospel in meaningful cultural contexts.

For believers, however, God has fulfilled his primary purpose to bring us back into relationship with Him. When we come to be *in Christ*, former distinctions, whether of ethnicity or of more superficial things, become trivial. As Galatians 3 reads,

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor

female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This unity among believers must be lived out practically. St. Paul set such an example when he appealed to Philemon to accept Onesimus back, no longer as a slave, but as a brother. Onesimus had become a believer, and Paul recognized correctly that Onesimus' new nature demanded such an appeal.

To flesh-out such unity in practice, believers must first believe it, and then grow transformed attitudes toward others. Can an American Christian recognize that he has more in common with a Chinese Christian than he does with his unsaved co-worker—regardless of shared interests or language? He must do so if He is to see mankind as God does. This is not to reduce one's love for the lost, but rather to increase one's love for his true family. It is a shame if believers take pride in anything that distinguishes us other than Christ. "Let Him who boasts boast in the Lord."

There are no further comparisons to make between men if believers are to see men as God does. There is, however, one further distinction to make in our *own* selves. Those in Christ are regarded by God as either "spiritual" (*pneumatikos* in the Greek) or "carnal" (*sarkikos*) at any given time or season in life. The distinction is clarified through the Bible's use of a completely different word to differentiate worldly unbelievers (*psuchikos*) from worldly believers. For unbelievers, disobedience is the *status quo*. For believers, it is a warring against oneself. We are not to compare ourselves against others, but each to compare our old nature with our new nature.

We are to recognize that it *does* matter when our positional standing in Christ does not correlate with how we are living. It matters not so much because God is angry with us as that He is saddened. He came "that [we] may have life to the full". The word translated "life" in this John 10 passage is *zoe* [dzo-ay], and is used 126 times in the New Testament. It is a mode of life available only to humans, who are believers, who are walking in the Spirit. It is the life that we will take with us into eternity.

If we must divide among men, let us do so as God does. We should appreciate ethnicity in that it opens doors for the Gospel. We should cherish the Body of Christ as God's redeemed family. And we should divide not among others, but instead let God reveal our own divided hearts.

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