

Idols of the Heart

Part 5

DEI: diversity, equity, inclusion

Diversity: The state of showing a great deal of variety; very difficult

- Galatians 3:28

Equity: The quality of being fair and impartial

- Psalm 96:10, 98:9

Inclusion: The action or state of making part of a whole, being included within a group or structure.

- Romans 15:7

The human heart is a perpetual idol factory (John Calvin)

Unity

- John 17:20-26

- **Unity in purpose**

- **Unity in truth**

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- **Unity in love**

- John 13:34-35; Ephesians 4:3-6; John 17:21; Exodus 23:9; Matthew 7:12; Revelation 7:9-10

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Idols of the Heart: Relation to others: Idol of DEI¹

Today we continue in our summer series called “Idols of the Heart.” In the Bible, idolatry is the number one issue, making its way into every book, and it’s as significant a problem today as it was then – and just as deadly to us. We made that point in the first couple of sermons in this series as we looked generally at the issue and problem of idolatry, and I used a lot of information from a book by Kyle Idleman called *Gods at War*. The next two Sundays we looked at idols in relation to the self; we looked at the idol of identity (what I called identolatry), vs being in the image of God, finding our identity in Christ. Last week, Pastor Casey did a great job helping us see the idols of comfort and control, vs God’s plan of sacrifice and surrender. Remember that we’ve been saying all along that idols are really Satan’s substitutes; that Satan has taken every good thing that God has for us, and convinced us to worship a lesser, sinful version of that good thing.

These next couple of Sundays we want to look at idols in relation to others.

So two weeks ago I talked about how we are made in the image of God – what theologians call the “Imago Dei.” Today I want to talk about a different Dei – actually what we call...

DEI: diversity, equity, and inclusion.

How many of you have just tuned me out? You’re thinking, oh man he’s going to talk about politics now. If you are conservative, you just tuned me out because you think I’m in favor of it – or, you’re excited because you think I’m against it! If you are liberal, you’ve tuned me out because you assume I’m against it – or you’re excited that I might be in favor of it.

So whether you think you’ll be disappointed or excited, trust me and hear me out, okay? I think you all know me well enough to know that I’m very careful when I preach not to choose any side except the Lord’s side. That may or may not align with your politics, but I am prayerfully careful to be sure that what I preach *will* align with the Word of God. Because I’m not talking about politics – I’m talking about idols.

¹ Sources: *God’s at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart*, Kyle Idleman, Zondervan, 2013 (much of the first two sermons uses material from this source. Direct quotations are cited)
The Baal Conspiracy: An Expose of Everyday Idolatry, Al Truesdale, Beacon Hill Press, 2010
New Beacon Bible Commentary: Exodus, H. Junia Pokrifka, Beacon Hill Press, 2018

Believe it or not, today's DEI has its roots in the Bible. Did you know that? I'm going to show you how.

Let's start by looking at the idea of diversity.

The definition of diversity is this...

The state of showing a great deal of variety; very different.

Now, our nation has been diverse from its very beginnings, shaped by the interaction of several different Native American Tribes, diverse European settlers, and the forced migration of Africans through the slave trades² before it was finally made illegal. After that, geopolitical unrest and the prospects of prosperity brought waves of immigrants to our shores from every nation. Now, the interactions between these different cultures have not always been positive, for sure, and immigration policies throughout our 250 years has at times been helpful and other times harmful. But the result of it all has brought this complex and evolving tapestry of cultures, ethnicities, and languages.³

The Statue of Liberty stands at the harbor beside Ellis Island – the place that processed over 12 million immigrants into America during its time. When these immigrants came by boat across the Atlantic, they would first see Lady Liberty welcoming them. On her inscription is a poem by Emma Lazarus, a portion of which says:

“Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glowes world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

America has rightly earned the nickname, “Melting Pot of the world.” All of this would only work because of our commitment to unity in diversity; that while we might be diverse, we are committed to the values and structures and systems of values outlined in our governing documents. And it was working – as long as the focus was on unity in division, not division in diversity. Either way, diversity is definitely part of the DNA of our nation.

² Google: [History of diversity in America](#)

³ ibid

The roots of this are found in our Scriptures. All throughout the Bible is a picture of God's desire to welcome all people into his Kingdom. From the beginning he desired for all of us to be his people. But that's not always what happened because of sin and its consequences. If you remember, for instance, in Genesis 11, people became so prideful and so power hungry that they built for themselves a tower. But God knew that this would only lead to more of our sinful self-destruction, so he scattered the people with different languages. Babel means to confuse or confound. That original diversity was the result of sin! So what did God do? He sent his Son Jesus Christ to suffer and die for us, then rose from the dead and sent his Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, marked by the Spirit-filled disciples preaching in one language that was understood in the diverse languages that were gathered. God reversed the diverse curse of Babel! Once again, we can be united in Him. That's why God's Word says that in Christ...

There is neither Jew or Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28, niv)

God's heart is that we would all be unified in him in our diversity.

So what about the second idea in today's DEI – what about “equity”? Equity means...

The quality of being fair or impartial.

This has always been both a priority and a struggle in our nation. Our governing documents are very clear that, under the law, all people are to be treated equally fair. Within less than a century, this concept was really put to the test with the issue of slavery. Half the nation believed this applied to black people as much as whites; the other half did not. I'm over simplifying the issue, but we went to war with ourselves over this, and the side believing in equity for all triumphed. Of course, we are still trying to live that out, which is why 100 years after the Civil War came the civil rights movement – during the latter half of the 20th century. That century also saw us realizing that women did not have equity. In our commitment to our unity, we enacted laws that protected the equity of rights for people.

Equity, too, finds its roots in Scripture. In describing God and his people, it is clear that God rules with equity, especially looking out for the immigrant, the lowly, and the oppressed. A couple of examples are found in the Psalms:

Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.” The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. (Psalm 96:10, niv)

A couple of chapters later, the Psalmist again writes:

Let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity. (Psalm 98:9, niv)

So you see, equity is a priority for God. Well, what about inclusion, then? Inclusion means...

The action or state of making part of a whole, being included within a group or structure.

In our history, this means that people need to be able to have the same opportunities as everyone else; that no one should ever walk into a civil setting and be excluded. Determining how this looks is evident in what we've already stated about immigrants and women and races. But this has also been seen in the disability rights movement, making sure that the disabled are included in everything that everyone else can be included in. In recent years, our nation has struggled over whether or not this ought to also include gender issues beyond traditional binary categories, and that is still being wrestled with today, to put it mildly.

But guess what? This idea of inclusion has always been God's priority for his Kingdom. God has always wanted to include everyone, and now, in Christ, we can be! That's why the Bible says:

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:7, niv)

The love of God has been extended to every person through Christ. By acknowledging and confessing our sin and accepting Christ's death and resurrection for us, we are welcomed into the Kingdom of God and now live a life that brings praise to God – we no longer live lives of sin but instead lives of love for God and each other.

So why the history lesson? Why do I tell you all of that? If all that is true, and it is, what's the problem with DEI? Here's the problem, and listen carefully: today's DEI has its roots in the Bible, but today's DEI is *not* biblical. (*repeat*)

What's the problem? DEI has become an idol to be worshipped, not a description of the Kingdom. In all the Scriptures I mentioned above, it is a description of the result of what happens when we are *in Christ*. That means it comes when we have stopped worshiping the idols of self and we've submitted to Christ – gaining our identity in him and living a life of sacrifice and surrender. The problem with today's DEI is that the individual is the center, not Christ. The problem with it is people demand surrender to DEI; and they sacrifice those who oppose it. DEI has become a Satanic substitute that deifies our own sinful nature, rather than a description of the culture of the Kingdom of God. Does that make sense? *Of course* we've made an idol out of it – remember our quote earlier by the Christian leader John Calvin who lived in the 1500s:

"The human heart is a perpetual idol factory." (John Calvin)

It's what we do – we make idols out of everything that affirms our sin. So what is the solution? The solution is what the Bible calls...

Unity.

I can't think of a better place to see what God's unity looks like, than to look at what Jesus prayed for the church. In John 17, it records what is called the "high priestly prayer" – Jesus' prayer for the church. If Jesus is praying for this, for us, then that means it is his priority, right? So let's look at what he prayed for us. In fact, you've been sitting awhile, and these are the words of Jesus, so let's honor what he said by standing together. Thanks:

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." (John 17:20-26, niv)

This is the Word of God for the people of God – so we all say, "Thanks be to God!" Thanks for standing; please be seated.

As we look into what Jesus is praying here, know that this prayer is a continuation of his prayer that his disciples will be saved, protected from Satan, and sanctified, which means to be Christlike, or what we call holy. That is Jesus' prayer for everyone! So this part of the prayer is describing the sanctified Christian. A sanctified Christian is one who is single-mindedly determined and devoted to live for Jesus, carrying out his mission, and being surrendered and submitted to the Holy Spirit who empowers and equips the disciple to carry out that mission. So this prayer describes characteristics of that sanctified life. This prayer is not about affirming our own selfishness and sin. This is a prayer for the person who has slain the idol of identity.

So Jesus' prayer starts by once again praying that those who would be his disciples would have unity (he'd already prayed this back in verse 11). But this time, it is expanding beyond his eleven disciples; in fact, Jesus plans for, expects, and knows that it would expand *through* his disciples all the way to us, and through, us, to others. That sounds pretty inclusive, doesn't it?

Clearly by Jesus' prayer, being a Spirit-filled believer means that we are united in our commitment to each other in some very, very important ways. What Jesus is praying here for us is not just that we'd all have some kind of agreement in membership or vocabulary or participation, as if we were some kind of philanthropic club. He's not saying it means we have to affirm and accept each person's individual proclivities. This is far from some kind of DEI or natural unity; this is a *supernatural* unity.

The nature of this oneness would be *like* the oneness enjoyed by the Father and Son—a oneness that is deeply, intimately united in the core of our being and the core of Christ's, by the Holy Spirit.

So it is describing a...

- Unity in purpose.

Jesus has already made it clear that he and the Father are united in their purpose in this world – to love us with the same love they share together, and to see us brought into this saving, shielding, sanctifying love with them. He prayed that for his disciples, and now he prays it for us. He wants us to carry out that same purpose in this world: to love people in supernatural ways that will introduce them to Jesus and draw them into a relationship with him. This is a love that is shown to all people. It means that all people are respected, that we want to bless people and do good for them. It doesn't mean that it is a love that blesses people's sinful behaviors. Neither is it a "touchy-feely" kind of love; this unity in love is also rooted in a...

- Unity in truth.⁴

The power of our unity is found in the supernatural truth that Jesus is Christ and that God the Father is revealed in Jesus Christ the Son. This truth is provided for us in God's Word, the Bible. It is a sacred text because it is infused with the power of the breath of the Spirit himself:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, nlt)

The Spirit uses the revelation of Jesus Christ, recorded for us in God's Word, to unite us in our work together in our purpose – for every good work. Finding our unity in truth, as Jesus prayed, means we don't get to live however we want; we live in ways that are revealed in the Word of God. We've started this sermon series from the very first two of the Ten Commandments, which are what? You shall have no other God's before me, and you shall not make any idols in the form of anything in heaven above or earth beneath or the waters below. That means we worship God alone – we submit to the truth of who God is, and the truth of how we are to live. But there are eight other commandments too – three more that focus on God and the other five that focus on how we treat each other. Five focused on God, five focused on how we treat people. That's the unity in purpose and truth that we are talking about. All of that, ultimately, comes from our...

⁴ Joseph Dongell, [*John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 207.

- Unity in love.

We already mentioned that we are unified in our purpose to demonstrate and declare God's love to others. But this is also a unity of love for *each other* as fellow believers. This was so important that Jesus not only prayed for this, he added it as an eleventh commandment. Earlier in the same evening that Jesus prayed this, He said:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35, niv)

This is the heart of the matter and it's a matter of the heart; Jesus commanded us and prayed for us to love each other. This is why unity is so very important in the church, and why Satan wants to divide us by getting us to worship at the altar of DEI!

Jesus prayed that our unity would not only be *like* the unity of the Father and Son, but would be brought about through unity *with* the Father and Son. He prayed:

“May they also be in us...” (John 17:21)

So deep is God's love for us that He desires not only to make us like Him, but actually to *share life with us*. This is the abundant, eternal life that is a God-quality life, given to us by the Spirit within us, allowing us to know God in deep, intimate ways. The rich, living, intimate connection between believers and God makes (or *should make*) such a profound impression upon the world:

“...so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:21b, niv)

In other words, when the world sees the miracle of unity in love among believers in Jesus, the world should conclude that everything Jesus said and did represented the very truth of God for the redemption of the world.⁵

This was part of what God has wanted demonstrated to the world through his people since the beginning. He reminded them to welcome the diverse with equity and inclusion clear back in the Old Testament, when he said:

Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt. (Exodus 23:9, niv)

And the way we do this is through our love for each other and others. That's why God gave us what we've called “the Golden Rule” when Jesus said:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12, niv)

My friends, Jesus' prayer, his will, his vision for the church is that we would be unified in our purpose, in truth, and in love. This is the result of loving God and

⁵ Joseph Dongell, [*John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 207–208.

loving others. This is something far, far more substantial and real than anything DEI has to offer.

Listen, this is why being a multicultural church is so important to us. It has *nothing* to do with our culture's worship at the altar of DEI; it has always been about being the unified church in this world. That's why every day we worship in two languages; why we are committed to being one church with the two dominant languages of West Valley. This is exactly what we see when we read the description of the church in that day when Jesus returns. It's in Revelation 7, and it says this:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."
(Revelation 7:9-10, niv)

Did you see that? It is a description of the unified church, coming together in purpose and truth and love from all our diverse backgrounds, and DEI is not our priority. Our unity shows up when we are worshiping God: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. When we focus on him, surrender to him – slay all our idols and only worship God through Jesus Christ – we won't have to worry about DEI. We are a unified church. Amen?

Prayer

Benediction:

May the God who inspires people to endure, and gives them a Father's care, give you a mind united towards one another because of your common loyalty to Jesus Christ. And then, as one people, you will sing from the heart the praises of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So open your hearts to one another as Christ has opened his heart to you, and God will be glorified. (Romans 15:5-6, JBPNT)