

Beauty and Race

The natural world is a source of beauty, wonder, and inspiration. It is awe-inspiring and fascinating. It is also incredibly diverse in life forms that have adapted to thrive in an incredible array of environments. From the majestic flight of the bald eagle to the graceful dance of the monarch butterfly, the natural world is full of fascinating behaviors that are a delight to watch. The beauty of life is sacred. It is divine. It is the world “without a why.” All existing beings have no reason other than themselves, as **1 Chronicles 16:31-33 states, “Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice...let the sea roar and all that fills it, let the field exult and everything in it! Then shall the trees of the wood sing for joy”**. This joyfulness is not for something else; it is the purpose of life. God gave us a palette of diversity for great joy! Let’s take one example: Apple! Do you know how many apple cultivars we have on Earth? Imagine!



There are over 7,500 known apple cultivars, with some estimates suggesting there are as many as 30,000 varieties worldwide. However, only a few hundred are grown commercially. Imagine the diverse, all 30,000 delightful apple tastes.

Now, how many human races do we have? Are you counting inside? “Well... white, black, yellow?” Please do not be surprised. Here is the **AI research answer!** **“There is only one human race! 99.9% of DNA share all the human beings together.”** Only one human race! Is it surprising? Didn’t the Bible say we are all one family from Adam and Eve? However, we are Adam and Eve’s fallen, confused and troubled children. **We forgot who we are, the beautiful, the beloved of God, created for beauty in the image of God.**

We need to know that **the concept of different "races" is a social construct, not a biological one. The word race has been used throughout history to categorize and discriminate against human groups.** It was used to justify the use and abuse of other groups of people by a dominant group. If we love the image of God in all human beings, we need to unlearn what the culture, history, and society taught us. If we share God’s heart of compassion, the path will be a little easier.

This was a deep issue in the time of Jesus. The story of the Good Samaritan is very familiar to our ears. Samaria is the region in the middle of Northern Israel. The Samaritans were severely discriminated against by the Jews because of the mixed blood. After the Assyrians occupied Samaria, the Samaritans were isolated and dehumanized generation after generation. In Jesus’ time, Samaritans were thought of as dirty, unclean, dogs, inferior, half-breed, contaminated. There was only one stereotype in the story. Stereotype is violence, categorizing mysterious, beautiful masterpieces of God in a couple of words. It alienates people from who they really are. Jesus intentionally restores the dignity of Samaritans through story after story. In the story, Jesus pointed out that the true neighbor was the Samaritans who came to the beaten and showed the compassionate heart. He brought him to the inn for healing, promised that he would take care of all

the costs until the person was fully restored. He went far beyond the kindness of most hearts. Samaritans' dignity and the beauty of humanity were the last thing that the Jews could ever imagine.

How did it happen? While the Jews villainized Samaritans repeatedly, it resulted in the escalation of a negative response from the evil done to them. And their politics, guidelines, and rules started to change in response to the negativities. Unfortunately, this story exists in our current world, too. Who are today's Samaritans? Can we identify them by the description? Dirty, lazy, dangerous?

White people cannot fully understand the daily experience of people of color and immigrants. Black, Asian, Latino, and other races live with systemic discrimination. Life experiences are simply different. They are living in systemic discrimination that contributes to poverty, lack of educational and health care opportunities, and dangerous living conditions. All of this results in struggle, fear, pain, and desperation simply to survive on a daily basis. Which white people don't experience. In that difference, communications are very difficult. They do not share the same life environment. There is a vast gap in understanding. Most of us simply think, "*I am not racist, I have a black friend.*" If you think you are, then you need to open your heart more humbly, and listen to what is truly happening in their lives and see what you cannot imagine.

Let's imagine what happened to the people in Samaria. If the Samaritans are lesser than, it begins to infiltrate and impact the very ideas we think about them. After a while, we might start to think, it may be good that we don't provide dignity to the Samaritans. And after a while, it makes sense that they don't get the same resources that outside people have. Their school system just wasn't as good as ours, and it is okay for it to be like that because they are less than. After a while, water systems won't flow into the Samaritans from the same resources.

My black and brown friends genuinely worry about their children and how they will survive the oppression and violence against people of color in this culture. Where did this bias start? Why has this path become so broken, so dangerous? Indeed, there is a long list of things done in this country, beginning with the stories of slavery, African American people, Japanese Americans' incarceration in WWII, and indigenous people. It is harrowing even to remember.

In recent decades since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the civil rights of millions of Black and Latino Americans have been set back. It is because the fundamental injustice has been carried out through our criminal justice system due to our profoundly unequal law enforcement system. It is well explained in the book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* written by the civil rights lawyer Michelle Alexander. The United States has 5 % of the world's population; but it contains nearly 25 % of its known prisoners. It represents a 500% increase in the total number of prisoners over the last forty years. Almost 7 million people were in prison or jail in 2013. This surge in mass incarceration has had a robust racial character. She notes the shocking fact that more African American adults were in prison today than were enslaved in the year 1850, a decade before the Civil War began. According to statistics, with the same crime, the possibility that a Black man can go to jail is nine times bigger than a White man. All over the United States, communities are suffering from the consequences of racial injustice.

Reconciliation is needed. However, there is the reality that the experience of people of color is very different from the experience of white people due to the structural forces of racism and white privilege. What should we do? We can choose superficial conversations or deep connectedness with empathy in a cross-racial conversation. The obstacles can be reduced by honest and open communication between white people and people of color on that issue. All these overwhelming truths are wrapped with the emotion of fear on both sides. Where should we start? How should we go over the obstacles?

First, a deeper essential understanding is needed about who we are. We are all sinful and broken people, all biased with prejudice. But we have hope that Jesus has broken down all the barriers of hostility. Only in the heart of the Holy Spirit can we feel the pain of brothers and sisters of other races as one family. Only in Jesus can we truly become one in harmony as Ephesians 2:14 says: "For he is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."

People need the gospel for transformation. On the way toward the ultimate harmonious society, we need a sound system that regulates behaviors that can restrain the heartless. Also, there is one thing we need to be aware of. It is to know about what we should fight for. Paul said. **"For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12).** As we read, human sin is compounded by demonic power that intensifies systemic evil. Prayers are essential to knowing whom we are wrestling with. We need to have deep empathy, to stand on the right side of the truth, and to live our lives as disciples of Jesus, with concrete action to change the realities we have.

God created us as one family. God wants us to be one as in the **Revelation. "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 holding palm branches in their hands."** It is a broader vision of worship. Imagine! One harmonious gathering of multi-ethnic, multi-lingual tribes of worshippers in the spirit of God. They were those who won victory from the demonic power of the world in Jesus.

It is the space the divine essence of our God, LOVE, is shared. The fruit is compassion and social justice.

When we love one another more beautifully and justly, we enter the divine realm. There we will sing glory to God. Our heart will praise the sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

Are you worshipping God with the fruit of love, compassion, humility, gentleness?
Or are you worshipping God with cruelty, hubris, selfishness, hostility?