

Question: Since the Jews of the Old Testament were commanded not to intermarry with people of other nations, does this mean Jesus would disapprove of inter-racial marriages?

When the Lord God brought his people out of slavery in Egypt and into the land he had promised to their fathers, he wanted to keep them from the evil practices of the idolatry they had witnessed in Egypt and among the nations that had been in the land before them. Not only were these idols false gods, but the worship of these gods led people into many detestable practices like prostitution and child sacrifices. Therefore, the Lord commanded: “Do not intermarry with them. . . . for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods” (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

But, when God’s people remained faithful to him, he did not show his disapproval of marrying someone of another nation or race. For example, God spoke his law about intermarriage through Moses, but Moses was not made to separate from the Cushite woman he had married (Numbers 12:1). Also, the book of Ruth tells us about a family from Judah that went to live in the land of Moab because of a famine in Judah. Although the Moabites were one of the specific nations with whom intermarriage was forbidden, the two sons took Moabite wives (Ruth 1:1-4). Ruth, one of those Moabite women, is named in the New Testament in the ancestry of Jesus Christ along with Rahab, another foreign woman (Matthew 1:5). These women had left their false gods to worship and serve the Lord God. Evidently, the law forbidding marriage to other nations was not given to forbid interracial marriage, but to keep the Lord’s people from following foreign gods.

That the Lord’s concern was about spiritual matters and not merely interracial marriage is further illustrated by the life of King Solomon. We are told that Solomon “loved many foreign woman” from nations about whom the law of God said, “You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods” (1 Kings 11:1-2). Because Solomon ignored God’s warning, his wives did turn his heart after their gods and he was not fully devoted to the Lord his God. He built a “high place for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods” (1 Kings 11:7-8; cf. Nehemiah 13:23-27),

From the above, I believe we can conclude that Jesus would not disapprove of an interracial marriage. Instead, he would be greatly concerned about any marriage that might lead a Christian away from faith in him. In fact, the New Testament does warn: “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. . . . what fellowship can light have with darkness? . . . What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). This scripture is talking about more than the marriage relationship although marriage would be included in this principle. This admonition does not mean that a marriage between a believer and unbeliever is sinful in itself because a believer who is married to an unbeliever is instructed to remain married if the unbeliever is willing (1 Corinthians 7:12).

No, Jesus would not disapprove of an interracial marriage. He would be much more concerned about any marriage—either of the same or of a different race—that places faith in him at risk. The more differences which exist between a couple—cultural, racial, religious, educational or economic background—the greater the challenges will be to maintaining a lasting marriage. Jesus wants us to build marriages and homes that can help us learn to trust in him and live with him now and forever. An interracial marriage between people of common faith in Jesus has a better chance of accomplishing that goal than a marriage between two people of the same race without a common faith in Jesus.

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