

Gospel; Acts 1:8

I want to point out a few more books on your recommended reading list. One is called *A New Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, edited by Scott Moreau. It just came out last year. Scott Moreau is at Wheaton College in Chicago. The book's associate editors are Harold Netland, who is also in Chicago at Trinity, and Charles Van Engen, who is at Fuller Seminary. This would be a very helpful book for your personal library, your church's library, or both. It covers a lot of non-Western figures. One of the first things I checked was how they treated the United States, and I appreciate that they treated the United States of America as one among many mission fields around the world. Again, I would commend this to you as a tremendous resource for a missions' library.

Another book that has become a standard is *A History of Christian Missions*, by Stephen Neill, in the Pelican History of the Church series, volume six. It was first published in 1964. It is a standard work for covering basic missions of the church. For example, the book has two parts. The first part goes through 1800, and part two is from 1792 onward. The year 1792 is a benchmark time, because William Carey wrote his *Inquiry*. The year 1792 is 300 years after 1492, so it is easy to remember.

Let us pray together.

Our Father, You are a great and mighty God. We bow before You again and acknowledge You as the Lord. We agree and confess that the Lord Jesus has indeed risen, and we are grateful to be among those who acknowledge Him as the Lord, the one who is the King, the one who comes close to so many people in compassion and mercy, who comes in judgment and severity, the one who is continuing to gather a people from all parts of the Earth, and who continues to intercede before You, the Father, for His people. We thank You for Your Holy Spirit, who lives among us, who moves and works often times in spectacular and unexpected ways. We praise You, O God, that You are the one carrying out Your redemption of the world. These times of fear and war in the world are new and unnerving for many of us, but we look to You for Your mercy and grace. We long for the Lord Jesus to return and bring peace and full justice throughout the earth. We pray for Your continued rule and reign over all political leaders throughout the world, whether it is those of the United States, those of Pakistan, those in the Sudan, Indonesia, Japan, or those throughout Asia. We praise You that You are the Lord, and we can trust You and rest in You. As we meet again to learn and study, we pray for further equipping to serve the cause of the Gospel. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

We are going to look at topic 29, the Gospel. Take about 45 seconds and write down what your articulation of the Gospel is. If someone walked up to you and asked you what the Gospel is, what would you say? I would like to discuss with you one essential component of the Gospel that helps to fill out everything that Christ did. This relates to some of the comments we heard last time from Barry Henning and Bill Yarborough about the full scope of the Gospel and the Gospel of the kingdom.

To begin, I have a quotation from Lamin Sanneh from readings you did earlier in the course. I would like to make a few comments about this. Perhaps he overstates some things to make a point, but again, we are honing in on something here in particular with respect to the Gospel. He says, "When he stressed faith over against works, Paul was intending to enunciate the inclusive principle of God's right and freedom to choose us without regard to our cultural trophies. Faith, as the absolute gift of a loving, gracious God, is the relativizing leaven in culture." This is familiar-sounding language to you from earlier; that is, it is only by resting in what God has done in Christ—not by belonging to any particular culture and not by observing any particular cultural, religious traditions—that one belongs to God. He

goes on to say, “Western psychology and its theological variants have unjustifiably subjectivized the issue, pitting inward assurance against social engagement.” I think that says a lot about some of the background of the cleavage between word-and-deed kinds of ministries. It also says a great deal about many of our contemporary evangelical notions of the Gospel.

For example, many would say that the Gospel is “that Jesus Christ died for my sins and, in resting with that, I have full assurance. I can know that I am fully forgiven and I have peace and joy before God. This is the good news. It is not by anything that I have done. I totally rest in what Christ has done, and so I am free, and I have full peace before God.” In so far as that is the full scope of the Gospel, one could say that that is a subjectivized, individualized, compartmentalized, truncated, and (as Harvey Conn would say) synchronized understanding of the Gospel. Sanneh continues, “In fact”—and this is where he perhaps overstates the point—“Paul desired, above all, to safeguard the cultural particularity of Jew as Jew and Gentile as Gentile, though challenging both Jews and Gentiles to find in Jesus Christ their true affirmation.” You are still who you are culturally. However, in so far as the Gospel relativizes cultures, you belong to whatever culture you belong to while still belonging to that culture, and you are free to be that person while belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ, not because of belonging to any particular culture.

You can see this in Paul in places like Romans and Galatians. He told the Galatian Christians, “You have been set free”—that means free from the tyranny of law. You are free from trying to do all you can to be good enough. You are also free from the tyranny of any particular culture’s traditions that might be imposed on you. Paul was telling the Galatian Christians that they were free from those Judaizers who sought to force them to conform to their narrow, confined, cultural, religious framework. When you look at what Paul does in Romans and Galatians, it strikes me that he has that corporate, cultural component at the center of his thinking.

I went back and extracted a few paragraphs from a paper I wrote that has not yet been published. A few years ago in Japan, we had a conference on Gospel and culture. We had five North Americans and five Japanese come to speak. We wrote different papers and discussed them. I was honored to be asked by my Japanese colleagues to be a part of the Japanese side of things. I found that many of my newly ingrained Japanese instincts informed a more corporate and cultural hearing of Paul in which I argued in ways that I will highlight for you here. I mention in my paper that Romans and Galatians have certainly greatly instructed evangelicals about the nature of the Gospel in which we believe that it applies to all people everywhere. I wrote, “We believe the Gospel applies to all people regardless of historical cultural context and that salvation is by faith alone. This is a distinguishing mark of what Protestant orthodoxy is.”—I note that I definitely want to affirm that without question—“However, I do want to raise the question as to whether or not the Pauline Gospel as just articulated in that kind of a narrow, individualistic form”—as I have just mentioned to you—“has been too enculturated in an extremely individualistic and modern, contemporary Western setting so as to overshadow the Gospel’s more corporate dimensions. For example, in addition to justification, one aspect of salvation includes adoption of the individual into God’s corporate family.” So, I want to suggest a corollary, namely, that there is an accompanying blind spot constituting a failure to recognize the important place in Paul’s Gospel of cultural identity, which is a critical factor inherent in the offer of the Gospel to all people in that the Gospel is not just for every individual. Paul goes on and on in Romans to say that all have sinned and all have fallen short of the glory of God. I would argue that he is including in that statement all kinds of people. It does not matter what kind of person you are. He has those corporate identities in mind. The Gospel does not come in an ahistorical or acultural vacuum in which we have a direct, mystical encounter with God. Paul was always conscious of being a Jew. He was always conscious of ministering to Gentiles.

I think that we unwittingly at times slip into thinking of spiritual acultural souls in defining what the Gospel is. So, in the paper I try to argue that Paul's Gospel includes the essential two-sided component of the transcultural identity and intercultural unity of Christ's church. The identity of Christ's church is not confined to any particular cultural location. I am trying to say that, as we belong to each other, we cut across different cultural settings. In the paper, I try to point out that the bite in the argument is that Paul is saying that this is an essential part of the Gospel itself, not just the Gospel's effect. It is not just that the Gospel means that these individuals are saved and one result of that is that we therefore accept each other to belong together to God in Christ. It is very good news that I do not have to become something else. We are who we are in Christ, and we are free to be that. This is very good news. The conference was interesting, because as we discussed these things, the North Americans thought, "What is the point? What is the big deal?" The Japanese side, on the other hand, thought, "This is really significant! This is something different." It was different in terms of being contradictory, but there was an important difference. It was really interesting for me to observe the different reactions. I do not know what you think about that or if you would like to talk about it.

I want to stress one point with you. Let us look at some examples in Romans. Paul begins in Romans by saying that he is an apostle set apart for the Gospel, focused on who Jesus is and what he has done. In chapter 1, verse 5 he says, "We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ." He goes on to speak of how he longs to be with them and go on eventually to Spain. In verse 16 he says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." Then, he says what he means by "everyone." He says, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek." It is not just every single individual lifted out of cultural, ethnic identity in history. Verse 17 continues, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" I have never heard someone do this, but I wish I could find someone who would explore the possibility of when Paul says, "from faith to faith." It is an interesting phrase that has been interpreted in a number of ways. I wonder if that might describe the historical progression from different peoples to different peoples as they embrace the righteousness of God by faith. I am not going to live or die for that, but it is an interesting thought. Then, Paul goes on, saying, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness [...]"

What is he doing in the first three chapters when he is talking about all ungodliness and all unrighteousness? It seems to me that he is convincing the Jews, in particular, that all sorts of people stand under God's wrath. As you know, the Judaizers clung to being Jewish as justifying themselves. Paul gives many arguments about those who have the Law ought to keep the Law, because keeping the Law is what really counts; not having the Law. So, when he says in verse 3:9, for example, "Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin." His concluding notion was that all people are under sin.

Let us move into the latter part of chapter three. In 3:21 Paul says, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction"—that is, between Jew, Gentile, or whatever sort of person you are—"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." There is a lot here, but I am emphasizing that ethnic, corporate identity, which, in my mind, is there when Paul is talking about whom he is talking about. He keeps coming back to it. For example, in verse 27 he says, "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." Again, he is not here just slipping into an individual, acultural notion of "Is it my work or is it

God's work?" I submit to you that he has in mind the Jewish works of law in particular and the way that the Judaizers sought to impose it on people. He was saying, "No, it is all by faith for everyone," because as he says in verse 29, "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one. He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." God is the God of all sorts of people, regardless of their cultural religious customs. Abraham was saved by faith.

Paul begins Romans 5:1, saying, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God." I conjecture that there is a lot of power in that first-person plural pronoun that he uses there, because he is including Jew and Gentile alike. He is saying, "Let us together have peace with God through faith in Christ Jesus." It strikes me that as he moves onto chapters 9, 10, and 11, he is just continuing on with the same theme of Jew and Gentile alike—how we relate to God and rest in Him by faith. We all know those verses we use in evangelism—Romans 10:8, for example. He says, "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart [that is, the word of faith that we proclaim]'" because, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.'"—What follows connects again in Paul's mind. He has in mind there those corporate culture categories—"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek." You see, it is not just individual, acultural people whom he has in mind. There is always that cultural component that is a part of what he is saying, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'"—whoever, whatever kind of person you.

A climaxing part of the letter is when he gets into chapter 15. So much of what Paul was about in churches of his day was getting Jews and Gentiles to live together, to accept each other, and to embrace one another. He gives an entire theological background of why that should be. He talks, like he does in 1 Corinthians, in chapters 12, 13, and 14 about what it means to live with those who have different notions of eating food offered to idols. In Romans 15:5 Paul says, "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Again, he is not just talking about their unity per se. He is talking about unity—living together—as people who are different in ethnic and cultural traditions and backgrounds, because we are all saved by faith alone in Christ. Therefore he says, "Accept one another just as Christ accepted us."

He goes on and talks about how it was promised in the Old Testament that Gentiles would glorify God for His mercy just as the Jews and the circumcision do. To me, all of this continues to snowball into Paul having the notion that in the Gospel there is always an inherent component of corporate cultural identity. In Galatians, Paul gets so angry with Peter. When the Judaizers come, Peter backs off from fellowship (eating, in particular) with Gentile Christians. Paul gets so upset. Galatians 2:11 says, "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray." Then Paul says, "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel"—this was right at the heart of what the good news is all about, that all sorts of people together are embraced. Peter's withdrawal from different sorts of believers in and of itself was a direct violation of what the Gospel is all about.

Let me finish this topic with a quotation from Ortiz from your readings. He said, "The church's task is neither to destroy nor to maintain ethnic identities but to replace them with a new identity in Christ that is more foundational than earthly identities." I do not think Dr. Ortiz is saying that ethnic identities go away. He is combating on one hand the cultural imperialism, which Christian mission has carried out often times unwittingly. On the other hand, he is combating the contemporary, postmodern glorification of cultural difference for the sake of being different. He is also battling the preservation of pristine cultural backgrounds. He is saying that the most fundamental identity is found in Christ, and that is what counts as Christ brings all of His people together. This whole book that this quotation is taken from argues for different ethnic groups coming together in order to have multiethnic churches. He talks about the difference between being consciously multiethnic (a church like that would be New City Fellowship, for example) or being multi-congregational, where you might have different ethnic groups under one roof, functioning as different groups rather than coming together in the same way as a group that intentionally seeks to bring groups together.

Although this aspect of the Gospel pushes toward multi-ethnicity within the church, not every single congregation must be comprised of different ethnic groups. First, this is often times not going to reflect the area in which you live. Second, to be multiethnic in many situations is going to require training, calling, and intentionality that are not always there. However, it should enable all of us to have at least some measure of critical self-awareness of who we are ethnically and culturally. So, if you are in a church like the one I was in recently that is almost exclusively Caucasian/American, you need to at least be aware of that so that you can relativize yourselves in relating to other people; you will be able to welcome other people, and you will be able to be a part of other ethnic people groups as well. We have to have that self-awareness and know that the Gospel comes to us in that way. One area that will help us in tremendously is worship. Having that self-awareness will enable us to see worship related to cultural and generational preferences rather than to make it an absolute theological conviction when it usually just simply boils down to preference.

One way of approaching that is to recognize the descriptive power of the homogeneous principle. So often, the church of Jesus Christ grows and remains within particular ethnic groups. How to recognize that in our weakness, frailty, and brokenness and yet take to heart the theme of the Gospel of reconciliation between God and all kinds of people is a question that congregations need to wrestle with. For many of us who are in ethnic majority situations, it is important to realize that we are all ethnic. I saw a comedy show on television the other day. I sometimes work at my house and will often watch the news at noon. The news only lasted a few minutes before a comedy show came on that was addressing this issue of a Caucasian family, because of some school connections, trying to find its own ethnic identity. They were thinking, "I wish I were Asian-American or African-American, because there would be all sorts of benefits. But, what are we?" The entire show was about the family trying to figure out what they are, and it was comical. It is not always easy to determine what that actually means for us. Again, I am not necessarily advocating that we need to be "ethnic." However, I want to push us to realize specificity and particularity within the wider body of Christ and human family.

Let us go to topic 32, "North America, the West, and Acts 1:8." Your readings from Shenk note that, for example, in our day, there are increasing numbers of missiologies with respect to the West. Often times, it is not easy for contemporary, secular, post-Christian, postmodern, Western people to embrace the Christian Gospel. It can be an extremely difficult arena in which to operate with respect to the Gospel. In our day, thankfully there are those who are seeing the need and seeking to articulate for us missiological understandings of Western cultures. Some of the readings I assigned are connected to some people who are associated with an organization called The Gospel of our Culture and Network, which I do not fully endorse. Nevertheless, I appreciate the way that they are seeking to think missiologically about the

United States, Canada, and other Western settings. You can go to www.gocn.org to see some of the things they do. A lot of that is associated with Lesslie Newbigin. There is a great deal of appreciation for Newbigin and others in this setting.

One quotation that Hall includes in your readings is this: “We have still not fully awakened from our dream of a homogeneous Christian West. It often leads us to react furiously and in a false context when something happens to shake us out of the dream. We often seek to realize this dream-ideal and so apply ourselves to the wrong point altogether.” This was from 1960. It is a bit dated. However, you can see how, in the midst of terrorist attacks and the war in Afghanistan within the United States, trying to deal constructively with cultural, religious plurality is an interesting venture. It is a new road down which culture at large is walking. Hall is saying that many of us still have those instincts of being a rather uniform Christian West.

Hall also talks about moving from Christendom to *diaspora* and the metamorphosis that is occurring under the rubric of transformation of disestablishment. He says, “Here [in North America], complacency and self-deception on the part of Christian denominations and congregations are the greatest dangers.” This is a strong statement. Since this has been written, perhaps more and more Christian churches of various stripes are realizing that you cannot just maintain the status quo. We are increasingly in a missional setting. Hall says, “Those churches which have a heritage of being separatists and not being involved in public social affairs are the very ones for the past several years that have become extremely involved in politics and social, public matters”—and he sees that as quite ironic. I think it is in this section, too, where Hall talks about the greatest or the most influential events in church history in this regard were Constantinian approval in the Roman Empire of the Christian faith and the disestablishment of the Christian church in our own day effectively in Europe and increasingly so in North America. I asked the question, “What is the view of church history espoused in this article?” It states, “Pivotal events in all of church are what happened in the fourth century in the Roman Empire and then what has happened now in the twentieth century in Europe and North America.” I think this is a limited or linear view of church history.

One critique I have of this organization is that, until the last few years, they have not recognized the worldwide character of the church. Undoubtedly, what happened under Constantine in the fourth century as well as what has happened in the twentieth century in Europe and North America is terribly important for all of the Christian church. These events led to the church losing social and political position. However, to say that those are the two pivotal events in all of Christian history does not recognize the worldwide reality of church history or the Christian church. In the last few years, they have recognized it a little bit, and we are seeing it more in their publications. However, up until then, their view of church history has been rather limited. Hall asserts that we need to be intentional about being disestablished. He says, “We need to learn a critical and constructive theology of the church that is based on the charter of Scripture informed by the Holy Spirit in contrast to one that is entrenched in the ecclesial conventions of Christendom, and there is potential present in this enforced distancing from the world that is our present experience of disestablishment.” So, for example, he is saying that instead of lamenting the church’s no longer having the authoritative, public voice that it once had, we need to embrace that. We need to say, “This is putting us more in a position of what the experience of the church of Jesus Christ around the world has always been. So, let us be proactive about embracing it.” This is what he wants to assert in this article.

In a whole section of theology, Hall asserts, “But as we have been centuries in learning the rules of religious establishment, we shall need at least decades to learn the basis of our new vocation as a witnessing community—as salt, yeast, and light.” Again, I ask the question, “Who is ‘we’?” Here, he is

not allowing his corporate identity to be informed by who we are as the Lord's people. We, as the Lord's people, have not learned religious establishment. We have never been religiously established. We have been in the West, but has the church in India ever been religiously established? Has the church in Japan or China ever been religiously established? No. Again, I am being picky with him, but I am doing it to make the point that there is a need to theologically rethink where we are as the church within society and our sociopolitical station. It is going to take a while to relearn that as salt, yeast, and light, we are truly pilgrims, strangers, and aliens in this life.

Daryl Guder, who also writes a great deal for this organization, talks about the North American setting and understanding its culture. He seems to have some helpful things to say that are becoming more familiar. Again, it becomes more and more confusing now with all of the postmodern talk. There has been so much postmodern critique of modernity and the rational, modern self that you do not want to join simply uncritically the postmodern march toward deconstructing everything. So, how can we be wise and self-critical in the mine field in which we find ourselves? We are walking with postmoderns and those who would unwittingly defend modernity while thinking they are defending the Christian faith as they do that. It strikes me that many wanted to defend the Roman Empire in the name of defending Christianity. When Rome was falling, they thought it was going to be the end of the Christian church. So, many think that the attack on the end of modern, scientific, rational thinking (if you will) is an attack on the Christian faith. You need, for the sake of analysis, to be able to separate those somehow and realize that Christianity does not rest solely on modern, scientific rationale. The misuse of science has waged an attack on the Christian faith for the last 200 years, using the certain Enlightenment ideals that have reduced ultimate reality to scientifically explainable fundamentals. However, this is not what I am talking about. I am talking about the kind of Christian thought that only uses a scientific proof method, an acultural, individualistic, and strictly rational way of articulating the Gospel; and if that gets threatened in any way, then the truth of the Gospel is being threatened. Again, it gets tricky, because propositional truth is basic to the Christian faith. However, propositional truth is not the only aspect of the Christian faith. It is not easy once you begin navigating in those waters, but to me, that is part of our being disestablished and being put in situations where we do not have all the answers.

Guder has some succinct outlines of moving from the modern self to the postmodern self. I am not going to take the time to go through his outlines, but I will summarize them. In looking at the reality of the modern, individual self that has come under so much attack from the postmodern side, we as Christian people, if nothing else, need to have an historical, intellectual framework for embracing community and the necessity of community for the Christian church. These quotations are from a book that was in the making at the time.

Nineteenth-century Japanese were among those who, when they met Westerners coming in, sensed that they were a different breed of human beings. They sensed that these people were truly overrunning the world and not always with malevolent intentions. It was for trade and communication sometimes. Nevertheless, they were a kind of people who were very confident, capable, equipped, and scientifically buttressed with a strong economy and military. At the same time, some Japanese intellectuals had a sense as well that among these very strong, confident, capable individuals was a sense of unease. This sense of unease is the "Cartesian anxiety" that many postmoderns refer to that describes this modern, rational self (if you will) that has been ripped away from its specific cultural location. The question they asked was, "Where does this person belong?" Different Japanese individuals sought the answer to this question in their own particular ways that were uniquely Japanese and were able to determine what it meant to be human in the full sense that made up for the lack of the rootless modern selves (culturally speaking) that they were encountering. As American society has developed, it has uprooted so many of us. Most people have family who are scattered here and there. It is not like there is a tight-knit tribe,

clan, or village where everyone knows everyone and the group is what really counts. Instead, we are ripped apart from that reality. We are rootless. We are to re-find that more fundamental community within in the body of Christ while recognizing that other forms of community—cultural or family groups—are also important to what it means to be human. So, in our post-industrial, urbanized, technical society, the reality of loneliness is a reality that needs to be met with the Gospel.

Now, there is a whole multifaceted understanding going on there of history, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, language, ethnicity, etc. However, to see that the corporate identity of people is very important in terms of how God has made us and how it needs to be rooted in the body of Christ is part of the picture in dealing with people coming out of the wake of modernity and into a situation of postmodernity.

Van Engen has some thoughts about looking at mission theology in the North American context. He says that he needed to draw on the experience of many of his Latin-American colleagues. He notes that we North Americans now need the perspectives and advice of our brothers and sisters from the two-thirds world. Here, he is talking about how many of his Latin-American colleagues point out how we need to learn more about evangelism. They ask, “Why are you not more enthusiastic about evangelism?” Van Engen notes the obstacles in American particular culture are the perception that God is not needed and the privatization of faith. However, it seems to me that public talk about religious matters is becoming increasingly acceptable. Talk about spirituality or God is by no means off the table anymore. It is a really interesting shift. It is not, though, in the same terms and framework that it was 20 years ago. Van Engen lists some objectives for overcoming these obstacles. First he mentions getting help from two-thirds world Christians to understand and analyze and to be exhorted and challenged. Then, looking at 2 Corinthians 5, he discusses the newness for evangelism in purpose, heart, urgency, programs and methods, and the conversion to God, the church, and the world.

You can see from the latest census and in your local communities that this part of the world, the United States, is an increasingly diverse setting. It is very difficult to live anywhere in a monolithic kind of setting. I have visited churches and preached in small, southern towns. There is usually a traditional white/black divide, and there is a line where the two intersect. This line is usually a literal line—a particular neighborhood or railroad tracks. In most communities, you have increasingly larger Hispanic communities that come in and do all of the gardening work and work at McDonald's and that sort of thing. How are we, as the church of Jesus Christ, going to take seriously that component of the Gospel that drives us to see the all-ness in corporate culture? There was a well-known church in the South in the 1960s during the Civil Rights movement where the session established what they called the “color guard.” The color guard was a group of men who stood outside the church and would not let protesting blacks come in because the judgment was that they were not coming in to worship but to disrupt. Those were difficult days. We live in a new day, but there are still divisions and gaps where children go to school, where people live, and in what people's property value really means to them. This is where you see our values. As one who has a family, is now a homeowner, or who is interested in where children go to school, the answers are not always easy or simplistic. How to handle these things is part of where we live out our convictions in the midst of diversity.

One statement that you hear a lot that relates to Acts 1:8 is “the nations have come to us” or “the world has come to us.” On one hand, that is very true and a very helpful thing to point out. I do not want to devalue this statement, because in many ways it is very, very true. Many people from different parts of the world have moved to the United States. For example, in Saint Louis there are all kinds of immigrants (both legal and illegal) and people of different nationalities. On the other hand, missiologically speaking, there is something faulty about that statement. When you say it, you are unwittingly excluding us from

the world and from the nations. You do not want to do that. Again, if we think that there is an island that is the center surrounded by the world and the nations, we are going back a few hundred years. This island is no longer an established island, it is no longer secluded, and it is no longer out of touch with other peoples. The church of Jesus Christ is indeed transcultural and intercultural. It is made up of all sorts of people and languages. It is just as miraculous that we speak of the Gospel in the English language as we do in Japanese, Syriac, Arabic, Aramaic, or Greek. How we let this filter into our behavior and how we live in communities is crucial. I would encourage you to add to our common understanding of Acts 1:8 an historical, cultural way of hearing Jesus. When He said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," that is indeed a very helpful model for taking care of business at home first, then with those who are nearby, and then to those who are far away. For us here at Covenant Seminary, "Jerusalem" is Creve Coeur, and "Judea" and "Samaria" are the greater Saint Louis area and Missouri. The United States and the remotest parts of the Earth are outside of those areas. However, if those feed instincts that Jerusalem is right here, it is going to perpetuate an out-of-date notion of what the world mission is all about. One way to help correct that notion is to see Jesus' words here as a prediction of what was going to happen throughout history. He said, "This is what is going to happen. You are going to receive power, and you are going to be my witnesses here in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world. This is what is going to happen." When the disciples pictured the remotest parts of the Earth, that was Spain for Paul. This is true for your ancestors as well. My ancestors were certainly in the uttermost parts of the Earth, if not beyond the uttermost parts of the Earth. It is going to have a proper relativizing effect to see that movement of the Gospel historically and culturally and to know that we are all recipients of the Gospel by virtue of it coming into our sorts of people and being translated into our language, whatever that language might be. It adds further appreciation of the macro glory, power, and mercy of the Gospel. So, I encourage you to add that meaning to what Jesus was saying in Acts 1:8.

Let us move now to topic 33, "Israel and the Nations." This is related to what we have been discussing. As an introductory note, I just want to say that it is unfortunate that the Western/non-Western categories remain with us. Some of us studied in Edinburgh at the center for the study of Christianity in the non-Western world. This is a negative definition. However, it is a remaining reality in the way history has moved in the past several centuries. It is a meaningful category, and we will talk about that next time.

To put it in its extreme form, there is a notion that there was old covenant Israel, which is us, and that those of us who are of European stock are new covenant Israel. (This is changing with all that has happened in Europe and with what is happening in North America in terms of Christianity receding so much.) For example, I have a book in my office about how the Anglo-Saxons are the New Israel. We all know about how in different points in the history of the United States there was a notion of being the city set on a hill. We still speak in ways that are somewhat different and more diffused, perhaps, than they used to be a few centuries ago. I am speaking in general terms. Generally speaking, when you move into non-Western settings, you are talking about old covenant Israel and a strong sense of discontinuity with the West.

Now, there are notable exceptions where you have Ethiopian Jews and Jews in India. In East Africa and Ethiopia, there are people who trace ancestry back to Solomon and the Queen of Sheba coming together. It is a little bit different for them. However, for many North American Westerners, that gap is there.

In order for all of us to overcome that gap, it is important first to note that within the ancient Near East, Israel had a unique monotheistic faith that Yahweh gave. God, the Creator, came to Abraham and developed from Abraham's lineage a particular, unique faith of one holy God who is separate. This is

unique among the ancient Near East. It is not unique because of the ethnic makeup of Israel. It is unique to who the Creator God is Himself and how He claims old covenant Israel for Himself by His grace and, as they follow Him, by their faith. The point of mentioning Genesis 12 and Romans 4 here is to note that old covenant Israel is old covenant Israel by faith. It turns out that it is in a particular sociopolitical setting tied in large part to a particular ethnic group and language in which God is at work in a particular way. However, it is not strictly, as Paul argues, by being an ethnic Jew that one is a member of old covenant Israel. It is by faith, not by ethnicity.

Ramachandra is from this kind of a setting and senses the gap in which some people want to disregard the unique role of old covenant Israel and focus strictly on their own ethnic, cultural pasts. For others, the tendency is to emphasize what God has done in Israel but totally neglect what God has been doing in all peoples throughout the world. In order to try to help bridge this gap, Ramachandra combines the two in a very helpful way. He says, "Israel existed as a nation at all only because of Yahweh's intention to redeem people from every nation." Again, it is not as though God started to exist with Abraham or that He started the work with Abraham. God made the world. He has always been concerned about all peoples. He came to Abraham in order to redeem the whole earth. Ramachandra continues, "While Yahweh works in all nations, in no other nation than Israel did He act for the sake of all nations."—In a unique way, God prepares the way for the Messiah, the Savior of the world, in old covenant Israel—"Israel's unique experience of Yahweh issues a unique sociopolitical witness to Yahweh among the nations." As God works in that special way, He does make them into a special place. Again, it is not because of their ethnicity but by God's grace, embraced by faith.

For those of us who are of European stock, one key is to realize that we do have that ethnicity, but it is not because of that ethnicity that we are a part of new covenant Israel. It is only by faith in God's grace. One might say, "I am Japanese. It is because I am Japanese that I am a special, elect person." It has been a tendency in Japan and still is to think, "We are Japanese; therefore, we are unique and special." Well, there is a uniqueness to all sorts of people, but that does not mean that you are embraced by God in some special way. It is only by faith in Jesus Christ. All have sinned, and all are justified alike—by faith in Jesus Christ.

We do not think that this relationship to old covenant Israel is a problem for us here. However, because it does not tend to be a problem, we are not aware of the problem it is for many non-Western people. It is an acute problem. I went over this to emphasize the disconnect that many have sensed, but it is a very acute, existential problem for many Christians. It has become a different problem theologically. However, as one of my mentors used to say, "The Old Testament is like an old relative. You can stick him in the back room, but he always keeps coming out." Thank the Lord that the old covenant is part of our foundation as we as the new covenant Israel—the multiethnic, international new covenant Israel—walk by faith as well.