

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement for the Mission Field Worldwide.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

A lawyer came to Jesus to test him and inquired: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25-37)

Jesus said, "What is written in the law?"

The lawyer answered him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

Jesus responded, "You have answered right: do this, and you will live."

To appear righteous and to justify himself, the lawyer asked, "And who is my neighbor?"

The lawyer was a Jew, and the Jewish spiritual leaders of the time believed that only other Jews were considered neighbors. The obligation of neighborliness did not extend to the Gentiles and definitely not to the Samaritans whom the Jews regarded as "dogs" and "half-breeds." The Jewish people hated the Samaritans so much that they would sometimes cross the Jordan River on a longer journey rather than travel through Samaria; hence, avoiding the despised tribe.

With this in mind, Jesus related the story now commonly referred to as the "Good Samaritan."

A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was beset by thieves. They beat him, robbed him, stripped him of his clothes, and left him lying half dead on the road. A priest, a man separated for the work of God, saw the beaten man and avoided him by walking on the other side of the road. Thereafter, a Levite came along. He looked at the bloody, wounded man,

examined him, and also passed by on the other side of the road. A Samaritan, loathed by the Jewish people, journeyed down this same road. When he beheld the Jew, naked and beaten, he was moved with compassion.

The Samaritan cleaned, treated, and bandaged the wounds of the Jew. He put him on his animal and took him to an inn. He paid the host to lodge and feed the Jew, leaving instructions to care for him. The Samaritan assured the innkeeper that if more expenses were incurred, he would pay for them upon his return.

Upon finishing the story, Jesus asked, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man that fell among thieves?" The lawyer responded, "The man that had mercy upon him." Jesus concluded with an admonition and challenge: "Go, and do thou likewise."

As children of God, we are all called to have the heart and mind of this Samaritan. In a culture of bigotry and prejudice against the Samaritans by the Jews, it was a Samaritan who ministered in love to the needs of a Jew. How interesting that Jesus did not tell of a Jew helping a wounded Samaritan. It should make no difference to children of God whether they are born into a group of the despised or the despisers. We are to be kind and loving to everyone we encounter regardless of tribe, caste, nation, religion, color, or family. This is one of the pillars of Christian living and should differentiate God's people from their respective societies and cultures. ■



"We are to be kind and loving to everyone we encounter regardless of tribe, caste, nation, religion, color, or family."

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WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT...

Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 24:35

Relationship of Love

Matt. 22:37-40; John 14:21-23; 1 John 4:7-11

Repentance

Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10

New Birth

John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;
Eph. 2:1, 5-6

Freedom From Sin

1 John 5:18; Matt. 1:21; John 8:11

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:2; Acts 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Holiness

Luke 1:73-75; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16;
Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:22

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21; Romans 14:17; John 18:36

The Church

Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col 1:18

Unity

John 17:20-23; Gal 3:28; Rev. 18:2-4

Ordinances

Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 26:26-30;
1 Cor. 11:23-27; John 13:14-17

Divine Healing

Luke 4:18; Isaiah 53:4-5; James 5:13-16

Sanctity of Marriage

Matt. 19:5-6; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3;
1 Cor. 7:10-11

Outward Appearance

1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15; Deut. 22:5

End of Time

2 Peter 3:7-12; John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10;
Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

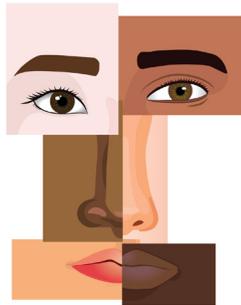
John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15

THE BEAUTY OF DIVERSITY

When God beheld all He had created, "...it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). The trees, herbs, flowers, birds, sea creatures, and the animals were varied and colorful. Nature itself speaks of a God who loves diversity. Mankind is no different. He created all of us unique, for there are no two people completely alike.



Humans have different personalities, dispositions, strengths, and looks. In addition to individual differences, there are distinct and varied ethnicities and cultures among groups dispersed throughout the world. Diversity is not to be feared by God's children but rather embraced. While all people are equal in the sight of God, life is much more interesting with diversity. Christians should appreciate God's beautiful creation of diverse humanity.

There is nothing wrong with ethnic groups valuing and appreciating their own heritage provided they do not devalue the heritage and ethnicities of others. The world wrongly promotes multiculturalism with a worldview that is human-centered rather than God-centered. Christians can love and enjoy the variety of ethnicities and cultures without falling into the quagmire of moral relativism that is so often tied with worldly multiculturalism.

Cultures of societies should be appreciated with the understanding that all beliefs and values are not on the same moral plane. The gospel was not preached to destroy cultures; but when cultural practices are in contradiction to the Word of God people should rise above them and give preeminence to God's truth. There is beauty in the diversity of humankind when coupled with the righteousness of God. ■

**"May God hasten the time when all race prejudice may
be obliterated and every soul for whom Christ died be
recognized as precious in His sight."**

—F. G. Smith (Pioneer minister of the Church of God, 1901)

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Editorial



Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. — Matthew 7:12

Our world would be a much better place if people would follow this simple precept as a rule of life: Treat everyone as you want to be treated. The news is full of reports of discrimination, hatred, unforgiveness, segregation, racism, and strife. I am so thankful that Jesus Christ not only taught a better path to follow but also gives grace and divine love for people of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities enabling all to get along in peace and harmony.

The subject of this issue of the Gospel Truth is “Christian Equality.” God created all of us equal, and though we have diversity of language, background, skin color, etc., we as Christians should love everybody and treat everyone with respect.

As I meditated on this subject, I considered having contributing writers from various countries and ethnicities. There are issues of discrimination in every country whether it be from racism, tribalism, caste systems, etc. We can all learn from one another and there is value in sharing. However, the Lord brought me to this conclusion: We all have thoughts, feelings, and a story to tell, but the standard of truth is not dependent upon my story or your story. The Word of God is the standard of truth by which everything must be measured, irrespective of our ideas and thoughts. It is a sad commentary when a Christian has more allegiance to ethnicity and cultural background than to faith in Christ.

Many people make exceptions for their attitudes and behaviors based on their experiences on all sides of this topic. Lord help us to look into the mirror of God’s Word and examine our own lives. All people are not treated equally and respectfully because of sin. There is prejudice, racism, and discrimination based on wealth, skin tone, tribe, and caste. It exists in North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Regardless of the type of discrimination around us, Christians are to love and value all people. We are not to bring the prejudices and bitterness of society into the Church of God; we are to rise above them by the grace of God. Injustices and hurts are to be committed to the Lord.

It is wrong to judge or mistreat someone because of the color of skin, whether it be black, brown, or white. It is instinctually easier to accept that a rich man should not discriminate against a poor man and that a tribe in power should not be prejudiced against a weaker tribe. However, it is equally vital for a poor man not to discriminate against a rich man and for a weaker tribe not to be prejudiced against a more politically powerful tribe.

While my experience is different from yours, I have been misjudged, mistreated, profiled, and cheated because of the color of my skin both at home and abroad. I have experienced it by people professing to be Christians and by sinners in the world. When something rose up inside of me because of the injustice, God let me know that I was to forgive and not be bitter. That is the Bible standard!

We as saints are not to measure ourselves by the standard of the world, but we are to treat everyone with love and forgive those that have trespassed against us. May God help His people to dwell together in unity.

Michael W. Smith

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Bible Study Guide

Subject: Christian Equality (Discrimination)

Scripture Reading: *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.* — Galatians 3:26-28

Definition: Discrimination means distinguishing between two or more people or things (Vocabulary.com). However, it is commonly used to reference the unfair or prejudicial treatment of one group of people above another.

Summary: All people are created by God and equal in His sight. The gospel was to people of every language, color, tribe, nationality, and socio-economic status. Christians are to be in unity and to love everybody, rising above the discrimination, unforgiveness, and prejudices of this world.

I. Created by God

- A. Genesis 1:27 God created humans in His image.
- B. Malachi 2:10 All have one father.
- C. Acts 17:26 All races descended from one origin.
- D. Proverbs 22:2 The Lord made both rich and poor.

II. A Universal Gospel

- A. John 3:16 God loves everyone.
- B. Galatians 3:26-28 All are the children of God.
- C. Revelation 14:6 Gospel preached to all races.
- D. Revelation 5:9-10 People out of every nation redeemed.
- E. Romans 10:12 No difference between the Jew and the Greek.

III. No Respector of Persons

- A. Acts 10:34-35 God is no respecter of persons. (See also Romans 2:11).
- B. James 2:1-10 Partiality and prejudice is sin.

IV. Middle Wall of Partition

- A. Ephesians 2:11-19 Barrier between Jews and Gentiles was broken. All are fellow citizens.
- B. Acts 10:28 No man should be called common.
- C. 1 Corinthians 12:25 There should be no division in the body.

V. One in Christ

- A. 1 Corinthians 10:17 One bread and one body.
- B. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 Many members and races but one body.
- C. Romans 12:5 Members one of another.

VI. Unity

- A. John 17:20-22 Jesus prays for unity.
- B. Psalm 133:1-3 Dwell together in unity!

- C. Philippians 2:3-5 Esteem others better than yourself.

VII. Love As Brethren

- A. John 13:34-35 Commandment to love one another.
- B. 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 Increase and abound in love.
- C. 1 Peter 1:22 Love one another with a pure heart.
- D. 1 Peter 3:8-9 Have compassion; love as brethren.
- E. 1 John 3:14-18 He that loveth not his brother abides in death.

VIII. Righteous Judgment

- A. Leviticus 19:15 Poor or mighty, judge righteously.
- B. John 7:24 Judge not according to appearance.

IX. Personal Response to Prejudice

- A. Mark 11:25-26 Forgive people's trespasses.
- B. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 Do not render evil for evil.
- C. Matthew 5:43-44 Love, pray, do good.
- D. Hebrews 12:14-15 Guard against a root of bitterness.

X. Not of This World

- A. John 17:15-17 In the world but not of the world.
- B. Romans 12:2 Be not conformed to this world.

Conclusion

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 2:3-5



CHRISTIAN EQUALITY VS. DISCRIMINATION

The teachings of Jesus Christ supersede the cultural practices and norms of this generation. In a world where hate, strife, prejudice, and discrimination have abounded since the beginning of time, there is a powerful and liberating call and experience to love, compassion, forgiveness, and equality.



“Christians are not to be partial or show favoritism but are to love and be respectful to all people.”

Created by God

While there is diversity of ethnicity, tribe, nationality, language, color, and socioeconomic status, we are all creations of God and equal in His sight. “God created man in his own image... male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27). Because of sin, there have been people all over the world of every generation who mistreated individuals and groups of people because of differences. However, we all have one father, and it is God who “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). While the human family differs not only in outward appearance but also in personality, customs, laws, and traditions, all people come from a singular origin. As Proverbs 22:2 states: “The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all.” We are all brothers and sisters and are to respect one another and live together in unity and harmony.

A Universal Gospel

The gospel of salvation and hope is to all people. “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). The great love of God encompasses people of every background, and it was for all people that Jesus died. The apostle John spoke of the angel that preached the everlasting gospel unto “them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6). Paul wrote, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

No Respector of Persons

Peter, who well knew the separation that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles, spoke of a lasting truth. “I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-35). Paul speaks this same truth in Romans 2:11, “For there is no respect of persons with God.” God loves all people and does not discriminate against anyone. He is not partial and does not favor one person over another because of wealth, influence, color of skin, language, or family. Christians should, yea must, have the same spirit and attitude toward people who are different from themselves. James deals clearly with this subject in the second chapter. If a rich man and a poor man come into the assembly, and special regard is shown to the rich man, is this not partiality? “If you have respect of persons, ye commit sin” (James 2:1-10). This is plain teaching and is applicable to all Christians today. The truth of the Word of God must be applied where there is segregation, prejudice, tribalism, caste systems, and discrimination of any kind. The spirit of acceptance and kindness is to be reflected in Christians of every tribe, every color, and every caste. Christians are not to be partial or show favoritism but are to love and be respectful to all people.

Middle Wall of Partition

Through the blood of Christ, the middle wall of separation between the Jews and Gentiles has been broken down. Christ hath reconciled “both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.... Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens

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with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:11-19). There is to be no division or discrimination in the family of God, but all members should have care one for another (1 Corinthians 12:25). There are people who have prejudices against others because of their tribe or the color of their skin and view them as inferior. The Gentiles were seen as inferior by the Jews, but Peter testified in Acts 10:28, “God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” It is wrong to view a race of people as less valuable or important, for all are equal.

One in Christ

While the world may segregate and divide, the Scripture teaches that oneness should exist among God’s people. “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Romans 12:5). “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). For there to be unity where there are natural differences, we must have the mind of Christ and follow the exhortation found in Philippians 2:3, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

Love As Brethren

Regardless of differences, Christians are commanded by Christ to, “Love one another” (John 13:34). Anything less is sin, for “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14). Peter taught to “have compassion one of another, love as brethren...be courteous” (1 Peter 3:8-9). The divine love of God destroys partiality, discrimination, racism, tribalism, segregation, etc. True love changes how we view and treat other people. A Christian with the love of God will respect and value all people.

Righteous Judgment

Judgments must be made in life, but they should never be based on ethnicity or economic status. The Levitical law addressed this: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor; nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Leviticus 19:15). Christ Himself taught to “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment”

(John 7:24). Let us judge according to truth and not upon preconceived notions and prejudices.

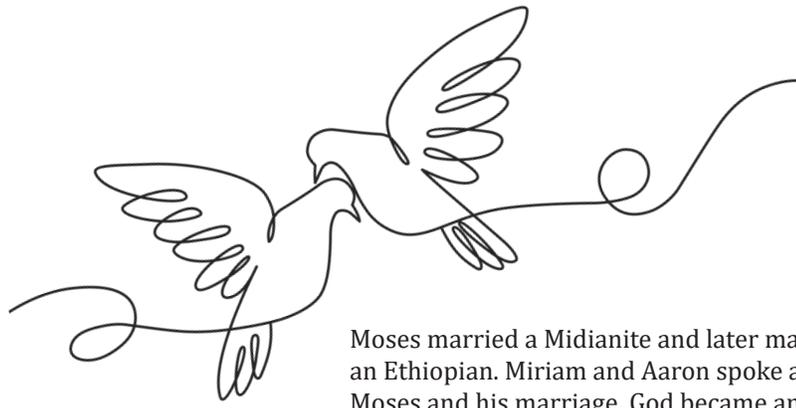
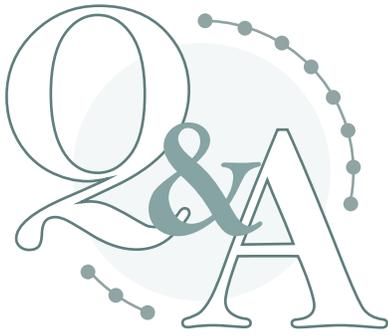
Personal Response to Prejudice

It is an unfortunate reality that some people will not always treat others with the equality, love, and respect which the Bible teaches. Christians should follow the teachings of the Bible regardless of what is happening in society. The Word of God addresses how the Christian is to respond when treated unjustly and discriminated against. Jesus taught unequivocally to forgive those who trespass against us. “If ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26). It is a cross hard to bear to experience discrimination, but there is no place for a saint to bear a grudge or unforgiveness. “See that none render evil for evil unto any man” (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Rather than retaliate, Jesus instructed to “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44). Just as there is too much discrimination, there is also too much unforgiveness. A Christian must be on guard when mistreated, “lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled” (Hebrews 12:14-15). Just as discriminating behavior has been passed down through generations, so has bitterness. We cannot gain entrance to Heaven with either one.

Not of This World

Jesus prayed that God would keep His disciples from the evil of the world (John 17:15). Evil abounds in our society; and there is much division in different countries over ethnicity, religion, color of skin, socioeconomic status, etc. Children of God are to rise above this strife and carnality, and it should never be brought in the Church of God. Saints are not to be “conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2), nor defined by the world and its ills. They are to set examples of love, respect, dignity, forgiveness, and acceptance of all people. There is no room for discrimination nor for bitterness. May God help every Christian to lay aside the carnal mindsets of this world and walk in holiness. The way of equality and acceptance is true, right, and beautiful. ■

“It is a cross hard to bear to experience discrimination, but there is no place for a saint to bear a grudge or unforgiveness.”



What does the Bible teach about interracial marriage?

The Old Testament law forbade the children of Israel to marry the inhabitants of Canaan land (Exodus 34:14-16). God told the Israelites to destroy the inhabitants and not to intermarry with them. God gave the reason for this instruction, and it had nothing to do with ethnicity or color of skin. “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them.... For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods” (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). God wanted His people to be holy and separate, exclusively worshipping Him.

When the Israelites began to intermarry with other nations and races in disobedience to God, they were influenced by idolatry and pagan worship. The prophets cried out against this practice (Malachi 2:11; Ezra 9:1-2). Because they mingled with the people of the land, their hearts were turned away from God. King Solomon is a sad example of this. “But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites...the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.... For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kings 11:1-5).

The commandment forbidding marriage between the Israelites and foreigners had nothing to do with race in and of itself but had everything to do with idolatrous influence. The New Testament teaches a very similar principle concerning marriage. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). Marriage is the closest yoke of all human relationships, and the New Testament teaches that a believer should not marry an unbeliever; it is not an issue of ethnicity or the color of one’s skin.

Moses married a Midianite and later married an Ethiopian. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses and his marriage. God became angry with them, not with Moses, and Miriam became leprous (Numbers 12:1, 9-10). Their protest had more to do with their power and influence than with the marriage itself. Bible commentator Albert Barnes wrote the following:

The marriage of Moses with a woman descended from Ham was not prohibited, so long as she was not of the stock of Canaan; but it would at any time have been offensive to that intense nationality which characterized the Jews. The Christian fathers note in the successive marriage of Moses with a Midianite and an Ethiopian a foreshadowing of the future extension to the Gentiles of God’s covenant and its promises.

In the New Testament, while there are still different ethnicities, “There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Romans 10:12). Ruth and Rahab are included in the lineage of Christ. Truly, God hath made of “one blood all nations” (Acts 17:26). The New Testament does not forbid interracial marriage.

Marriage is a very serious thing and there are many practical considerations. Marriage should be entered into with much prayer and counsel. Faith in Christ, not ethnicity or skin color, is the Biblical standard for choosing a spouse. However, issues of ethnicity, tradition, culture, caste, tribe, socioeconomic background, etc. should be prayerfully considered within one’s cultural context. Relationships with family, pressures from society, and the acceptance of future children should be considered. In some cultures, there are significant problems that would be caused by interracial marriage that would make the marriage very difficult. These considerations are not issues of sin but of wisdom and compatibility; they will vary from place to place and from situation to situation. ■



DID YOU KNOW?

“Discrimination is widespread and getting worse around the world, according to World Justice Project data.... 70% of countries have seen discrimination worsen between 2021 and 2022. Since 2015, discrimination has increased in three-fourths of countries that WJP studied.”

(2023, March 21). *Discrimination is Getting Worse Globally*. www.worldjusticeproject.org.



A Word
in Season

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

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But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.
—1 Peter 2:9

The Israelites had been a chosen or elected race and were a special people to God above all other people. They were separated from other nations so that they might exclusively worship God. It was God’s will for them to maintain their identity and not be polluted with idolatry of other nations. God wanted them to protect and defend their heritage at all costs. The Jews had a unique identity as God’s treasured people.

Jesus Christ came and reconciled us all to God through His blood. When we accept God’s forgiveness and are saved from the power of sin, we become new creatures. We have a wonderful, new identity in Jesus Christ as citizens of the kingdom of God. We have been chosen and are a royal priesthood.



People of the world are seeking for “identity.” There are bigots and people with prejudices against others. When people have that heart, it is often because they are not at true peace within themselves. Whether from hatred, insecurity, self-interest, pride, greed, misinformation, or ignorance, when one devalues another, it exposes an identity that is built upon a wrong foundation.

While we all have an earthly heritage and ethnicity, our primary identity should be found in God and in the fact that we are His children, for therein is true rest. Many struggle with who they are and what they look like. The Lord wants us to accept how He created us and to be at peace. We have been chosen by God and need not struggle with the vain identity issues of our society. It is our identity in Christ that will carry us through to eternity! ■

HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD