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Are There Really Different Races?

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By Ken Ham

What Constitutes a “Race”?

In the 1800s, before Darwinian evolution was popularized, most people, when talking about “races,” would be referring to such groups as the “English race,” “Irish race,” and so on. However, this all changed in 1859 when Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*.

Darwinian evolution was (and still is¹) inherently a racist philosophy, teaching that different groups or “races” of people evolved at different times and rates, so some groups are more like their apelike ancestors than others. Leading evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould claimed, “Biological arguments for racism may have been common before 1859, but they increased by orders of magnitude following the acceptance of evolutionary theory.”²

The Australian Aborigines, for instance, were considered the missing links between the apelike ancestor and the rest of mankind.³ This resulted in terrible prejudices and injustices towards the Australian Aborigines.⁴

Ernst Haeckel, famous for popularizing the now-discredited idea that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,”⁵ stated:

At the lowest stage of human mental development are the Australians, some tribes of the Polynesians, and the Bushmen, Hottentots, and some of the Negro tribes. Nothing, however, is perhaps more remarkable in this respect, than that some of the wildest tribes in southern Asia and eastern Africa have no trace whatever of the first foundations of all human civilization, of family life, and marriage. They live together in herds, like apes.⁶

Racist attitudes fueled by evolutionary thinking were largely responsible for an African pygmy being displayed, along with an orangutan, in a cage in the Bronx zoo.⁷ Indeed, Congo pygmies were once thought to be “small apelike, elfish creatures” that “exhibit many ape-like features in their bodies.”⁸

As a result of Darwinian evolution, many people started thinking in terms of the different people groups around the

world representing different “races,” but within the context of evolutionary philosophy. This has resulted in many people today, consciously or unconsciously, having ingrained prejudices against certain other groups of people.⁹

However, *all* human beings in the world today are classified as *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Scientists today admit that, biologically, there really is only one race of humans. For instance, a scientist at the Advancement of Science Convention in Atlanta stated, “Race is a social construct derived mainly from perceptions conditioned by events of recorded history, and it has no basic biological reality.” This person went on to say, “Curiously enough, the idea comes very close to being of American manufacture.”¹⁰

Reporting on research conducted on the concept of race, ABC News stated, “More and more scientists find that the differences that set us apart are cultural, not racial. Some even say that the word *race* should be abandoned because it’s meaningless.” The article went on to say that “we accept the idea of race because it’s a convenient way of putting people into broad categories, frequently to suppress them—the most hideous example was provided by Hitler’s Germany. And racial prejudice remains common throughout the world.”¹¹

In an article in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*,¹² researchers argued that the term “race” is basically so meaningless that it should be discarded.

More recently, those working on mapping the human genome announced “that they had put together a draft of the entire sequence of the human genome, and the researchers had unanimously declared, there is only one race—the human race.”¹³

Personally, because of the influences of Darwinian evolution and the resulting prejudices, I believe everyone (and especially Christians) should abandon the term “race(s).” We could refer instead to the different “people groups” around the world.

The Bible and “Race”

The Bible does not even use the word *race* in reference to people,¹⁴ but it does describe all human beings as being of “one blood” (Acts 17:26). This of course emphasizes that we are all related, as all humans are descendants of the first man, Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45),¹⁵ who was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27).¹⁶ The Last Adam, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45) also became a descendant of Adam. Any descendant of Adam can be saved because our mutual relative by blood (Jesus) died and rose again. This is why the gospel can (and should) be preached to all tribes and nations.

Can the Bible be used to justify racist attitudes?

The inevitable question arises, “If the Bible teaches all humans are the same, where was the church during the eras of slavery and segregation? Doesn’t the Bible actually condone the enslavement of a human being by another?”

Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible mention slaves and slavery. As with all other biblical passages, these must be understood in their grammatical-historical context.

Dr. Walter Kaiser, former president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Old Testament scholar, states:

The laws concerning slavery in the Old Testament appear to function to moderate a practice that worked as a means of loaning money for Jewish people to one another or for handling the problem of the prisoners of war. Nowhere was the institution of slavery as such condemned; but then, neither did it have anything like the connotations it grew to have during the days of those who traded human life as if it were a mere commodity for sale. . . . In all cases the institution was closely watched and divine judgment was declared by the prophets and others for all abuses they spotted.¹⁷

Job recognized that all were equal before God, and all should be treated as image-bearers of the Creator.

If I have despised the cause of my male or female servant when they complained against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? When He punishes, how shall I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb? (Job 31:13–15)

In commenting on Paul’s remarks to the slaves in his epistles, Peter H. Davids writes:

The church never adopted a rule that converts had to give up their slaves. Christians were not under law but under grace. Yet we read in the literature of the second century and later of many masters who upon their conversion freed their slaves. The reality stands that it is difficult to call a person a slave during the week and treat them like a brother or sister in the church. Sooner or later the implications of the kingdom they experienced in church seeped into the behavior of the masters during the week. Paul did in the end create a revolution, not one from without, but one from within, in which a changed heart produced changed behavior and through that in the end brought about social change. This change happened wherever the kingdom of God was expressed through the church, so the world could see that faith in Christ really was a transformation of the whole person.¹⁸

Those consistently living out their Christian faith realize that the forced enslavement of another human being goes against the biblical teaching that all humans were created in the image of God and are of equal standing before Him (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Indeed, the most ardent abolitionists during the past centuries were Bible-believing Christians. John Wesley, Granville Sharp, William Wilberforce, Jonathan Edwards, Jr., and Thomas Clarkson all preached against the evils of slavery and worked to bring about the abolition of the slave trade in England and North America. Harriet Beecher Stowe conveyed this message in her famous novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. And of course, who can forget the change in the most famous of slave traders? John Newton, writer of “Amazing Grace,” eventually became an abolitionist after his conversion to Christianity, when he embraced the truth of Scripture.

“Racial” Differences

But some people think there must be different races of people because there appear to be major differences between various groups, such as skin color and eye shape.

The truth, though, is that these so-called “racial characteristics” are only minor variations among people groups. If one were to take any two people anywhere in the world, scientists have found that the basic genetic differences between these two people would typically be around 0.2 percent—even if they came from the same people group.¹⁹ But these so-called “racial” characteristics that people think are major differences (skin color, eye shape, etc.) “account for only 0.012 percent of human biological variation.”²⁰

Dr. Harold Page Freeman, chief executive, president, and director of surgery at North General Hospital in Manhattan, reiterates, “If you ask what percentage of your genes is reflected in your external appearance, the basis by which we talk about race, the answer seems to be in the range of 0.01 percent.”²¹

In other words, the so-called “racial” differences are absolutely trivial—overall, there is more variation *within* any group than there is *between* one group and another. If a white person is looking for a tissue match for an organ transplant, for instance, the best match may come from a black person, and vice versa. ABC News claims, “What the facts show is that there are differences among us, but they stem from culture, not race.”²²

The only reason many people think these differences are major is because they’ve been brought up in a culture that has taught them to see the differences this way. Dr. Douglas C. Wallace, professor of molecular genetics at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta, stated, “The criteria that people use for race are based entirely on external features that we are programmed to recognize.”²³

Origin of People Groups

Those with darker skin tend to live in warmer climates, while those with lighter skin tend to live in colder climates. Why are certain characteristics more prominent in some areas of the world?

We know that Adam and Eve were the first two people. Their descendants filled the earth. However, the world’s population was reduced to eight during the Flood of Noah. From these eight individuals have come all the tribes and nations. It is likely that the skin shade of Noah and his family was middle brown. This would enable his sons and their wives to produce a variety of skin shades in just one generation. Because there was a common language and everybody lived in the same general vicinity, barriers that may have prevented their descendants from freely intermarrying weren’t as great as they are today. Thus, distinct differences in features and skin color in the population weren’t as prevalent as they are today.

In *Genesis 11* we read of the rebellion at the Tower of Babel. God judged this rebellion by giving each family group a different language. This made it impossible for the groups to understand each other, and so they split apart, each extended family going its own way, and finding a different place to live. The result was that the people were scattered over the earth.²⁴

Because of the new language and geographic barriers, the groups no longer freely mixed with other groups, and the result was a splitting of the gene pool. Different cultures formed, with

certain features becoming predominant within each group. The characteristics of each became more and more prominent as new generations of children were born. If we were to travel back in time to Babel, and mix up the people into completely different family groups, then people groups with completely different characteristics might result. For instance, we might find a fair-skinned group with tight, curly dark hair that has blue, almond-shaped eyes. Or a group with very dark skin, blue eyes, and straight brown hair.²⁵

Some of these (skin color, eye shape, and so on) became general characteristics of each particular people group through various selection pressures (environmental, sexual, etc.) and/or mutation. For example, because of the protective factor of melanin, those with darker skin would have been more likely to survive in areas where sunlight is more intense (warmer, tropical areas near the equator), as they are less likely to suffer from diseases such as skin cancer. Those with lighter skin lack the melanin needed to protect them from the harmful UV rays, and so may have been more likely to die before they were able to reproduce. UVA radiation also destroys the B vitamin folate, which is necessary for DNA synthesis in cell division. Low levels of folate in pregnant women can lead to defects in the developing baby. Again, because of this, lighter-skinned individuals may be selected against in areas of intense sunlight.

On the flip side, melanin works as a natural sunblock, limiting the sunlight's ability to stimulate the liver to produce vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium and build strong bones. Since those with darker skin need more sunlight to produce vitamin D, they may not have been as able to survive as well in areas of less sunlight (northern, colder regions) as their lighter-skinned family members, who don't need as much sunlight to produce adequate amounts of vitamin D. Those lacking vitamin D are more likely to develop diseases such as rickets (which is associated with a calcium deficiency), which can cause slowed growth and bone fractures. It is known that when those with darker skin lived in England during the Industrial Revolution, they were quick to develop rickets because of the general lack of sunlight.²⁶

Of course, these are generalities. Exceptions occur, such as in the case of the darker-skinned Inuit tribes living in cold northern regions. However, their diet consists of fish, the oil of which is a ready source of vitamin D, which could account for their survival in this area.

Real science in the present fits with the biblical view that all people are rather closely related—there is only one race biologically.

Cross-Cultural Problems

Because many people groups have been separated since the Tower of Babel, they have developed many cultural differences. If two people from very different cultures marry, they can have a number of communication problems, even if both are Christians. Expectations regarding relationships with members of the extended family, for example, can also differ. Even people from different English-speaking countries can have communication problems because words may have different meanings.

Conclusion

The church could greatly relieve the tensions over racism

(particularly in countries like America), if only the leaders would teach biblical truths about our shared ancestry: all people are descended from one man and woman; all people are equal before God; all are sinners in need of salvation; all need to build their thinking on God's Word and judge all their cultural aspects accordingly; all need to be one in Christ and put an end to their rebellion against their Creator.

When the prophet Samuel went to anoint the next king of Israel, he thought the oldest of Jesse's sons was the obvious choice due to his outward appearance. However, we read in 1 Samuel 16:7, "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.'" God doesn't look at our outward biological appearance; He looks on our inward spiritual state.

Footnotes

1. J.P. Rushton, professor of psychology at the University of Western Ontario, Lond, Ontario, Canada, *Race, Evolution and Behavior*, www.harbornet.com/folks/theedrich/JP_Rushton/Race.htm.
2. S.J. Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, Belknap-Harvard Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1977, 127–128.
3. Missing links with mankind in early dawn of history, *New York Tribune*, p. 11, February 10, 1924.
4. D. Monaghan, The body-snatchers, *The Bulletin*, November 12, 1991, pp. 30–38; Blacks slain for science's white superiority theory, *The Daily Telegraph Mirror*, April 26, 1994.
5. For more information on the fallacious nature of this idea, see answersingenesis.org/go/embryonic.
6. E. Haeckel, *The History of Creation*, 1876, 363–363.
7. J. Bergman, Ota Benga: the man who was put on display in the zoo! *Creation* 16(1):48–50, 1993.
8. Keane, Arthur H.J., "Anthropological Curiosities - The Pygmies of the World". *Scientific American Supplement* 64, no. 1650 (August 17, 1907): 99.
9. This is not to say that evolution is the cause of racism. *Sin* is the cause of racism. However, Darwinian evolution fueled a particular form of racism.
10. R.L. Hotz, Race has no basis in biology, researchers say, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, p. A3, February 20, 1997.
11. We're all the same, ABC News, September 10, 1998, www.abcnews.com/sections/science/DyeHard/dye72.html.
12. S.C. Cameron and S.M. Wycoff, The destructive nature of the term race: growing beyond a false paradigm, *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 76:277–285, 1998.
13. N. Angier, Do races differ? Not really, DNA shows, *New York Times* web, Aug. 22, 2000.
14. In the original, *Ezra 9:2* refers to "seed," *Romans 9:3* to "kinsmen according to the flesh."
15. For more on this teaching, see chapter 6, *Cain's Wife—Who Was She?*
16. Contrary to popular belief, mankind does not share an apelike ancestor with other primates. To find out the truth behind the alleged apemen, visit answersingenesis.org/go/anthropology.
17. W.C. Kaiser, Jr. et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1996, 150.
18. Ref. 17, 644.
19. J.C. Gutin, End of the rainbow, *Discover*, pp. 72–73, November 1994.
20. Ref. 12.
21. Ref. 13.
22. Ref. 11.
23. Ibid.
24. As they went, the family groups took with them the knowledge that had been passed to them about the creation and Flood events. Although these accounts have been changed over time, they reflect the true account found in the Bible. For more information, see answersingenesis.org/go/legends.
25. This assumes that each trait is independently inherited, which may not always be the case. Although there are many instances in which a certain trait shows up in a person of a different ethnic group (e.g., almond-shaped eyes in a woman with very dark skin, or blue eyes in a man with tightly curled brown hair and tan skin).
26. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melanin.

FUNNIES

A little boy got into an argument with some lads twice his size. He drew a line in the dirt and dared them to cross it. The boys accepted the challenge and crossed over the line. Whereupon the little fellow smiled and said, "Now you're on my side."

A teenage boy was applying for his first job. The personnel assistant was explaining to him about the benefits of the job. As she told him that after a year on the job, he would be entitled to one week of paid vacation, the boy's eyes widened in wonder and he asked, "Anywhere?"

The hospital patient was worried. "Are you sure it's pneumonia, doctor?" he asked. "I've heard of cases where a doctor treated a person for pneumonia and he ended up dying of something else."

"Don't worry," said the doctor. "When I treat a patient for pneumonia, he dies of pneumonia."

Andy says he doesn't the government. "When I was a boy I walked two miles to school every day. Then the government

taxes us for a school bus. The bus got us to school in five minutes. Then the government taxed us for a new gymnasium so the kids could get exercise.!"

A group of crooks broke into the Fostoria Bureau of Concern in Fostoria, Ohio. The agency serves the poor and needy and keeps little cash on hand. But the criminals found a safe in the organization's administrative office and took off with the stash. But—oops!—the safe was empty. The bureau's money was actually in a new safe the criminals hadn't found. The agency had meant to get rid of the old safe but hadn't found anyone to cart the heavy thing off.

A sporting goods store had just put up a large display of expensive fishing tackle. A customer picked up one of the newest lures and inspected the gleaming metal and colorful plastic. "Do the fish really go for these things?" he asked the salesperson. "Dunno," replied the clerk, "We don't sell 'em to the fish."

James called the fire department and shouted that his house was on fire. "How do we get there?" asked the dispatcher. "Don't you have your red truck anymore?" replied James.