

Tribalism

“...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all things and in all people.” (Colossians 3:11, CEB)

I want to elaborate on a topic that Pastor David mentioned in one of his recent sermons in the Unafraid series: tribalism. No, this doesn't refer to being a fan of the Indians, but rather to participating in a group loyalty that is based on an 'us vs. them' attitude. At its most basic level tribalism results from the human instinct to want to belong to a group of people who are like us. This is not necessarily a bad thing; we are born into a particular family, live in a particular neighborhood in a particular community, and have a lifestyle that is characteristic of these circumstances. These social groupings help us to organize and make sense of the world we live in.

But tribalism becomes detrimental to the greater social good when it is used to depersonalize those who are not members of our 'tribe'. They too often become objects of scorn rather than fellow humans created in God's image and likeness. Today's world seems to have moved into an unproductive and unhealthy expression of tribalism. Our country is divided into 'blue' and 'red' counties and states, with precious little 'purple' to be found anywhere. Identity politics dominates public discourse, with countless surveys continuously subdividing us into ever more refined categories of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, income level, education level, occupation, marital status, generation (Baby Boomer, Generation X, Millennial, and Generation Z), etc. etc. etc. Consumerism is being driven to unprecedented levels by micro customized marketing strategies generated by ever more pervasive database information on individual preferences.

So, what is the Christian perspective on these trends? Scripture is very clear that followers of Jesus Christ have their identity first and foremost in Him. Paul says that we are “*God's sons and daughters*” (Romans 8:14), “*baptized by one Spirit into one body*” (1 Corinthians 12:13), “*all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28), and that “*Christ is all things and in all people*” (Colossians 3:11). In Galatians 5 he contrasts the actions of selfish motives with the fruits of the Spirit. One of the former actions is described as 'group rivalry', 'divisions', or 'factions' depending on which translation you read. The King James version even uses the word 'heresies' which best fits the meaning of the original Greek! Paul says that “*those who do these kinds of things won't inherit God's kingdom*”. Instead he says “*Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature*” (Romans 12:2).

Yale law professor Amy Chua has written a book titled Political Tribes: Group Instinct and the Fate of Nations in which she argues that America must rediscover a national identity that transcends our political tribes while acknowledging the reality of group differences. This identity should be based on our constitutional democracy which was designed to balance and reconcile local (state) and national interests. While the history of the United States has not always been a perfect expression of this balance, we have managed to survive 242 years. Now is the time to focus on our long term success rather than our short term differences.

We as Christians have a history of over 2000 years which has also not always been a perfect expression of Scriptural principles. Yet we have living within our hearts the Spirit of the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the universe. We should say with the Apostle John “*the one who is in you (us) is greater than the one who is in the world*”. Even more should WE be able to live from an eternal Kingdom perspective than from a temporary human political perspective.

Galatians 2:20;
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