

## Week 5: The Desire to Belong

NCAC Adult Sunday School

December 4, 2022



**The Bible gives much space to genealogies. What does that tell us about how the Bible thinks of individual identity? Is that a useful way of thinking about identity today?**

**Key Resource:** *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* by Carl R. Trueman (Crossway, 2022)

**Course Goal:** To better understand how a changing concept of self has led to this “strange new world” in which we now live and to consider what Scripture teaches about how we should respond.

### THE DESIRE TO BELONG

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“Think of a typical teenager. There is no person more prone to emphasize independence and freedom than a teenager wanting to assert their emerging adulthood by breaking free of the constraints placed upon them by parents. Often this manifests itself in choice of clothing..Yet this choice of clothing, while intended as a display of individuality and independence, often leads teenagers to adopt a remarkably conformist appearance. In short, teenagers frequently all look, dress, and talk like each other. This highlights that fact that human beings do not simply wish to be free. We also wish to belong, to be part of a group where we are accepted and affirmed. We are social creatures and thrive best in situations where we are connected to others and have a sense of communal identity.” (SNW, p. 115)

**What other ways have you observed people gravitating towards community? Why do we do this?**

“...we all wish to belong to a group or groups that make us feel valued. This leads us to the politics of recognition...Societies as a whole have frameworks for recognition. We might call this their ethical structure: the set of cultural standards and expectations to which individuals need to conform in order to be considered full members of a particular society or community. Refusal to conform to these norms is likely to result in a refusal of full membership—a denial of full recognition—to the one who is deviant by the relevant standards.” (SNW, pp. 115-116)

**Think about some communities you are part of. What makes you part of those communities? What might cause someone to be removed from some of those communities?**

"Nations almost by definition involve so vast an area of geographical space, such large populations, and so many individual communities—villages, towns, cities—that it is impossible for everyone to know everyone else. This means that, for a nation to exist, its members must imagine that they hold things in common that give them a coherent identity as a body of people...The trucker in Seattle must identify at some deep level with the restaurant owner in Florida if the idea of America is to make any sense. What binds them together, of course, is in part a strong national narrative, something that gives them a sense of history, a sense of belonging, a sense of pride—in short, a sense of identity." (SNW, pp. 117-118)

**Trueman claims that our common sense of what it means to be "American" is being lost. In what ways do you observe this to be true? What are the implications of this?**

"In the past, civil society was possible because, whatever the differences that existed between citizens, there was a deeper narrative, a deeper sense of identity and community, that all shared and that served to relativize such...Modern American society is fragmenting because the imagined communities to which people choose to belong lack any shared narrative. Therefore, the terms of recognition that one group wishes to see American society adopt are often antithetical to those of others. And this leads to further conflict because the very existence of alternative narratives is a threat to a given community's identity." (SNW, pp. 124-125)

*He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." (Elijah, in 1 Kings 9:10)*

**It is hard to stand alone, especially in a world that is hostile to our faith. How might community help with this?**

## THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

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"The letters LGBTQ+ loom large in the cultural and political imagination of our day. The coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer people is without a doubt the greatest political success story of the last half century. In the 1960s, homosexuality was still illegal in many Western countries. Even Barack Obama did not dare to support gay marriage unequivocally until 2012. Yet today, even to voice dissent from trans ideology is likely to earn one a ferocious social media beating and exclusion from polite liberal society. The speed, depth, and comprehensive scope of the LGBTQ+'s triumphant cultural conquest is impressive." (SNW, p. 129)

**How have you seen the LGBTQ+ alliance successfully achieve some of its goals?**

**VIDEO: "Session Seven"**

"The first thing to note about the LGBTQ+ is that its different constituent members are actually divided over the very thing upon which an outsider might assume they are agreed: the nature and status of sex." (SNW, p. 130)

**What do these various groups have in common? What divides them?**

**Though the idea of this alliance eventually fracturing may sound appealing to evangelical Christians, why does Trueman say it may actually not be good news if we see this happening?**

## RESPONDING BIBLICALLY

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*"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10, ESV)*

**Scripture continually calls us to think of ourselves as part of the people of God. Why?**

**Trueman suggests that one thing believers can learn from the LGBTQ+ movement is how to work towards becoming a stronger community. How might we do this?**

**What does the Bible teach about how we think of the Christian community's place in the world?**

*<sup>27</sup> And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup> saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us."*

*<sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup> God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup> And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."*

*<sup>33</sup> When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. (Acts 5:27-33, ESV)*

**Why do Peter's words in Acts 5:27-33 enrage his audience?**

**How does the Christian message contradict the beliefs and viewpoints of many of our neighbors and our society at large?**

**How should we prepare ourselves and respond to the fact that the world is increasingly enraged by the Christian worldview?**

*<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." (Luke 10:30-37, ESV)*

**Despite the tension between their two groups, in this parable, the Samaritan sees the Levite as an individual and treats him with love. Although Trueman encourages us to work against some of the political aims of the LGBTQ+ movement, he also encourages us to see each person in this movement as an individual.**

**How should Christians relate to those who are part of the LGBTQ+ movement?**

**Can you give some practical examples of how we might love individuals within this movement while disagreeing with them on certain issues?**