

Why Racism is Sin

The Biblical Case against Racism

This morning I'd like to speak to you on a subject rarely addressed in Bible-believing circles: "The Biblical Case Against Racism." It's interesting that I have been asked to speak on the inauguration day of our nation's first African American president. We should all be thankful that much progress has been made in our society in the arena of race relations -- yet sadly, over 100 years after the emancipation of slaves in America, we are still struggling with this issue of race. Let me offer evidence of that: Why is it that Barack Obama is described by the media and perceived by most Americans as "black" when his mother was actually white? Think about it. The legacy of race is still with us. Even in Christian circles we continue to wrestle with racism. Sadly, it's still true—that the 11:00 hour on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America, as documented a few years ago by two white evangelical sociologists in their bombshell book entitled *Divided by Faith*. This book shows how, despite our good intentions, often evangelicals are actually preserving America's racial divide. The authors document that most whites feel that we have no real race problem in America -- whereas most A/A think otherwise because they still experience it.

Now when we refer to racism, we mean not only its **blatant forms**, such as South African apartheid, but also its more **subtle forms**, such as American discrimination in the social and economic spheres – for example, hiring and promotion practices, salary structures, renting apartments, buying and selling houses, etc. **Racism can be defined as *any explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races***. More specifically, and from a Christian standpoint, racism is ***any sinful action or attitude elevating (or idolizing) the superiority of one's race over another in such a way as to cause a lack of love***. In other words, it involves a failure to love as Christ loved. Ultimately, it's to ***hate others*** in our hearts and actions, and/or to act toward a race or individual in an oppressive, unjust, paternalistic or indifferent manner. Please note that racism, like any sin, is expressed in ***attitudes, thoughts and actions*** by an individual. But ***as individuals act together***, racism can be expressed by a group or institution. This is much harder for some conservative Christians to understand.

Let me illustrate **racism within our Christian settings**. Praise God, He is raising up a growing number of ethnically-mixed evangelical churches in our nation and many churches now have some Blacks and ethnics in their congregations. But how about in visible positions of leadership such as SS teachers, deacons, on pastoral staff, or as secretaries, or even as guest speakers to provide pulpit supply? See men, those of you who are now pastors, or who're going to be pastors and church leaders, need to condemn and correct publicly not just sins like abortion, sexual immorality, and drugs, but all moral and social evils of our time, including racism and discrimination in its various forms.

Likewise we rejoice that many **fundamental and evangelical schools** now have Black, Hispanic and ethnic students. But are we aggressively recruiting more minorities and really welcoming them to our campuses? And how about more minority representation on the faculty—and as secretaries, other staff, and in the administration? Or, on the board of trustees? What about scheduling more black and Hispanic chapel speakers and musicians? You see, racist attitudes can be expressed in numerous subtle, yet still sinful ways. We have certainly not arrived.

Now I'd like to quickly go through with you 10 Scriptural reasons why racism is sinful:

We begin this brief overview of the Biblical case against racism at what, for many, will be a surprising place in Scripture, namely the **creation account in Genesis 1**. There we read how God created every living organism and thing and **pronounced them good**. *Six times* in Gen. 1 it's recorded that God saw what he had made and declared it good. Everything was in its proper place and functioning as it should under the Sovereign Creator God. The whole scene teems with sanctified life. But then when Elohim created man *ex nihilo*, he declared it, you'll recall, to be **very good**. Why so? What makes man so unique among all the other living creatures? **Gen.1:26** tells us. The Creator God, in announcing his crowning creative work to all the members of his heavenly court, says "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.*" This is why man is the **climax**, the **pinnacle of God's creation**. He's the **divine image bearer**. [That's reinforced in Gen. 1: 27.]

Now however you understand the **divine image theologically**—and there are at least **three good views** as to what it means to be created in the image of God---the bottom line is this: God has **designed man to represent him** on earth, to **preside over all** things as **His vice regents** -- and he's **splendidly equipped** every man for this great task. *This means He's given to every man and woman **dignity and worth***. Each one is worthy of **respect and has essential value because he/she has the potential to contribute to society thru his presence, work and ideas**. Men, this is the first reason why racism is so wrong-headed--it **denies that all men were created in God's image**. See, racism is essentially a denial that all men are equally created **by him, like him and for him**. That we're all **equal in his sight in worth and dignity**. This point brings out the particular heinousness of racist attitudes. To treat a member of another ethnic group as inferior or with disrespect is to **despise the face of God**. And to despise the face of God is to invite His wrath. Amen?

[The NIV Study Bible adds: “Since man is made in God’s image, every human being is worthy of honor and respect; he neither is to be murdered (Gen 9:6) nor cursed (Jas 3:9).” Remember what James says? If we curse man, we actually curse the God who made him. Right?]

Now turn to **Exodus 20** for two more biblical reasons racism is sin. Here we have the giving of what we call the Ten Commandments, God's moral law. This may also surprise some of you. Notice in **Exodus 20:13** -- and the parallel passage in Deut 5 – in the 6th commandment, the Lord God states: “*You shall not what? not murder*” (NIV). Now what this commandment forbids, all agree, is **depriving others of their right to life**. You say, "OK, I understand that but how does this relate to the evil of racial prejudice? The Westminster Larger Catechism explains the sixth commandment as prohibiting “sinful anger, hatred...provoking words, oppression...and *whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any*” (Q. 136). The Larger Catechism also asserts that the sixth commandment obligates us *to preserve the life* of others by “love, compassion...readiness to be reconciled and *protecting and defending the innocent*” (Q. 135).

Such an understanding of the ultimate meaning and implications of the sixth commandment is warranted by **Christ's own exposition** of not only the **letter of this law but also its spirit** in Matt. 5:21-26. Remember what Jesus taught? The correct interpretation of this commandment is that

anyone who is *angry* with his brother (or sister) has broken it. **A racist attitude, then, is but a form of anger and hatred, which can lead to murder.** In Matt 5:23-24, Jesus further indicated that such a person should go and be reconciled to his brother (or sister). Men, I believe, the sixth commandment, the law of God, goes to the heart of the issue. To be a racist ultimately is to be a killer. That's why I John 3:14-15 says that anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and we know that no murderer has eternal life.

But that's not all, *look at the nine commandment.* Exodus 20:16 tells us we are *not to give false testimony [or bear false witness] against our neighbor.* How does that relate? This 9th commandment requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our neighbor's good name. Again the Westminster Catechism helps us; it reminds us that this command forbids "*whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our neighbor's good name.*" So men, I submit to you then that racism is also sinful because it is a **form of lying, of bearing false witness against one's neighbor whom you dislike.**

Now turn to **Deuteronomy 10:17-19.** Here's a 4th OT passage pertinent to this matter of the evil of racism. This is one of numerous OT texts which instruct God's people how to treat the foreigner, the resident alien, or immigrant in their midst. As we read this I want you to observe the motivation God gives the Jews for not mistreating the stranger within their borders. Notice:

For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.

Do you see here the **primary reason** God says we should **love and care** for those who are not native born, who may be culturally different from us as the majority? He's saying, "**I am impartial in my character and dealings -- and thus I want you as my people to reflect that attribute.**" And notice how He makes this very practical by linking this to Israel's dealings not only with immigrants [i.e., aliens, strangers] but with **others who are often forgotten** and neglected -- or even discriminated against—**orphans and widows.** So here's another principle in the biblical case against racism--that **of impartiality.** God expects us to be impartial because He is.

The same exhortation to be *impartial in administering justice* occurs also in Romans 2 and James chapters 2 and 3. This principle of impartiality is a *basic teaching of both the Old and New Testaments*, and it too precludes racism. A **classic example** of how this should work out in race relations is seen **in Acts 10** when the **Lord calls the Apostle Peter** to take the good news to the Roman centurion Cornelius, one of the first Gentile converts. Remember at **first Peter resists**, still holding onto his Jewish bigotry and prejudice. He says, “*Not so, Lord.*” This is all the more remarkable because here’s an **example of a preacher**, mightily used of God at Pentecost, but **still a bigot**. As a church leader, like many today, he’d **not fully allowed the teachings of His Lord** and the **further NT revelation** to change his worldview and perspective. So remember, the Lord sends him the vision of the clean and unclean, declaring he should not call anything impure. Peter is humbled, and now realizing his error, he says -- **Acts 10: 34-35**: “*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation [every ethnos, every people group] who fear him and do what is right.*” See men, Peter understood this truth of God’s impartiality theoretically -- but now he’s beginning to **really grasp its implications & translate it** into his daily experience. He’s saying, “*Now I really understand and plainly see that my God is impartial and so must I.*” See the principle, men? **God does not favor people because of their color, their station in life, ethnic or national origin, or their material possessions – nor should we.** He does, however, **respect each man’s character and judge his work.** Peter confesses that as well when he says. “*Though God doesn’t show favoritism, He does accept from every ethnic group those who fear Him and live righteously.* See that?

One final OT passage which shows the evil of racism is **Amos 5:24**. Notice the prophet says, “*Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!*” i.e., in contrast to stream beds that are dry much of the year. Men, notice the similes here--they are especially appropriate. He’s saying, as plants and animals flourish where there is water, so **all human life flourishes where justice and righteousness abound.** See that? Isn’t that beautiful? Throughout the OT we see this—that Yahweh **loves justice and truth** and He hates oppression and injustice. In the context in Amos 5 we find that He is rejecting their worship because they were corrupting the institutions and procedures of justice in their society (v. 7), and trampling on the poor and

needy (v.11), and depriving them of justice in their law courts (v. 12). Do you see then this principle? **God is just in all His dealings and so expects us to also practice justice in all our affairs.**

Now let's **move into the NT**. An important NT passage in the Biblical case against racism is **Acts 17:26**. Paul is speaking to the philosophers at Mars Hill in Athens and notice what he declares: "**From one man (namely, Adam) God made every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.**" In other words, all people are of one human family. Though we are not all of the same family of faith, we are all part of the **same ultimate genetic family**. Now from this truth we can draw **several important conclusions**: **First**, since all human beings are descendants of Adam (and Noah), **there is only one human race**. Thus there is no such thing as so-called inter-racial marriage. As the Australian creation scientist, Ken Ham, shows in his book, **One Blood**, from a *biological and creationist standpoint* there is but one human race and the differences between us are very small – just a little pigmentation, or nose size or waviness of hair, etc. Ham shows the modern concept of race is not biblically based, but in fact springs right out of Darwinian evolution. [Men, do you know what Darwin's classic 1859 work, *The Origin of the Species*, was subtitled? *The Preservation of the Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. See, Darwin's foolish idea of the survival of the fittest races was used by Hitler to propose the concept of the superiority of the so-called Aryan or German race.] The **second** thing we conclude from Acts 17:26 is this: if all humans descend from the same parents, **then no one segment can be inherently inferior to others**. When one race considers itself superior to others, it is *corrupting the biblical doctrine of creation* which teaches we all have a common origin. **Moreover**, since all of mankind has descended from the original parents, Adam & Eve, and the parents were made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), **all of their descendants reflect the image of God as well**.

A **2nd NT passage** that relates to the biblical case against racism is **Phil. 2:3**. Notice Paul writes:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider[or esteem] others better than yourselves."

The principle is this: **Christian love sees others as worthy of preferential treatment**. Without a doubt, Paul's exhortation here applies to the race issue. One way to picture this is that we are to **treat others as if they were royalty**. **How** do we treat royalty? We treat royalty with *respect, decency, and graciousness*. Right? This implies that our heart attitude must not be arrogant, paternalistic, or denigrating to others. This understanding clearly precludes racist attitudes.... We are obliged to treat others as royalty. If individuals of another race were treated in this manner, then racist attitudes could not gain a hold in our thought or practice.

The NT is clear: Christians are to be **distinguished by one thing**: our unconditional God-like love for others. Remember what our Lord commands us in **John 13: 34-35**?

*“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**”*

Preferential love for all other believers in Christ, regardless of their ethnicity, color or culture, is the distinguishing mark of true Christians -- and the standard for such love is Christ's love for us.

Moving on, I want you to see that racism is also a rejection of the NT doctrine of redemption. Let me help you see that from three vantage points:

- 1) Racism **minimizes the doctrine of the fall** which teaches in **Romans 3:22-23**:
“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
- 2) Racism **minimizes the drawing power of Christ in His death** and in his supreme exaltation on the cross. In **John 12:32** He says:

“I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men [or better, all peoples, all kinds of peoples] to myself.”

Now it's significant that on this occasion when he spoke this in John 12, **Greeks and other Gentiles were present**. Remember they had come to Philip with the request to see Jesus. Christ is saying, *“Don't turn them away. I will draw all people to myself without regard for nationality, ethnic affiliation or status. **I died for all and all can come to me.**”*

- 3) Through the death of Christ the NT teaches **all who believe are reconciled first to God and then to one another**. Paul teaches that in **Ephesians 2:13ff**--that thru the blood of Christ we who were Gentiles and far away have been brought near because Christ is our

peace and has destroyed the barrier between us, the dividing wall of hostility – and He has created in himself one new man, thus making peace between us. See, the NT understanding is this: since all ethnic peoples originated from the **first Adam**, and fell together into sin and **were alienated** from one another because of sin, the redeemed of all colors and ethnicities are **reunited in the Second Adam**. Amen? That’s why I contend, men, that if you’re a racist you’re really rejecting the biblical doctrine of redemption & reconciliation.

Finally, let me quickly remind you of **three additional passages** that clearly prohibit, in meaning or by implication, all forms of racism:

In Galatians 3:28 Paul teaches his generation and all successive generations:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” See what the inspired Apostle is declaring? A simple statement of fact--All those who are **one with Jesus Christ are one with each other**. **Our unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social, and sexual distinctions**. Now Paul is **not** teaching these distinctions are all wiped away, that they simply no longer exist – he’s saying they really **don’t count any more**. He’s affirming that racial, class and gender differences **should not separate us** -- nor do they imply spiritual inequality before God. Our position in Christ is the same. Salvation in Christ has broken down the natural barriers that **formerly have divided us** and kept us apart. We are now free to fellowship together around Christ. The Church is to be the one place where all these superficial delineations should not exist.

[In the parallel passage in **Colossians 3:11** Paul adds a few more groups to the list, *“There is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”* Again he affirms that Christ transcends all barriers and unifies people from all cultures, races and nations. Such distinctions are **no longer significant**. Why? **Christ alone matters!** Amen? And in the following verses Paul goes on to exhort Christians to live out this fundamental unity in Christ across natural barriers by practicing compassion, kindness, humility, bearing with each other, forgiving one another, and really loving each other deeply. That’s where the tire touches the pavement in race relations.]

And what about **I Corinthians 12:12-14; 18-23; 25-27**? This is certainly one of the classic passages on the **unity – yet diversity – of all true believers in Christ**. Here we see the **church is to reflect and pursue unity in the midst of our overall diversity**. Paul says we are one body with many member parts. “*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free.*” Such unity of fellow members of the Church, the Body of Christ, exists in spite of different spiritual gifts, racial and cultural distinctions, and different social and economic backgrounds. Paul points out that Christ in fact **uses diversity to create unity** in His Body. In v. 21 he says the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘*I have no need of you*’; nor can the head say to the feet, ‘*I have no need of you.*’ The principle in verse 21 is the interdependence of the parts of Christ’s Body in the one whole. All members of His Body are **mutually dependent** as they exercise their spiritual gifts to minister to one another because **we need each other**. On a personal note, having **ministered to** and **received ministry from** African Americans for over 30 years, I can testify that my life has been **deeply enriched** by the biblical insights, warm fellowship and celebratory worship in the A/A church. In this unity in diversity, according to verse 26, if *one* Christian suffers, *all* Christians are affected. When one hurts, all hurt. Right? So that means if one member is discriminated against we should all feel it and seek to address it. Right?

The final passage I’d like you to consider is **Revelation 5:9**. We hear the song of the redeemed now raptured and gathered at the throne of the Lamb; they sing a new song:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

What a glorious scene this is. Amen? Notice it depicts the **redeemed of all ages dwelling** together in glory – **loving** each other and **praising** the Lord together. Every ethnicity and race of humanity is present with representatives there. It seems clear that we should get a head start on accepting and loving each other here and now before we get to the there and then. Worship in our churches here and now should be just tuning us up for glory! Amen? I believe this provides a strong case for planting intentionally multi-ethnic churches!

As God's people, how should we respond?

Since we are one people of God, we should be working hard to not allow racial and cultural differences to divide us. Let me suggest some practical things all of us can be doing:

- 1) **God is calling us to prayer**. This is ultimately a spiritual issue. Only the power of Christ will help us individually triumph over sinful attitudes and live holy lives in this area. We need to pray that the Holy Spirit will break down barriers that separate us from one another and create a manifest unity that a watching world can see.
- 2) **God is calling us to self-examination and confession**. All of us, by virtue of our fallen nature, have some elements of racism in our hearts. We each need to examine our attitudes, our prejudices, our stereotypes, our hurtful statements, and repent of those God brings to light thru His Word.
- 3) **God is calling us to repent of the sins of our history**. Independent Baptists and Bible churches, in our schools and churches, do not have a good track record in this arena. In some cases our leaders have propagated –either in verbal or written statements—error and confusion on the matter of race. For example a good number of pastors and church leaders have taught that inter-racial marriage was a sin against God. In other cases we have purposely excluded people from our schools and churches. Or sent blacks to another nearby church because we did not want them. Racial slurs or jokes were not challenged. Even where our public official position did not reflect racist views, the silence of many in our churches allowed free expression of racist sentiments that were perceived by others to be our official position. We need to repent of those teachings and actions in our history that are sinful, make a clean break from them and establish a new beginning in obedience, by God's grace. If you doubt that its biblical to repent of the sins of our forefathers, I'd remind you of examples of this in Scripture. Godly men often confessed their own sins and those of their people; they even confessed past and present national sins: Daniel (Dan. 9:4-19); Ezra (9:5-8); Nehemiah 9:5, 33-35); -- cf. also the words of our Lord in Luke 11:46-51.
- 4) **God is calling us to intentionally pursue racial reconciliation** – for starters, all of us should be initiating and building personal friendships with several ethnic brothers and begin to fellowship with them; then we should make any needed changes in our church to

be sure minorities really are being welcomed and assimilated into the life of the body.

Another practical thing we can do: invite in a godly minority pastor to speak to your flock or lead your church to go fellowship with an ethnic church nearby or across town.

- 5) **In addition to pursuing c/c relationships, God is calling us to develop cross-cultural ministries and to plant churches among the people groups of North America – not just internationally.** Some of you seminarians should be joining a multi-racial team to plant an intentionally multi-ethnic church in a large diverse city like NYC. At the very least we can be supporting financially such efforts or sending church teams on mission trips to help these c/c cp projects in our own Samaria. **God may be calling some of us to minister among the urban poor.**

May the Lord help us to act upon what we've heard today. Let's pray ...

Oh, God thoroughly convince us from your Word that racism is sinful in your sight. Convict us of specific areas where we have each fallen short. Forgive us of **pride of grace, pride of race and pride of face**. May your Spirit work in great power thru the Gospel so that we who've been reconciled to God may be also fully reconciled to one another, through Christ our Lord. We recognize that this must **all be by your grace and for your glory**.

In His matchless name we pray. Amen.

Contact Ken Davis: kdavis@bbc.edu