

SIX KEY BIBLICAL TRUTHS

ONE

Every human being is a unique, precious, image-bearer of God.

TWO

All ethnic groups and nations share common ancestry.

THREE

Our ethnicity uniquely honors God.

FOUR

Our value is not based on our ethnicity, race, or gender.

FIVE

Racism is a sin against God and the image-bearers He loves.

SIX

All human beings have sinned and are in need of salvation.

To Our River West Church Family:

Recent events have brought back to the surface the immense pain felt by far too many in our community due the insidious sin of racism that has marked our nation historically and currently. In light of this, we, the leadership of River West Church (the elders and pastors) feel compelled by the Gospel to respond. We are unanimous in our condemnation of racism as contrary to the heart of God and the clear teaching of scripture. The issue of racial injustice requires more than a statement, but certainly not less. What follows is our stance as a church on racism because of our commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Racism and the Bible

The Bible condemns all forms of racism and teaches that every human being is created with equal dignity and God-given worth. While these truths are clearly evident from any faithful reading of scripture, it is also important to acknowledge that all of us read the Bible through the lens of our own culture, unconscious biases, and ethnic lenses. So when we discuss 'what the Bible says about racism,' we must always seek to do so with humility and openness to the Spirit's conviction.

What do we mean by "racism"?

Before taking into account what the Scriptures have to say about racism, it's helpful to define what racism is. According to Merriam-Webster's definition, racism is "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race." While this definition is fitting, it's also important to consider that racism encompasses both individual prejudices and bias along with systemic and structural manifestations of discrimination.

With these things in mind, let's now examine six biblical truths that shed light on the reality of racism, then briefly consider how the Gospel offers a unique remedy and reconciling power to address this sin.

Six Key Biblical Truths

ONE

Every human being is a unique, precious, image-bearer of God.

The human story begins in Genesis 1, where God “created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (v. 27). Every human being is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (*Psalms 139:14*) to bear God’s image and reveal unique aspects of his righteous, loving character to the world (*1 Peter 4:10*). Every person is equally worthy of love, respect and unbiased treatment (*Deuteronomy 1:15-18; 10:18-19; 16:19; 24:17; 27:19*). Therefore, every form of racism, by definition, is a sinful departure from God’s loving intent.

Additional Key Passages

Genesis 1-2, Psalm 8, Psalm 139, Acts 17:26-28

TWO

All ethnic groups and nations share common ancestry.

Regardless of ethnicity, all human beings share a common ancestry with Adam and Eve (*Genesis 1:28*). As a result, the Bible refers to Eve as “the mother of all living” (*Genesis 3:20*). Likewise, Adam is our common father, for the Lord “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (*Acts 17:26*). In the New Testament, this common ancestry is linked to Christ’s atoning sacrifice—which binds us together as family members irrespective of our ethnicity and race (*John 1:12-13, Romans 12:10, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 John 3:1-2*).

Additional Key Passages

Genesis 12:2-3; 22:18; Isaiah 2:2-3; Amos 9:12; Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11

THREE

Our ethnicity uniquely honors God.

In the book of Revelation, John was given the following vision of a multiethnic multitude worshipping the Lord: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (*Revelation 7:9*). According to the Bible, heaven is not made up of a monolithic multitude of souls. Rather, we will retain our God-given ethnicity because the Lord is glorified through “all tribes and peoples.” Reflecting on this same scene in Revelation, Tim Keller notes that “Our resurrection bodies will keep their ethnicity. Final redemption, then, does not erase racial and cultural difference. Different cultures have their own particular glories and splendors, analogous to the differing gifts of the body of Christ.” To promote racial harmony within society the church, as the beginning of God’s new creation, must demonstrate to the world, by its own communal life, that people of every race have become equal members of His body.

Additional Key Passages

John 17:23; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6-12; Colossians 3:10-1; Revelation 5, 7:9-17

FOUR

Our value is not based on our ethnicity, race, or gender.

Although our ethnicity is a gift God enjoys and loves, we do not derive our value from ethnicity, race, or gender. Such attitudes ultimately lead us headlong down the same path of prejudice and racism that existed between Jews and Gentiles in the New Testament (*Galatians 2:11-16*). During the first century, Jews considered Greeks to be unclean and inferior. Some claimed that God made Gentiles so there would be “firewood in hell.” Many refused even to engage in table fellowship or look upon a Gentile in public.

For their part, Gentiles persecuted the Jewish people across nearly their entire history. Throughout their history, the Jews were enslaved by Egypt, attacked by Canaanites and other surrounding tribes, destroyed by Assyria, enslaved by Babylon, and ruled by Persia, Greece, and Rome. Over time, this history of oppression and injustice led to mutual distrust, prejudice, and fear among Jews and Gentiles.

Nonetheless, in the New Testament we see that first century churches did not allow for segregation among Jews and Gentiles. Instead, in full view of complex ethnic and cultural tensions we see Jews and Greeks worshipping, serving, and sharing bread together as equal members in new spiritual family (*Ephesians 2:11-22*). In this new family, as Paul wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (*Galatians 3:28*, see also *Colossians 3:11*). These revolutionary claims flew in the face of ethnic, patriarchal, and cultural biases by affirming that every person’s worth is determined by God alone.

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(*John 17:23; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6-12; Colossians 3:10-11*). Through its example of racial harmony, compassionate service, seeking the peace of society, prayer, and prioritizing the Gospel, the church should be an agent of change.

Additional Key Passages

Jeremiah 29:7; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 11:1-18, 15:6-21; Romans 9:1-18; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Corinthians 9:22-23; 10:32; 1 Timothy 2:1-8; 1 Peter 2:13-17

FIVE

Racism is a sin against God and the image-bearers He loves.

God’s word is blunt: “If you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (*James 2:9*). The Greek term James uses for “partiality” (*prosopolempsia*) means to show favoritism or prejudice, to treat one person as inherently better than another. The Bible considers all such forms of prejudice to be a sin against God and our fellow man because “God shows no partiality” (*Acts 10:34*).

In contrast to our sinful prejudices and biases, Jesus taught us: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (*Matthew 7:12*). As followers of Christ, we are commanded to “love your neighbor as yourself” regardless of their ethnic, racial, and cultural distinctions (*Matthew 22:39, Leviticus 19:18, Leviticus 19:34*).

At its root, racism is a spiritual heart issue. However, like most expressions of sinful rebellion, racism can also corrupt the customs, policies, laws, and even institutions of a society. Though scripture emphasizes individual accountability for specific sins, God warns against active participation in the sinful systems of any given society.

Additional Key Passages

Acts 10:28; 1 Timothy 5:21; James 2:1-9; Leviticus 19:9-37

All human beings have sinned and are in need of salvation.

The Bible consistently teaches the universal problem of sinful human hearts. Writing to Jews in Rome Paul asks, “What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one’” (*Romans 3:9-12*).

Astonishingly, in spite of our willful rebellion, God loves sinful, broken people and wants all to come to faith in his Son: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (*Romans 5:8*). Our Lord “is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (*2 Peter 3:9*).

That’s why the apostle Paul could testify: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (*Romans 1:16*). Christ’s reconciling love is available to all: “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him” (*Romans 10:12*). His grace is universal: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (*John 3:16*).

When we trust in Christ, we become one people: “He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (*Ephesians 2:14*). As a result, “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (*1 Corinthians 12:13*).

Additional Key Passages

Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 1:16-17; 2:1-11

The Gospel: Our Hope and Power

As the Spirit opens our eyes to the awful reality of racism in the world and within our own hearts, the Scriptures also direct us to the only hope and power that can bring about reconciliation: the Gospel. In simplest form, the Gospel is the gracious announcement of who Jesus is and what He’s accomplished through his death and resurrection to reconcile our broken world (*2 Corinthians 5:18-19*). As God reconciles us back into loving relationship with Himself through Christ, this same reconciling love spills over into our relationships with others. While this reconciling love for others doesn’t eradicate our racial biases instantaneously the moment we come to faith, it will inevitably flow from our lives as we grow in our understanding of the Gospel.

At the same time, as we experience the reconciling power of the Gospel, it fills us with faith and courage to step into personal and sometimes even corporate repentance that leads to true change. As we are reminded of God’s lavish grace, our defenses and fears give way to the Spirit’s transforming work in our personal lives and in our community.

Finally, the Gospel provides the only permanent solution to racism. Justice will be realized in our world when the redemptive work of Christ is completed. As followers of Christ, we look with hope to his return when ultimate peace and true justice will pervade all of creation. In the church, we experience this reality already, if only in part. At His return, every nation, tribe, and tongue will be unified in Christ and submitted to Him (*Revelation 7:9; 21:24-26*); but a measure of this should already be the experience in the household of God (*Ephesians 2:11-22; Col. 3:11*). Our commitment is to invite everyone into the foretaste of His Kingdom through the proclamation of this Gospel.

By God’s grace and for Christ’s glory, may we find the courage to proclaim and live this “message of reconciliation” out in our world today!