

BIBLE STUDY SERIES ON RACISM IN AMERICA
Thinking Biblically, Thinking Clearly, Acting Responsibly
Presented by Rev. Dr. Harold E. Kidd

Lesson 1 – Wednesday, June 24, 2020

1. How would you define racism?

In the summer of 2004, the Presbyterian Church in America settled on the following definition, which we might find helpful: **“Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races.”**

The focus of this definition of racism is on the heart and behavior of the racist. The heart that believes one race is more valuable than another is a sinful heart. And that sin is called racism. The behavior that distinguishes one race as more valuable than another is a sinful behavior. And that sin is called racism. This personal focus on the term racism does not exclude the expression of this sin in structural ways—for example, laws and policies that demean or exclude on the basis of race. — John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 18–19.

- A) Interpersonal Racism** - refers to prejudices and discriminatory behaviors where one group makes assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intents of other groups based on race.
- B) Intrapersonal Racism** - exists in a society where one group is politically, socially and economically dominant, members of stigmatized groups are bombarded with negative messages about their own abilities and intrinsic worth, may internalize those negative messages. It holds people back from achieving their fullest potential and reinforces the negative messages, which in turn, reinforces the oppressive systems. This set of prejudices leads to cruel intentional or unintentional actions towards other groups.
- C) Institutional Racism** – Where assumptions about race are structured into the social and economic institutions in our society. Institutional racism occurs when organizations, businesses, or institutions discriminate, either deliberately or indirectly against certain groups of people to limit their rights. This type of racism reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group. (Faith In Action National Leadership Training Jan.2018)

2. In light of recent events including the effects of the pandemic on people of color, and the murder of George Floyd, Ahmad Aubrey, and Breonna Taylor, let’s take a careful look at what the Bible teaches about racism. All scriptures

are from the NKJV

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Romans 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

Romans 2:11 For there is no partiality with God.

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Acts 17:26 And he has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.

James 2:9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

1 John 2:9 He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.

Acts 10:34-35 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him.

3. Troubling Biblical Waters

The bible contains scarcely any narratives in which the original intent was to negate the humanity of Black people or view Blacks unfavorably. Ancient authors of biblical texts did have color and race consciousness (they were aware of certain physiological differences), but this consciousness of color and race was by no means a political or ideological basis for enslaving or otherwise oppressing other peoples. In fact, the Bible contains scarcely any narratives in which the original intent was to negate the humanity of Black people or view Blacks unfavorably. **Sophisticated theories about race and the phenomenon of racism are by-products of the postbiblical era.** -Dr. Cain Hope Felder, Troubling Biblical Waters, Ch.3, P37

In fact, there are several texts in which the Bible affirms the beauty of Blackness.

Numbers 12 – Moses' wife Zipporah was a Cushite (Ethiopian) woman.

"Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he has married an Ethiopian woman."

God struck Miriam with leprosy because of this act. (Num. 12:10)

2 Sam. 18: 21 – 32 indicates that Black people were part of the Hebrew army and even part of the royal court.

Jer. 38: 7 -13 Ebed-Melech an Ethiopian official in the palace of king Zedekiah who takes action to save Jeremiah's life during the siege of Jerusalem.

1 Kings 10 – In hearing the fame of Solomon's wisdom, the Queen of Sheba travels with her royal entourage to Jerusalem to test his wisdom as well as bringing him a large quantity of spices, gold and precious stones.

Acts 12 – Paul and Barnabas are ordained for their first missionary journey by Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger (Black) Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen..(V1) The Greek word Niger is where we get the name Nigeria.

Race in the Old Testament - Dealing with a misunderstood text: “The so-called curse of Ham in Genesis 9: 1 – 17, 28,29 is an example of sacralization. Which rabbis of the early Talmudic periods and the Church Fathers at times used to denigrate Black people. Later Europeans adopted the so-called curse of Ham as a justification for slavery and stereotypical aspersions about Blacks.

The great significance of Genesis 9: 18 – 27 is not that it contains the so-called curse of Ham, which technically does not take place at all. Rather, these verses make it clear that, to the mind of the ancient Israelite author, “the whole post-diluvial humanity (following the flood) stems from Noah’s three sons. Humanity is conceived here as a unity, in a way different from the creation; humanity in all its variety across the earth, takes its origin from those three who survived the flood. The purpose of the contrast is to underscore the amazing fact that humanity scattered in all its variety throughout the world comes from one family.”

– Dr. Cain Hope Felder, Troubling Biblical Waters, p.38-39

Lesson 2 - Wednesday, July 1, 2020

4. Romans 10:12, Romans 3:22, Ephesians 2:13. What do we learn about the heart of God from these verses that can be used to tear down the walls of racist attitudes?

Ephesians 2:13 trumpets the foundational note with the word blood. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ.” The “nearness” Paul has in mind is nearness to God and to Jews. Gentiles find reconciliation with God and with Jews “by the blood” of Christ. We watch this unfold as we move through the following verses.

Paul says in verse 14 that Christ “himself is our peace, who has made both one.” In other words, Christ did not come to open a second, alternative way to God. He came to shed his blood for sinners, both Jew and Gentile, and by his sacrifice to give Jew and Gentile a common access to God through faith.

Then Paul adds in verse 15b that the aim of Christ was “that he might create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.” Here he pictures the church as a single person. Once there was a Jewish people, and there were Gentile peoples. Then Christ came, and by his blood united them to himself so that “in himself” there would be only one new person, namely, Christ. He is their common identity. Which leads us naturally to verse 16 where Jew and Gentile are the one body of the one new man Jesus Christ.

Verse 16: “[Christ reconciled] us both [Jew and Gentile] to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” The reconciling work of Christ brings

people to God not in two alien bodies, one rejecting him (Jewish) and one trusting him (Christian). Christ brings Jew and Gentile to God in one body, the church redeemed by his one sacrifice. — John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 123–124.

5. **Romans 10:12 says, “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.” But, there are differences, aren’t there? Are we to pretend that there are no differences?**

As Christians, we are firm in our convictions that all ethnicities are equal in value: “For there is no difference” (Rom 3:22b). As believers we are deeply committed to and convinced of the fundamental equality of all peoples. We also believe that to understand a culture, you must be aware of ethnicity and especially the prejudices that may exist within a particular culture. To ignore them is naïve and can result in serious misunderstanding.

Can getting to know the culture, experiences and beliefs of others help bring people together in unity, and dispel false stereotypes? Tear down the walls of misunderstanding that so easily divide us?

Just as ignorance about ethnicities can lead to misunderstanding a people. We can be conditioned culturally to make generalizations about people based on their ethnicity. One might be led to believe, “He does such-and-such because he’s Latino.” Or all black people can dance because they have rhythm. For far too long highly qualified black men and women have been denied equal access and opportunity to advance their careers because of racial stereotypes and racial profiling. Being oblivious to ethnicities can cause us to miss the God given value in others. Our deeply ingrained racial prejudices influence our interpretation of who a people are.

6. **We live in a racially divided world. Was the Bible written in a racially divided world? Are there examples?**

Paul had started churches in the southern regions of Anatolia (modern Turkey) in the towns of Derbe, Lystra and Iconium. Acts tells us that on his second missionary journey into the region, Paul attempted to go into the northern area: “After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them” (Acts 16:7). This northern region was known by the Romans as Galatia, a mispronunciation of the word Celts, the name of the people group that had settled in the region generations earlier. They were considered barbarians, a term that referred to someone who didn’t speak Greek. The word barbarian was more or less the Greek equivalent of us saying “blah-blah-blah” to ridicule someone’s speech. Since Greeks equated speech with reason (as in the word *logos*), someone who couldn’t speak Greek was considered stupid.

While the entire region was technically Galatia by Roman designation, the inhabitants of the southern region preferred their provincial names, a practice Luke knew: “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes” (Acts 2:9–10).

They did not want anyone confusing them with those uneducated barbarians in the north. When the churches in this region acted foolishly, Paul wrote to chasten them. He addresses them harshly: “You foolish Galatians!” (Gal 3:1). This is roughly equivalent to someone in the United States saying, “You stupid rednecks.” Is Paul employing an ethnic slur to get his readers’ attention? We might assume Paul would never do such a thing; he’s a Christian, after all!

Yet that instinct proves the point. Our assumptions about ethnicity and race relations make impossible the prospect that Paul might have used ethnically charged language to make an important point about Christian faith and conduct. — E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O’Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 56–58.

7. Should we, as Christians, be concerned about social issues like racism? Why?

In Dr. King’s explanation of his obligation to disobey an unjust law of the government in order to obey the just law of God, he piercingly indicted these pastors with the following words:

In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sideline and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, “Those are social issues with which the Gospel has no real concern.”

Then he pleaded for them to apply the gospel to such social issues, saying:

“There was a time when the Church was very powerful. It was during that period when the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the Church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.”

“But the judgment of God is upon the Church as never before. If the Church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early Church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.”

Do Dr. King's words speak with truth today concerning the church having lost its authentic ring, having forfeited the loyalty of millions?

I reread these words as I prepared to make my remarks on that Good Friday, and I was freshly grieved by the gospel-less actions of my white forefathers during those days. — David Platt, *Counter Culture: Radically Following Jesus with Conviction, Courage, and Compassion* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2015).

Lesson 3 - Wednesday, July 8, 2020

8. How did the Jews feel about Samaritans back in the day?

Every Jew in Jesus' day viewed Samaritans with contempt and from a position of superiority. To the Jews, the Samaritans, a mixed-race people descended from the Jews, were compromisers, impure and wayward. This perspective was so much a part of the Jewish psyche that Jesus' own disciples marveled that he would take them into Samaria rather than skirting around it, and they were even more amazed when they found him conversing with a woman there. Jesus had sought this particular woman out so that he could treat her with respect and offer her the true, abundant life that he came to bring. Through her witness, many in her town came to believe (Jn 4:1-45). — Leroy Barber, *Embrace: God's Radical Shalom for a Divided World* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

9. Why the animosity between Jews and Samaritans? What is the back story?

During the Persian period, the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the walls. This attempt was resisted by the Samaritans, who were now a mixed race of Assyrians and Israelites and did not want to see the city of Jerusalem successfully rebuilt because of their racial hatred of the Jews (Nehemiah 2:19; 4:1; 6:1-6). The Jews, meanwhile, desired to maintain the purity of the Jewish race and thus would not allow the Samaritans to participate in the rebuilding process (Nehemiah 2:10; 6:14). A feud developed that continued into Christ's day and served as the historical backdrop to the confrontation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. — Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015).

10. How does Jesus model for us breaking down racist barriers?

In Samaria, Jesus rested at Jacob's well (John 4:6). A well offered water and shade, and it was a natural place for a hot, tired man to stop. But Jesus chose this particular well because both the Jews and Samaritans loved Jacob, who was the father of both groups. Jesus was looking for common ground so He stopped at Jacob's well and built a bridge of communication by starting with what He and the Samaritan woman could agree on.

Jesus had rejected the attitudes of His contemporaries in His willingness to go through Samaria from Judea to Galilee, something no good, orthodox Jew would do. This is why in John 4:9 the Samaritan woman asked him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?” The text tells us, “For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”

Shocked at Jesus’ request, she could not believe that He was asking her, a woman of Samaria, to let Him use her cup. To put His Jewish lips on her Samaritan cup was an intimate act of fellowship and warm acceptance. It was something that wasn’t done in this woman’s neighborhood. Not only was this an action that signified a willingness for fellowship, but it was also an action that gave the woman value. Jesus was letting her know that He had a need, and that she was in a position to meet that need. He esteemed her with value by placing Himself in a position that acknowledged that she possessed the ability to help Him. — Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015).

11. John 4:9. How did this woman know Jesus was a Jew?

But how did the woman know that Jesus was a Jew? John, the author, does not say that Jesus told her that He was a Jew. So, there must have been something about Him that made her know. It could be that He looked like a Jew, or perhaps He had a Jewish accent or some other trait that gave a public indication of His racial and cultural heritage.

Whatever it was, when Jesus Christ went through Samaria, He did not give up His own culture. He did not stop being a Jew to reach a Samaritan, but neither did He allow His culture to prevent Him from connecting with her or meeting a spiritual need in her. While remaining culturally competent, He maintained His unique cultural identity. He just didn’t let who He was stop Him from being what He was called to be.

In other words, Jesus didn’t let His history, culture, race, and background get in the way of ministering to a woman who had a spiritual need and who would meet him on common ground. Likewise, Jesus allowed the woman to retain her history, culture, and experiences as a Samaritan. — Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015).

12. What is the application of this story? What are some steps we can take to rid our world of racism?

Jesus’ ensuing conversation with the Samaritan woman shows us further that a heart which is disciplined to minister not only works hard, but crosses difficult relational barriers to reach out to others. The narrative continues: “When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I

am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’ (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)” (vv. 7–9).

Racial differences form some of the most daunting barriers in this world. The moral enormity of the slavery question is one still viscerally felt today, especially by the descendants of those who were enslaved and persecuted. The gospel speaks to this. The idea of a human being attempting to “own” another human being is abhorrent in a Christian view of humanity. That should hardly need to be said these days, though it does, given the modern-day slavery enterprises of human trafficking all over the world.

In the Scriptures, humanity is given dominion over the creation. We are not given dominion over our fellow image-bearing human beings (Gen. 1:27-30). The southern system of chattel slavery was built off of the things the Scripture condemns as wicked: “man-stealing” (1 Tim. 1:10), the theft of another’s labor (Jas. 5:1-6), the breaking up of families, and on and on.

In order to prop up this system, a system that benefited the Mammonism of wealthy planters, Southern religion had to carefully weave a counter-biblical theology that could justify it. In so doing, this form of southern folk religion was outside of the global and historic teachings of the Christian church.

The gospel compels action to dismantle Institutions, systems and thoughts that embrace white supremacy and white privilege. By the grace of God, we must work to overcome prejudicial pride in our lives, families, churches and nation, a process that begins with having a real life-changing conversation about race. In a context where minorities will become the majority over the next thirty years, we must consider how to apply the gospel across a multiplicity of colors and cultures for the glory of Christ. — David Platt, *Counter Culture: Radically Following Jesus with Conviction, Courage, and Compassion* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2015).

How has this bible study series on racism in America and a biblical response helped you? What actions are you willing to take given how the lord is speaking to you?

References:

- 1. New King James Version of the Bible**
- 2. www.mybiblestudylessons.com/racism**
- 3. Troubling Biblical Waters (Race, Class & Family) – Cain Hope Felder, Orbis 1990**
- 4. Faith In Action – National Leadership Training, (Power & Race)
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