

Our Response To Racism (Part 1)

Eph 2:13-16; If you're visiting with us, welcome to our church. We're glad you're here.

And if you're joining us via livestream (9am West), God bless you.

High Five, our week long day camp, filled the halls and grounds around here this past week, and what a week it was. 320 kids, 150 leaders, 25 decisions for Christ . . .

And countless moments of discipleship.

If you were a part of that, thank you and God bless you. What a labor of love.

I can't tell you how proud I am of Pastor Grady and his team. (**Intro**)

➤ We're in the middle of a mini-series on racism, and as I said last week, everything we're going to talk about is an application of **Phil 2:4**.

[4] *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

It's a command for every single one of us to get outside our *own* world and our *own* interests, and into *the interests of others*.

The situations *they* face. The concerns *they* have.

Which for people of color and our nation as a whole these days, is racism. Defined as . . .

(Racism is) the feeling of distrust or dislike because of a person's color or ethnicity.

Something that exists, something that's sinful, and something that's contrary to God's heart. That was last week.

➤ This week, I want to talk about the *implications* of all that. Our response. Starting with this:

1. We must strive for the unity God intends.

Last week I mentioned very briefly, that though the world's *against* racism for the most part, it's not necessarily *for* unity.

Which is exactly the *opposite* of what God *intends* for us. What he intends for the church. His people. That means we have to strive for it. Especially so . . .

Since it's one of the reasons he died for us. Eph 2:13-16.

Speaking of the division between Jews and Gentiles in that day, Paul says . . .

[13] *But now [as opposed to when they were separated from God and others due to their sin and hate] in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ [you've been reconciled]. [14] For he himself [Jesus] is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh [his death and resurrection] the dividing wall of hostility [15] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances [the Old Testament Law; he abolished it as the means of getting right with God], that he might create in himself one new man [a new mankind, a new people] in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might reconcile us both to God in one body [the church] through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

3 quick thoughts here:

1. Jesus died to *reconcile* us to the Father.

Or as it says in v16 – that he *might reconcile us both to God*.

2. Jesus died to unite us to one *another*.

For he himself is our peace [v14], *who has made us both one* [united us] *and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*. The walls *we* build.

3. Jesus died to make a new *people*.

To create in himself one new man [v15] *in place of the two*.

Jew or Greek, slave or free, black or white – we are *one* in Christ. United. Together.

Which means we ought to reflect that unity and strive for it as much as possible.

It's what we *have* as believers, it's what God *intends* for us, and it's what Jesus died for.

Unity.

➤ Which starts, by . . .

• Seeing yourself as a Christian instead of a color

Let me ask you something. In what, or in whom, do you find your identity?

Or to say it another way, what characteristic of yourself most defines who you are? In your *own* mind. What aspect of yourself do you most value?

Is it in your color? Your ethnicity? Your intellect? Your money? Your motherhood?

Your marriage?

Whatever it is, whatever you most value or treasure or cling to in life, is your primary identity.

And if it's anything other than your salvation, the fact that you're a child of God through faith in Jesus and repentance of your sins . . .

You'll *never* experience the unity God intends. Especially so if you see yourself as a *color* first and foremost.

Striving for the unity God intends starts with seeing yourself as a Christian instead of a color.

➤ And 2nd . . .

• Seeing others as God sees them

And *trusting* God for them. Especially so if they *too* are a believer.

It's something I realized 22 years ago when I was asked to get involved with a post-prison ministry. Mentoring guys coming out of prison.

The first of whom was **Eddie**. Pictured here just 2 years ago when he and his son came out to look at a college.

A far cry from the life he lived on the West Side of *Chicago* 30 years ago.

A life so different than mine he just as well have been from the other side of the world.

From drugs and guns to immorality and dysfunction.

And I had a minor crisis of faith in seeing him as God sees him. Something that was captured on video for the ministry I was working with.

Take a look. 1998. And don't judge the hair. (**Video** – Koinonia House Promo).

➤ (**Next Slide**) I had to trust that the grace that saved me was the same grace that saved Eddy, and it was sufficient for both of us.

If we're going to strive for the unity God intends, we have to see ourselves as a Christian instead of a color, and others as *God* sees them.

And for those who *don't* know him, we have to present the gospel to them. That's where the *most* unity lies. That's the *best* solution to the problem of racism.

That people would give their lives to Jesus and be reconciled in *him*. At peace in *him*. Unified in *him*.

It's one of the reasons Jesus died, and it's ours to strive for. (**Summary**)

2. We must seek to understand.

That's the 2nd implication of looking to the interests of others when it comes to racism.

We must get out of our echo chambers, expose ourselves to other viewpoints, and seek to understand the past, the present, and even the anger. Let's start with **the past**.

Most *white* people tend to think that the way *they* see our nation's history, is the way everybody sees it. And the way it *was* for everyone.

But the America black people have experienced, is very different than the one white people have.

For starters, if you're white, you're the product of a history your ancestors *chose*.

If you're black, you're probably the product of a history your ancestors did *not* choose.

That's a big difference. And a cloud that *continues* to hang over many who are black.

Not all, but many. And if we fail to understand that, we fail to see their interests.

Or take **The Declaration of Independence**. If you're white, it's very meaningful to you.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

As a white man I read that and think, "Of course. Awesome. What a great country."

But most black people read that and think, "For you. It was great for *your* forefathers."

Because the America theirs experienced was very different. They *had* no rights.

Certainly not equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Not even life sometimes.*****

So when it comes to racism and the interests of others, we must seek to understand the past. From *their* perspective.

➤ 2nd, we must seek to understand **the present**.

Starting with the fact that there *continue* to be significant disparities between blacks and whites in America. Disparities in "education, employment, income, incarceration . . .

Homeownership, standardized test scores, single-parent households, and participation at the highest levels of leadership." From business and academics to athletics/politics.

(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/racial-reconciliation-mostly-almost-agree-likely-still-dont-agree/>)

I'm not saying the disparity is as wide as it *could* be. Or that no *progress* has been made.

I'm just saying it still exists. Nor am I saying that people of color . . .

Bear no *responsibility* for some of those disparities. They do.

I'm just saying that reducing racial tension, coming to grips with reality, and finding good solutions depends on *understanding* that disparity.

And that in some areas, there *hasn't* been much progress in the last 50 years.

Like in home ownership. Black home ownership remains just over 41%, while white home ownership is 71%. The former unchanged since 1968, and the latter *up* 5%.

(<https://www.epi.org/publication/50-years-after-the-kerner-commission/>)

And most black *men* continue to make less than their white counterparts at every level of society. Poor, middle class, *and* rich.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/03/19/upshot/race-class-white-and-black-men.html>)

So we must seek to understand that the America many *blacks* live in, is different than the America most whites live in.

Now, that's not to say that *racism* is worse today than it has been in the past. It's not.

Forward progress has been significant. From the election of a black president for 2 terms, to vastly different attitudes on interracial marriages and black neighbors.

And "Juneteenth" celebrations like the one this weekend here in Davenport.

Commemorating the end of slavery on June 19th, 1865.

We've made *significant* progress on racism.

But we're far from done. And forward progress in the *future*, depends on understanding the *present*. Especially the disparities.

➤ And 3rd here, we must seek to understand **the anger**. The past, the present, & the anger. Have you ever wondered why many blacks react so strongly to issues of injustice? From the righteous anger of those who express it legally . . .

To the sinful anger of those who loot and riot?

And why most whites take it in stride, or slough it off? Why is that?

Because those in the cultural *majority* tend to see such instances as rare, impersonal, and isolated; while those in the cultural *minority* . . .

Tend to see them as common, personal, and systemic.

IOW incidents of injustice are too close to home. And too near the past.

Too near their *own* suffering, and too near past oppression.

So they react in solidarity as if it happened to them. Often times in anger.

Not only that, but the memory of the *oppressed* is always longer and always more vivid than the memory of the oppressors.

It's true in war, it's true in bullying, and it's true in racism.

When the playground bully does his dirty work, the victim is often traumatized for weeks. Maybe even months. While the bully laughs it off and moves on.

Same with racism. Only the memory lasts for generations.

And it doesn't take much to break the scab of that wound sometimes.

Especially if the anger of the oppressed, seethes. Boils. Which it does in many.

Overflowing in the heat of frustration every time.

Not that such overflow is *right* every time. At all.

But that the lingering memory, shared oppression, and mutual solidarity helps us *understand* it. And respond appropriately. Compassionately. (**Summary**)

➤ If we're going to look to the interests of others with any kind of success, we *must* seek to understand.

Which means getting out of our respective echo chambers, black and white alike, and exposing ourselves to other viewpoints.

3rd, the third implication of looking to the interests of others, is that . . .

3. We must stop stereotyping.

As in categorizing people according to their color.

Just because *some* blacks are criminals doesn't mean *all* blacks are criminals.

Just because *some* whites are racist, doesn't mean *all* whites are racist. That's stereotyping. Assigning oversimplified and often unfair labels to **groups**, because they *look* similar. We must stop stereotyping groups. It's the exact *opposite* of loving them and looking to their interests.

And people of color are the most susceptible. The *most* vulnerable. "While whites can and do commit a great deal of minor and major crimes [one author said], the race as a whole is never tainted by those acts. But when *blacks* violate the law, *all* members of the race are considered suspect." (Lisa Bloom, *Suspicion Nation*) That's our tendency. And we have to stop.

➤ We do it with groups, and we do it with **situations**. If we see black people protesting on TV, we think ill of them. Hoodlums. Up to no good. And they might *be*. Especially if they're violent. But they might *not* be. They might be peaceful and entirely appropriate. They might be spot on. Even if the *form* of their protest is ill-advised.

The point being: just because *some* people in *some* situations are off the deep end, doesn't mean everyone is. And we have to stop stereotyping as if they are. It helps no one.

➤ And the same goes for **individuals**. Like thinking that a black person in a predominantly white neighborhood is up to no good. Or that a person of color browsing in an upscale store can't be legit. We have to stop that. Because it's wrong. And black people feel it. They *feel* sized up. They *feel* stereotyped. They *feel* distrusted.

Does that mean *every* look or *every* form of attention from a sales clerk or neighbor is racist? Not at all. But if you're the sales clerk . . . And you're *thinking* they're up to no good because of their color, it is. Just like discounting someone's *perspective* because of their color. Or not wanting to be *around* people of color. Or having less mercy for them. It's racism, and leads to stereotyping.

➤ And finally here, we have to stop stereotyping **opinions**. Not all black people think and feel the same about these issues, just like not all white people do. There *is* no monolithic mindset. I've met white people who see everything as racist, and black people who don't see it at all. No big deal. So stereotyping opinions gets us nowhere. Especially with so many different facets of this issue.

We *must* allow for differing viewpoints. From all corners. Otherwise the slightest provocation or disagreement will enflame your passion, harden your heart, and obstruct our unity.

It's quite *possible* as someone put it, to "stand side by side with another person in the binding principle that racism is evil . . ." And at the same time be far apart in our analysis (Ismael Hernandez). That's okay. It's okay to disagree about why disparities persist. Is it systemic racism or personal choices? Cultural bias or the conditions of poverty? Those things are debatable. And that's okay. **(Summary)**

What's not okay, is to put everyone and everything in a box, that hinders dialogue and inhibits trust. We must stop stereotyping. Everything.

And 4th . . .

4. We must start empathizing.

Empathizing, as in identifying with the feelings and difficulties of those less fortunate. You don't have to *agree* with those most affected by racism, but you *should* feel some of their pain. *Weep with those who weep* the Bible says. (Rom 12:15) We must start empathizing.

It's an undeniable fact that black people have been *wronged* in the past. And sometimes continue to be wronged in the *present*. Poorly treated and wrongly profiled. And white people need to hear that, accept that, and sympathize. Because progress on this issue will only go as far as our empathy.

Which means we can no longer ignore the struggles of those less fortunate. We can no longer ignore the fact that the rich and guilty are often treated better than the poor and innocent. Especially if they're black. We can no longer ignore the reality of white privilege where the obstacles are lower, the possibilities higher, and the barriers fewer.

➤ Now, does that mean you should feel *guilty* if you're white? Or *sorry* for those who are black? Not at all. It means we should try to *identify* with their plight . . . And error on the side of compassion.

The reality of white privilege doesn't mean we should wallow in guilt and lower standards, but *acknowledge* the difference and raise *awareness*. Counting others more *significant* than ourselves. *Looking* to their interests, instead of *ignoring* them. (Phil 2:3-4)

We must start empathizing. **(Summary)** And from *that* disposition, we'll go a long way toward the unity God intends.

Pray – Lord, open the eyes of our hearts. Open them to see you, and see others. Forgive our stereotypes. Forgive our ignorance. Forgive our apathy. Knit our hearts together in love now, for your glory and our joy, in your church.