

# Thinking Biblically About Race

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Georgia, the singer and the poet. How did you celebrate our country's 244th birthday yesterday?

Probably in a different way than you have in the past, since we're not supposed to be gathering together for all kinds of outside events, or inside in particular.

Yesterday was supposed to be, and for many people was, a celebration. But the reality is the mood of this country is anything but celebratory.

And it's because of two major crises that we're involved in right now. One is a health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. The other is a social relational crisis, racial division.

Now, concerning the health crisis, there is a lot of people saying the same thing. There's a consistent message of how to deal with the coronavirus.

[ 1 : 09 ] Things such as wash your hands frequently, practice social distancing, wear a mask, stay home if you're sick. We're hearing these and some other things.

It's a consistent message, isn't it? Well, concerning this social relational crisis, we are far from even being able to identify a consistent message on how to deal with the racial division.

So the question comes up, at least I think about it, is there any hope? And if you watch the news, if you read, things are looking bad.

Is there any hope? If so, where do we look? Well, before we try to answer that question, I want to be clear about where we are not to look. Don't go to social media.

That will only give you an unfiltered, an unhealthy personal opinion from people who have absolutely no platform from which to speak.

[ 2 : 23 ] And a lot that you're going to read on social media is going to only add fuel to the fire of controversy and division. Don't write inflammatory things on social media yourself.

It is a terrible witness as Christians. Number two, don't turn to mainstream media. Places like CBS, NBC, ABC, CBS, they are committed to giving you a very one-sided, liberal perspective on the issues, and they won't even deny it.

And they seem determined to keep fanning the flames of racial hostility. Now this third one is going to surprise some people, but I think it's the most important place not to look.

Don't look at your own heart. You know, one of the dumbest things, statements that have ever been put together is, follow your heart. The Bible repeatedly points to, even explains the root cause of all evil, including racial division and hostility, is the sinful hearts of human beings.

I'll give you two examples. Some of you know both of them, but look at this from Jeremiah. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

[ 3 : 52 ] Who can understand it? And then Jesus made this statement. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

And if the subject had been on racial division, he would have said racial division. When it comes to the seeking solutions to our social relational problems, the first and best place to look is the Bible.

And as Christians, that should be automatic for us because we should be convinced, have no doubt that God's word is true and trustworthy. This morning, as you can see the title, I want us to think biblically about race.

Last week, went along with this, thinking biblical about government authority, with a special emphasis on how law enforcement officers, they're agents of governmental authority who enforce laws, who protect and serve their communities.

As we looked last week, while there are a few who do not administer justice fairly, who are racially prejudiced, the overwhelming majority are men and women who are committed to protecting and serving their community, upholding and serving justice.

[ 5 : 20 ] And they do it not flawlessly, not perfectly, but they do it consistently. And they do it fairly. But this morning, we're focusing on a different subject, sub-subject, thinking biblically about race.

Let's begin at the beginning. And what I'm talking about is creation. Creation reveals the foundational oneness of all human beings. I truly believe this is the place to begin when talking about racial issues, racial division.

Look at the very beginning of how God started this world. All human beings can trace their origin to one common source.

Look at this. The one common source of human beings is the creative work of God. This is in the end of Genesis chapter one. Look at what it says.

Then God said, let us make man in our image after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens, over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

[ 6 : 30 ] Humanity, mankind, is in charge. God's stewards of the world. Look at the next verse. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God created mankind, humanity, both male and female, in his image.

That's unique. Nothing else in all creation was created in God's image. That gives every individual significance, worth, dignity even.

Every human being who has ever lived, who ever will live, is made in the image of God, and that makes them important. Creation also reveals that all human beings have one common ancestry.

Look at this. The one common ancestry of human beings began with the first man and first woman God created. Verse 28 in Genesis 1. And God blessed them.

[ 7 : 35 ] And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

That verse is telling us that if there were written records of all births that have taken place in this world back to creation, everyone would be able to trace their ancestry to that first couple.

That would blow up ancestry.com, wouldn't it? to have that many records. The Bible makes this clear in two other places at least.

We'll look at it this way. Adam is the father of us all. Luke records Paul preaching and he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth.

And then back in Genesis 3. And verse 20, Eve is the mother of us all. Adam named his wife Eve because she would become the mother of all the living. I want you to understand that the opening pages of the Bible clearly tell us that the way God created human beings makes two things true about everyone.

[ 9 : 03 ] number one. Every person who's ever lived is of equal worth, equal importance because they were created in the image of God. That means every person you see, every person you know you see, every person you like and don't like, every person who is just like you, everybody who is different from you, you should treat them with dignity and respect for one reason.

They're created in the image of God. That's what gives a person significance. Number two, every person who's ever lived is a descendant of Adam and Eve which makes every person a member of the same original race, the human race.

And the application of that is we should embrace every single human being as our blood can. If the Bible's true, this is how it begins with these clear statements and I want to emphasize here, Jesus, the way he talked about Adam and Eve and what happened at creation, Jesus understood that Adam and Eve were literal people.

That God created this man that he named Adam, that God created this woman he named Eve and from Adam and Eve have come all human beings.

So what the Bible teaches about the way God created human beings makes a very powerful statement about our country's racial problems.

[ 10 : 50 ] Listen, all human prejudice, all human hostility, divisiveness is based on anything like race, nationality, ethnic group or any other human distinction.

That is contrary to the way God created human beings to live. And we have prejudice toward people, discriminate against people based on the way they talk, the way they look, something like this.

we are treating the person contrary to the way God intended for them to be created and you can look at creation and see that. All this means is the root cause of all human relational problems, including racial problems, is sin.

Going against God's revealed will, acting contrary to what God has ordained, ordained. If God created everyone in His image from one man and one woman, how in the world did people get so divided?

Not just today, but throughout history. Well, the Bible explains the source of these divisions. The Bible explains the problem, what went wrong shortly after creation.

[12:18] Look out of here, we'll call it this, the fall broke the foundational oneness of all human beings. Now this is found in Genesis 3. I'm not going to turn to it.

We've looked at it on several occasions over the years. Most of you should be familiar with Genesis 3, how it explains how Adam and Eve sinned against God, they disobeyed Him, they ate the fruit He said not to eat of, they sinned against God, which immediately resulted in broken relationships.

If you read Genesis 3, as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God. They had enjoyed a close relationship with Him in the Garden of Eden, but after they sinned, they hid, they were afraid. their relationship with God was broken as a result of their sin. It also tells us there in the first few verses of Genesis that their relationship with one another was broken.

It wasn't what it once was. When Adam and Eve sinned and God confronted them, Adam actually blamed God for giving him Eve who gave him the forbidden fruit.

[13:46] That not only is an example of God, of Adam blaming God for his sin, he blamed his wife. Adam demonstrates great male weakness in not accepting his own responsibility.

That's what sin does. Sin blinds us to the truth. Sin causes us to be selfish, to protect ourselves no matter what. Even we have to lie, cheat, steal, or whatever it takes.

From Genesis chapter 3 until you get to the book of Revelation chapter 20, you see every kind of human, broken human relationship you can imagine.

Throughout the Old Testament, between individuals, between family members, between families, between tribes, between nations, between ethnicity, and the Old Testament, especially, you see, in the Old Testament and New, broken relationships between Jews and Gentiles, or Jews and non-Jews.

God's solution to this problem of broken relationships is found in one place, in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel explains God's plan for restoring unity and harmony between people of all races and ethnic groups.

[15:11] The gospel really explains the way God intends for harmony to be restored in every kind of broken relationship. Our relationship with Him, our relationship with other people, but it also applies for our relationship with people who look or act differently from us.

Now, let's look at how Paul explains this. Here we're going to be in Ephesians chapter 2. God used the death of Christ to unite His people, all His people in Christ, by tearing down walls of racial and ethnic prejudice and hostility.

There's an extended passage, Ephesians 2, 11 through 22, but I want us, for sake of time, just to focus on most of verses 13 through 16.

Look at this with me. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

[16:40] One of the tallest and strongest walls of separation that has ever existed, existed between Jews and Gentiles. It was a wall that no one could penetrate basically.

Now the Jews were responsible for building this wall. They were God's chosen people, but God chose them for a purpose more than a privilege.

God chose the people of Israel to be His agents in this world through whom He would work to call other people to Himself. But the people of Israel, the Jewish people, they only heard and acted on that part about being chosen by God.

It went to their head. They became arrogant. They became condescending toward everyone else in the world who was not Jewish.

So instead of becoming agents of peace and reconciliation, they became agents of hostility and division. The walls of division that Jews built also became the Gentiles' walls.

[ 18 : 05 ] The Jews erected these walls. We're God's chosen people. If you're not one of us, you're nothing. Well, the Gentiles embraced that wall. We don't want to be a part of you.

And persecuted Jews. Both groups embraced a common hostility and hatred for one another. Neither was innocent. Now, it's not just Jews and Gentiles who build such walls, is it? And it's not just something that happened in the past, is it?

We all know in this room there are all kinds of walls that divide people. You've got some walls in your life that you've erected to keep certain people away from you.

We all do. And it may have nothing to do with race. It may be other factors that we've built walls over. But let's go back to our subject matter, the race issue.

[ 19 : 11 ] Like Jews, white people in this country are responsible for building the walls between black and white in this country to start with.

There are, there's a major wall division today between blacks and whites in this country, between black Americans and white Americans. We have something in common with the Jews as white people.

we built the wall of separation and division to start with. Walls were first built by the institution of slavery. It thrived in this country for over 200 years during colonial America and then the first 90 years after our country was established.

these walls were reinforced by the legal lawful discrimination and segregation that took place in this country for 100 years after the end of slavery or until the mid to late 1960s we'll say.

That's the Jim Crow era. Now this is a fact that we cannot ignore. and it is a fact that cannot be denied.

[ 20 : 39 ] But like the Gentiles black people in this country have taken ownership of these walls of division.

Racism and prejudice are it's a two way street. I want to be clear. There are some people black and white who will argue that it's only white people in this situation who can be racist.

That is not true. It is not true in theory. It is not true in practice. Racism and prejudice are two way streets.

There's racism and prejudice white toward black. There's racism and prejudice black toward white. Now, racism is a term that's really hard to define.

You think about it. All that you are hearing about racism in this country, all that you have read, have you heard a common definition?

[ 21 : 45 ] Have you heard it actually defined or even clearly described? It's hard to find that. truth is many different people have many different definitions.

Here's a definition that was adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America, PCA denomination, that I think is academic, technical, but it helps us see what we're talking about.

Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races.

Racism, it may not be overt, it may be something that's just sort of subtle, inward, you don't think about it that much, or it may be very much you have embraced it and you talk about it, but it's a belief that you really believe your race is better than another race, that you're superior than another race.

D.A. Carson, the New Testament scholar, adds the idea of exclusion to the definition of racism, and he says this, but if racism is defined in terms of exclusion, then racism occurs wherever anyone is dismissed or disowned or demeaned or stereotyped for no other reason than his or her race or ethnicity.

[ 23 : 14 ] racism. Now, based on those two definitions, anyone from any race or ethnic group can be guilty of racism.

Now, while we're on the subject of definitions, let's address the definition of systemic racism. That dominates everything today. If you look at news online, listen to it, read it in the paper.

You can't read a paragraph without reading something about systemic racism. Very few people define it, by the way.

But I want to use a definition proposed by Derek Johnson, who is president of the NAACP. It was reported in the USA.com news.

Johnson defines systemic racism, also called structural racism, or institutional racism, as systems and structures that have procedures or processes that disadvantage African Americans.

[ 24 : 23 ] Now, it is without debate that during the days of slavery and Jim Crow, racism in this country was systemic as well as evil.

But since the Civil Rights Acts were passed in the mid to late 1960s, systemic racism has actually been illegal, unlawful in this country.

Thomas Sowell, he is one of this country's leading economists and commentators, or at least he was until his retirement of just a few years ago. He is also, by the way, a black man.

He said in a recent interview, look at this, that he has no idea what the proponents of the existence of institutional racism mean, and that they themselves do not know what they mean.

There's a lot of things being said about systemic institutional racism in this country. But very little definitions, examples, proof has been given.

[ 25 : 43 ] Now, I want to be clear. There are definitely groups of people and individuals in this country who are pure racists to the core. Some of them have such evil hearts that they are proud and public about their hatred for certain people whose race or language or culture is different from their own.

But what is being said about systemic racism being the predominant attitude of this country, that is by far overstating the problem.

It is not accurate. It is not accurately describing the issue. Now, one more thing needs to be clarified about the current racial situation.

The organization, Black Lives Matter, does not have the solution. It is true that the lives of black people matter just as much as the life of every other human being in this world because as we have already noted, all human beings are created in the image of God.

That means every life matters. Every life is of equal worth and dignity. But the organization called Black Lives Matter rejects the Bible's teaching on family, on sexual orientation and gender, and on abortion.

[ 27 : 21 ] Black Lives Matter, the organization also promotes radical socialism and opposes democracy. If you have any doubts, go to their website.

Go do a search. Black Lives Matter, the organization, it is there in black and white, very clear what they believe. They make no bones about it. This organization, as a result of these kinds of beliefs, they are not only not providing a solution to our current racial problem, they are compounding the problem.

They are fanning the flames of this problem. If we are serious about wanting the walls of racial division torn down in this country, then both black and white Christians must be willing to assume responsibility for these problems.

And both black and white Christians must be willing to work together for the glory of God and the good of all.

But the walls will never be torn down and reconciliation, unity, and loving relationships will never take their place without God's gracious intervention.

[ 28 : 55 ] Paul tells us that the only way years of distrust, prejudice, and outright hatred can be overcome is by the blood of Christ in verse 13.

And when he talks about the blood of Christ, he's referring to the Lord's death on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. As I pointed out earlier, sin is the foundation that the walls of division in this country about race are built upon.

These are sins like pride, like prejudice, like selfishness, like an unforgiving spirit. When we, when anyone turns to Christ in faith, the response to the gospel is we must simultaneously turn from sin.

That's what repentance is. The gospel, the good news is that Jesus came into this world to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He arose triumphantly by the power of God to prove he has conquered sin, death, and the devil.

He's ascended into heaven. This good news, the Bible tells us we respond to it by admitting we are sinners in need of a Savior, changing our mind about the way we've been living, turning from our sin, repenting of our sin, and then turning to Christ in faith.

[ 30 : 21 ] Now, I want to make it clear what repentance means. I can only repent of my sins, not the sins of what someone in the past has done.

I'll be more specific. I cannot repent of the sin of slavery because I have never owned a slave. It is impossible for someone living today to repent of the sin of slavery that was abolished in 1865. I want to go further because some evangelical writers are going further. Being white is not a sin. I read just recently an evangelical pastor made the statement that white black people need to repent of their whiteness.

I am not lying. Google it. You'll see it yourself. Being white is not a sin. Being black is not a sin. Being brown is not a sin.

[ 31 : 44 ] Let's go even further. God made me white. God made every black man or woman black. He made every brown person brown.

That's the sovereign work of God to make us who we are, put us where we are. So we don't repent of other people's sins.

White people do not have to repent of being white because it is not a sin. Black people do not have to repent of being black because it is not a sin. Let's go back to what we are talking about more personally.

But I can and must repent of my personal sins. You must, to be a follower of Jesus Christ, own your sins.

Confess them. Agree with God. They are there. They are real. People hate them and then turn from them. If I have been prejudiced against someone because of the color of their skin, in either attitude, word, or action, I have sinned against that person.

[ 32 : 58 ] I have sinned against God. And that is a sin I must own and repent of. The truth is, not a single person in the world, not a single one of us in this room, can be right with God and refuse to repent of any sin that he convicts us of.

We can't make excuses for our sin. Sin is an offense against a holy God, punishable by death and ultimately hell. And the only reason all of us are not bound at this moment to hell is God sent his son to this world because he loves us to pay the penalty for our sins when he died on the cross so that through faith in him we're forgiven, made right with God.

And when we die, we go to heaven instead of the place we deserve called hell. There will never be complete unity and agreement on how we as Christians actually do do the hard work of racial reconciliation and bring it about unity.

There's always going to be differences in how we look at the problem, how we identify with the problem, and how we go about dealing with the problem, but we can work together.

It won't be easy, but by God's grace, it is possible. So we've got to try.

[ 34 : 34 ] We've got to seek God to help us. I want you to look at something Billy Graham said years ago when talking about racial and ethnic problems. He says, the issues that face us are complex and enormous, and simply wishing they would go away will not solve them.

I do not pretend to know the full answer, but let those of us who claim the name of Christ repent of our past failures and relying on the Holy Spirit demonstrate to a weary and frightened world that Christ indeed has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility through the cross by which he put to death their hostility.

Right now, I don't want us to think about what's going on in the world. I don't want you to think about any other person that you know or even know of.

I want you to think about you for these next few minutes. Do you have any walls of racial or ethnic hostility that need to be torn down in your life?

You may not have built those walls. You may have inherited those walls. You may have grown up in a family. You may have grown up in a circle where those walls were already in existence, but you embraced them.

[ 36 : 05 ] The place to begin in racial reconciliation is to admit that those walls exist, if they exist in your life.

They may not. But God knows, and you know, because God will make it clear to you. The place to begin with reconciliation is to admit there's walls if there are walls.

Then repent of your specific sins. Will it be attitude, words, or actions? That which God has convicted you about through this message.

Or maybe as you watch the news, maybe as you read the Bible, maybe as you're just going down the road thinking in the spirit of God, if you're a Christian, has got a hold of you. Admit the walls exist.

Change your mind. Change your attitude. Change your vocabulary. Change the way that you live. Turn to Jesus Christ in faith, trusting that he's paid the penalty for your sins.

[ 37 : 20 ] Trust that through faith in him, you're right with God. But also understand that everyone else who puts their faith and trust in him is your brother or sister in Christ, as well as a fellow member of the human race with you.

If you're a Christian and you need help overcoming some racial barriers, cry out to God to change your mind, change your heart, change whatever needs to change.

We all need to ask God to work in this country, to tear down walls, to help people see that there's a lot, just as human beings, we have in common regardless of our color.

We need to pray that God will also work in our country that people will be able to forgive and move forward and leave the past in the past and truly experience reconciliation, oneness in Christ if we're Christians, and brothers and sisters in Christ if they're Christians.

But we need to also pray that people learn to live as brothers and sisters, as fellow human beings. I want us to pray together, and I want us all to pray about ourselves and the response we need to make.

[ 38 : 48 ] And then you make it to God right now. Let's bow. Let's bow. Let's bow themselves. How to bow?

Now let's bow as brothers and sisters, who have we be concerned. Let's bow. All right. Bye bye. My baston.