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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Why must we keep talking about racism?

(a) Events (and varying, contrary interpretations) continue to reveal deep-seated racism among our nation and the evangelical church of America.

(b) Racialization continues to define our nation and the evangelical church of America.

In Michael Emerson and Christian Smith's important book *Divided By Faith*, a radicalized society is defined as "a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships."<sup>1</sup>

This racialization is, as Sandy Willson has said, "increasingly covert, deeply imbedded in our institutions, and virtually invisible to most white people."<sup>2</sup>

David Wells: "American Christianity has adopted American character"; in that, people are free to worship where and how they want.

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<sup>1</sup> Emerson and Smith, *Divided By Faith*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Willson, *Letters to a Birmingham Jail*, 134.



## 2. What theological principles must we uphold?

(a) We must cultivate a deep conviction of the wrong-ness of racism.

1. All human beings are made in the image of God.

*Martin Luther King: "There are no gradations in the image of God. Every man from a treble white to a bass black is significant on God's keyboard, precisely because every man is made in the image of God."*<sup>3</sup>

2. All believers are redeemed through the blood of Christ.

**Ephesians 2:14-16,18:** *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, 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. . . . For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

*John Piper: "The bloodline of Jesus Christ is deeper than the bloodlines of race. The death and resurrection of the Son of God for sinners is the only sufficient power to bring the bloodlines of race into the single bloodline of the cross."*<sup>4</sup>

3. All forms of exceptionalism must cease.

(b) We must resist all racial prejudice and beware of the tendency to discount the effects of a racialized society.

1. Beware of the tendency to conclude the antidote to racism is personal reconciliation and forgiveness.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/in-the-image-of-god-we-trust>

<sup>4</sup> Piper, *Bloodlines*, 13–14.



*Carl Ellis says, "Tears and hugs and saying I'm sorry is a good first step, but for me, the question is not one of changing the hearts of individuals as [much as] it is dealing with the systems and the structures that are devastating African-American people."<sup>5</sup>*

2. Beware of the tendency to reject the effects and conclusions of a racialized society.

(a) Beware of emphasizing personal responsibility too highly.

(b) Beware of skepticism about "white privilege" and other conclusions about the United States as a racialized society.

3. Cultivate a deep love for diversity.

Ephesians 4:4-6: There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

### **3. How should we practically respond?**

1. Repent.

2. Listen and learn.

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Ellis, quoted in *Divided By Faith*, 67.



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**Philippians 2:3-4:** *"...in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

3. Love the other.

4. Engage.

5. Pray.

**Psalms 127:1:** Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.