

The Beauty of Grace and Race

The problem with good works and the problem with race and how Jesus is the answer.

Acts 10 - 11:18

Introduction

The Problem with Good Works

The scandal of the gospel – prostitutes and thieves will enter into heaven, while many religious people who lived an outwardly moral life and went to Church every Sunday will be left out.

Matthew 21:31 Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

Description of Cornelius' Character

10:2 (Luke's description)

A man who prayed

Cornelius and his character (a Centurion)

A man who was devout

10:22 (Cornelius' servants)

A man who feared God

Upright and God-fearing man

A man who cared for his family

Well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation

A man who was generous and gave to the needy

Biblically we're forced to say that even though Cornelius was a good man he was not saved and needed the gospel of Christ. Bible interpretation – cannot be proof text Christians, must understand every passage in its own context and in the context of all of Scripture. Because God is the author of Scripture, we believe that the Bible, in its entirety is inerrant. That means that there are no errors in the truths which the Bible are asserting to teach. In other words, the nature of Scripture means that the Bible cannot say that A is true and A is false at the same time. That would be a contradiction. One of those statements cannot be true. So for instance, you can't have one part of the Bible saying that a man like Cornelius is saved and another part of the Bible saying he is not saved.

Why I think the Bible is clear that he's not saved until Peter comes with the gospel

1. Acts 11:13-14 And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; 14 he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.'
2. Acts 11:18 When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."
3. 10:38-41 Peter unpacked the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – Look how he summarizes his message: Acts 10:42-43 And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. 43 To him all the prophets bear witness that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins** through his name."

Galatians 2:16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

The mindset that we can be acceptable to God on the basis on our goodness or our good works nullifies the concept of grace – It's to say that Christ died for no purpose.

Diver in the shark suit - sinking

Jesus did not come to die for people who were pretty good but just needed a little help.

Please don't be offended by my pointing out that your good works would never be good enough

Be humbled and rejoice that your Savior loves you this much...

Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The exclusivity of Christ

How many people do you know who

- Have a good reputation in the community
- Are devout and pray
- And even believe in God and tip their hats toward him

Have they actually heard and do they understand the gospel?

Have they experienced the repentance that leads to life?

Have they believed in Jesus and received forgiveness of sin?

What about us here today. It's all together possible that you're here today and you've come from a good family. You have a good reputation in our community. You're devout. You've been a pretty good parent.

What I want to know is have you come to the foot of the cross and bowed your knees at the feet of King Jesus? Have you made an end of trusting in yourself and your goodness and placed all your hope of eternal life in the person and work of Jesus?

Maybe you're here today and you've never thought about all of this but you've simply always thought of yourself as a pretty good person. Can I just go ahead and agree with you that you probably are. But let me also tell you that the doorway into an eternity of perfect love and happiness is not through your good works. The door into eternal life is through the perfect work of Jesus. And I pray that you walk through it.

The problem with our good works is that they can never be good enough to gain acceptance with God. We need the gospel!

The Problem with Race

The epicenter of Christ's redemptive work was in Jerusalem. But we've been seeing how that Jesus wants results of his work to expand over time to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Easy for the Apostles and early disciples to think that Jesus only meant for the gospel to go out to ethnic Jews who had been scattered throughout the known world.

Peter's vision (how drastically God has to act to overcome Peter's inherent racism)

Joppa – Jonah

Peter – hungry, housetop to pray, trance 12 noon

Heavens opened – a great sheet, all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds

Jesus speaks from heaven, "Rise, kill, and eat!"

By no means Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.

"What God has made clean, do not call common."

Acts 10:28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

What is racism? Racism is bias or discrimination based on a person or group's racial qualities. The underlying notion of racism is that various races can be subdivided into categories and, based on their characteristics, prioritized as superior or inferior.

One Race

What lies at the heart of racism? (cont. next pg)

What lies at the heart of racism? The root? Sin. Human beings are selfish creatures. In any given situation we want our own selves to be in a position of advantage. We want to have the most power over our domain. We want to call the shots. We want to feel superior to other people. The natural extension of that is that our individual self-centeredness gets cast to our entire people group. So, in society, we want the group of people most like us to be in power. We want the advantage. We want to be the superior group. And so what happens? In order to keep our position of advantage, we keep other people groups down so they don't get the advantage over our people group.

This make this very personal with us, ok?

Generally speaking there are two forms of racism – overt and subtle.

Overt – actively and openly hating people of other ethnicities

Subtle – you might not actively or openly hate, but you have this subtle fear of other people who are not like you. Out of fear, you support the political party that you feel will most represent the interests of your people group. In subtle racism, we would never get caught committing an overt act of hate toward another person, but we tend to stay segregated from those people.

Ephesians 2:13-16 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 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, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Galatians 3:27-28 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 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.

Does it bother you that Sunday is the most segregated day of the week?

My presupposition – That the throne of Christ is the most beautiful place that exists. (Rev. 4 and 5)

Revelation 5:8-9 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,

If the precious blood of Christ was shed to purchase people from every people group on the planet, Shouldn't our churches mirror the beauty of the glory of Heaven?

How could a Christian, or a church, with any sincerity pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven," if what we really want is a segregated Church.

If you're overtly a racist – repent! There's hope for you if you repent.

If you struggle with the more subtle forms of racism, I want you to consider what Christ's blood has purchased at the cross...

The problem of racism is that it is a contradiction to the character of God and Christ's redeeming work on the cross.

The beauty of grace and race is that -

Jesus is the answer to these two problems – Jesus was the one man in the universe who was truly, uniquely superior to every other person who's ever existed. And yet, he humbled himself, he willingly and joyfully condescended to associate with us. The accusation against him was that he ate with sinners. He came and lived the life that we should have lived and died the death that we should have died, all for love.