**Week 4  - Understanding Unconscious Bias: Seeing God and God's Image Bearers More Clearly** - Dr. Christina Edmondson

**… I'm trying to be mindful of the fact that God loves people and that is a good reason to love them as well...**

**It's hard to see what you're not looking for and moreover it's hard to see what's actually hidden -- things that are under the surface and in many cases well-protected by many psychological defenses.**

**I want to talk about a term called unconscious bias or implicit bias.**

**… and what we can do to resist the implicit biases that we most certainly have.**

**Implicit bias -- it refers to the attitudes and the stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.**

**And these biases that we have they start forming at a very early age through direct and indirect messaging.**

**So they don't necessarily match our declared belief -- meaning that they are incongruent, they’re inconsistent with who you and I say that we are.**

**Generally, our implicit biases favor our “in group**”**.  Although, that's not always the case because the impact of dominant group bias is so pervasive, so influential and so attached to power resources and danger that even minority groups will begin to internalize implicit biases that are negative against themselves.**

**Implicit biases, just like they can be learned, in theory, they can be unlearned -- and they can change.**

**And so, for the sake of having an efficient brain, well, it sorts things up -- puts them in a “file cabinet”.**

**So welcome to Psychology 101 -- a study in the limbic system and amygdala.**

**And that amygdala that I mentioned is the emotional center of the brain and it reacts strikingly to fear and threat.  Remember that fight, flight, or freeze from Psych 101?**

**In other words, when my fear goes up, so do my implicit biases.**

**The amygdala is not the only part of the brain involved in unconscious or implicit bias, but also the frontal cortex.**

**And that's the part of the brain that we associate with kind of executive functioning, and forming impressions of others, and measuring, and using empathy and impulse control. These are good things, saints… impulse control.**

**The noetic effects of sin... speaks to the way that sin negatively affects and undermines the human’s mind and the human’s intellect.**

**People like Calvin and Kuyper and more recently Maroney have theorized and talked about the noetic effects of sin and one of the things that we saw particularly with Calvin and Kuyper and other, ironically, European western men is this belief that all the hard sciences are protected from the noetic effects of sin and that our rationalization is still still secure. That hasn't been jacked up.** **We can still intellectualize and reason our way to Jesus.**

**So... that's the problem: to only believe that emotions are somehow susceptible to sin, but not that reasoning isn't susceptible to sin.**

**After all, our emotions are a product of our cognition.**

**And the truth is we cannot intellectualize our way to God.  And those of us who are attracted to the theology of the large brain-on-a-stick have to reckon with this. We've got to reckon with it.  We have to reckon with whether or not we have found ourselves practicing an intellectual, works-based righteousness.**

**But yet, when I see their witness in the worship service of their hands raised, of utterances of broken amens, I am reminded that I have a God who loves past the weaknesses of my intellectual infirmities and who pulls me to himself not by my wisdom, but by his love and his grace alone.**

**We must push back on this temptation of giving our brains too much confidence.**

**I find it hard to believe that we don't think that we don't all have biases, but sometimes that truth gets in the way of our political agendas and it pushes back on our mythologies. Oh, they give us a sense of our own identity.  Implicit bias has deep, deep implications for you and I and our neighbors.**

**Two empirical examples of implicit bias:**

1. **The way in which we associate names with particular values because names are often racialized in our cultural context.**

**Research study called “Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal**?”

**With the same qualifications, the same background, and the same information we find that so-called white sounding names are 50% more likely to receive a call than the so-called black sounding names.**

1. **Another study looks at accents.**

**Non-western, white American accents are considered less trustworthy than other accents.**

**Those who had accents that were outside of white American normativity were always ranked as having higher likelihood to be distrusted.**

**I didn't name myself -- you didn't name yourself, more than likely.  And the accents that we have are a product of God's providence in us listening and hearing and being shaped by different places.  And at bottom, they are not a reflection of whether or not we can do a particular job.  But we know they have a significant impact on whether or not we're perceived as competent and trustworthy. And those are characterological statements.  They give you access or deny you access.  So these biases are problematic.**

**Race is a pseudo-scientific caste system.  That's the perfect purpose of it.  Racism is a necessary by-product of race.  The purpose of race is to give us racism.**

**That pseudoscientific caste system is central to the American mythology of exceptionalism.**

**[Dr. Devine] offers us some practical, concrete ways for us to disentangle us for what she considers the habit-forming of prejudice that we have.**

1. **She reminds us of the importance of having positive cross-cultural mentors in our lives.**
2. **She reminds us of the importance of dismissing the toxic belief that you and I are somehow objective when we're not.**
3. **She emphasizes the importance of actually being trained to dig up, expose, and reveal our biases so that we can actually wisely resist and dismantle them.**

**Romans 12:1-5 (NIV)**

**Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your true and proper worship.  Do not conform to the pattern -- the schemas, the systems -- of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

**Did you know that your brain actually renews itself?  Physiological level.**

**Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing, and perfect will.  For by the grace given me I say to everyone of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought…**

**... in accordance with the faith God has distributed each of you for just as each of us has one body with many members, oh, we need each other. And these members do not all have the same function -- you better believe the western church desperately needs the eastern church.**

**So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.  This passage, Romans 12:1-5, reminds us of a few things: it’s talking to all of us, the “y’alls”, everybody, all the saints -- ”I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy… ”**

**It reminds us that our bodies are a part of worship.  These brains-on-the-stick -- we gotta put that down y’all.  And that orthodoxy and orthopraxis and orthoaffective -- the way we feel about things -- have all got to be submitted to the word of God in the catholic fellowship of the church because you and I cannot rightly see each other without the entire church-global speaking into who we are.**

**It reminds us to resist conforming to the patterns of this world -- the schemas, the structures, the mythological views of exceptionalism -- that are a farce, that give some inferiority and others the heresy of divinity.**

**This Romans 12:1-5... tells us to renew the mind so that we can test and approve God's will.  Your hermeneutics are jacked up if you don't renew your mind. Your biases about who should be on top and who should not be on top inform the way you read holy scripture.  And it impacts everybody.  And while this text is most certainly focused on the body of Christ -- the children of God -- it has direct implication for those currently outside of the household of God.**

**It has direct implications for “agapic neighborliness”.  And your neighbor is the person you least want it to be.  And that's what we know from the good Samaritan.  I would encourage you brothers and sisters to continue to do the humbling work along with me of renewing our mind to the glory of God that we might see God, ourselves, and our neighbor rightly.**