

Racial Reconciliation is a Gospel Thing

I mentioned a few weeks ago an important resolution that overwhelmingly passed at our recent General Assembly meetings of the PCA. It's called "Pursuing Racial Reconciliation and the Advance of the Gospel." [You can read the full statement at the bottom of this page: <http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Actions-of-the-44th-General-Assembly-2016.pdf>] With this resolution, our denomination is striving to move beyond mere words toward real healing between races. Each of our congregations is being called to consider ways that we should repent of our own failures (past and present, active and passive) and work on ways to build cross-cultural relationships within our communities. But how do we "strive towards racial reconciliation for the advancement of the gospel, the love of Christ, and the glory of God" the way the resolution challenges us to do?

The resolution suggests a letter written by the Mississippi Valley Presbytery which gives practical wisdom on how we can seek biblical reconciliation. It starts with recognizing that racism is "denial of the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27)... a contradiction of the visible unity of all believers in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22; Revelation 5:9; 7:9)... [and] a contradiction of Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31; Luke 10:25-37)." Jesus is very clear that He intends to save individual people so that they can be united together as His body, but racism in the church - whether active or passive - breaks down this unity and harms the witness of the church to the world. In other words, we start racial reconciliation by affirming that it is an essential part of the Gospel of Jesus.

The hard thing for us is that we often don't even recognize when we are participating in actions and attitudes that contribute to hurting our brethren from minority cultures. So, how do we heal? The pastoral letter suggests some things that we can pursue:

1) Learn - Read this whole pastoral letter online (you can get to it from the link above). Go online to <https://www.raanetwork.org> and see what's on the hearts of reformed pastors from a different culture. Read a book like *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith. Let your heart be humble to learn where your own presuppositions are.

2) Pray - "In prayer we acknowledge our own powerlessness, but at the same time acknowledge God's power to act, save and change... Thank God that there is a reawakening of Reformed Theology in the African American community... Thank God for the increasing ethnic diversity in the PCA that has grown up because of the power of the Gospel... Confess whatever your own personal and congregational sins and failures may be, whether by omission or commission, pertaining to loving our African American brothers and sisters in Christ... Grieve the consequences of this for our own day and ask the Lord to open your eyes to blindspots and behavior that continue to cause us to fall short of our biblical duties towards fellow believers of different ethnicities... Ask God that by the Holy Spirit he would break down barriers that separate us from one another and create the unity that ought to be exhibited within the body of Christ... Ask God that the real, biblical, Gospel, Holy Spirit-wrought, racial reconciliation in our church might be a powerful witness to the culture around us that would cause even unbelievers to say: 'surely God is among them.'"

3) Relate - "Make friends. Do not underestimate the power of friendship. This whole discussion will remain abstract until you meet and befriend a person whom you come to care about, who is different from you, and who can give you a perspective on this issue different from your own... We naturally gather in similar groups. We have to do something unnatural, or rather, supernatural to break the cycles of social sameness that hinder racial reconciliation."

Racial reconciliation is not an option for the people who belong to Jesus; it is a Gospel thing. If Jesus loved us enough to break down the walls of sin that separated us from Him, then we should be eager to love others enough to break down the walls of sin that separate us too. What will that look like in our lives? Let's not be afraid to talk about it together.