

The Bible and Racism

Philippians 2:1-4. If you're visiting with us, welcome to our church. We're glad you're here. And if you're joining us via livestream (9am West), it's good to be connected. As you can see, I too am a walking billboard for High Five. So be in prayer. These are often formative weeks for our kids.

- As I said last week, we're taking a break from our study of Acts, to focus on racism. The reason for which is found right here in Phil 2.
[1] *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

We're going to focus on the issue of racism, because it's part of looking *to the interests of others*. V4 says – *Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others*.
It's a command first of all, for every single one of us. Individually. *Let each of you* it says. Which is particularly appropriate for racism . . .
Because dealing with it starts right here (heart).

During WWI, a London newspaper asked its readers to respond to the question, “What’s wrong with the world?”
And G.K. Chesterton, an author, poet, and apologist wrote, “Dear Sirs, I am. Sincerely, G.K. Chesterton.”
Where does the problem of racism lie? Right here (heart).

2nd, this verse is a command to get *outside* ourselves. Outside our *own* world and our *own* interests, and into *the interests of others*.
The issues of others. The situations *they* face. The concerns *they* have.
Which for most people of color, is racism. Whether they want it to be or not. It's an issue. A topic they can't get away from and have to think about far too often.

So everything I'm going to say in the next 3 weeks is an application of this verse. *Let each of you look . . . to the interests of others*. (4)

- That said, I'm *not* talking about this because I think we have a *problem* with it in our church. At all.
We have a *great* deal of affection and sympathy as v1 says. A *great* deal of love, a *great* deal of humility, a *great* deal of likeminded-ness and accord.
I don't see or sense *anything* awry in this respect.

But that doesn't mean racism is non-existent among us. That doesn't mean we're exempt from *blind* spots. Or that we don't need to confront it or *speak* to it on occasion.

So this is an “interest” for all of us. And I'm pretty sure we *all* have room to grow.
Especially in our sensitivity to those it most affects.

- So let's start with a definition:

Racism is the feeling of distrust or dislike because of a person's color or ethnicity.

You can find a hundred different definitions of racism these days, but I think that gets at the core of it. And *covers* most of it.

From blatant animosity and expressions of racial superiority, to subtle discomfort and mild aversion. It's all a matter of degree. Degrees of distrust and dislike.
Distrust and dislike that's often times *internal*. In how we *feel*.

Which means you can be racist without ever burning a cross, wearing a hood, or calling someone the N-word.

Those are some of the most heinous forms, but they're not the only ones.

Most of the time racism shows itself in certain attitudes, or decisions, or innuendos.

Like the tone of voice some people use when speaking about “black people.”

Or the discomfort whites have when *they're* the minority.

Or the disdain some *blacks* feel toward whites. That too is racism.

Or thoughts of superiority in *both*.

It's racism. All of it. Whether you're racially wary, racially skeptical, racially charged, or racially calloused. That which we call a rose, by any other name is still a rose.
It's still racism.

And it still exists.

Racism exists

Oh, maybe not legally. With Jim Crow laws and all. Separate but “equal.”

We may not have *legal* racism anymore. Or *systemic* racism on the scale we did 60 and 100 years ago. Even though blacks are sentenced longer than whites . . .
For the same crimes often times. And the quality of our *schools* are vastly different.

We may not have legal or *systemic* racism like we did before, but we certainly have *personal* racism. Individual expressions. That *does* exist.

From those who spout off on social media, to those who still call people names. And even spit in people's faces. Like my daughter saw firsthand the other day.

A group of Junior High boys, all black, were standing at a stoplight walking home from school one afternoon . . .

When a white bike courier *spit* on them as he sped by. Hitting one of the boys in the face. It exists.

Or how about the kids of one of our own families being called the N-word recently. By some other kids in their neighborhood.

Or some of our other minorities being asked if they have their Green Card.

And on the *national* front recently, I'm not even going to name her name.

Racism exists. Not that it's as bad as it could be or as bad as it was. Not that it's culture-wide or all-pervasive. But that it's still there.

- And it goes both ways. With many blacks fostering ill-will toward whites. Like the slurs and taunts directed at one of our own *biracial* couples.
To the extent they won't even go to the mall together anymore. Right here in the Quad Cities. Racism is racism. And it exists on both sides of the street.

But there's little doubt that it takes its greatest toll on people of color. Those in the minority. Many of whom in our country . . .
Still feel marginalized, disenfranchised, or threatened.
And if they don't, they're still *tired*. Tired of dealing with the *issue*. Whether they experience it or not. It's called race fatigue.

➤ And compounding the problem, are those who refuse to even consider it. Those who are indifferent to racism. Those in denial.
Something as believers by the way, we don't have the *luxury* of.
We *can't* be indifferent. To *any* kind of injustice or inequality.
We bear the name Christian. We represent Jesus. We're ambassadors of the king.

So if you haven't yet opened your eyes to the reality of racism, the time has come.
Because it exists. Sometimes right here (heart).

And what's worse, is that it's sinful.

Racism is sinful.

Feelings of distrust or dislike because of a person's skin color, is *sin*. Because hate is sin.
In *any* form. *Any* amount. From mild aversion to loathing. It's wrong.
So wrong, that the Apostle John equates it to murder. **1 Jn 3:15**.
Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.
Racism is hate, hate is murder, murder of the soul, and it leads to death. Just like the consequences of *any* sin. (Rom 6:23)

So racism is sinful because . . .

1. It's a form of hate. Plain and simple. All of it.

From whites to blacks, blacks to whites, Americans to Mexicans, and any other combination that exists. It's hateful.
And if we're ever going to stop it, we need to start by calling it what it is. Sin.

Second, it's sinful because . . .

2. God will judge us for it.

That's found in **Rom 14:10-12**. Where Paul says . . .

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God . . . [12] So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

In other words, racism is not only sinful, but foolish. Because we'll be held accountable for it. And judged for it.

3. It's the opposite of love.

Jesus says in John 15:12 – *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* Love people like Jesus loves you. That's the command.

Which is just the opposite of distrusting or disliking someone because they're *not* like you. Racism is the opposite of Christ's command to love.

So no matter how you look at it, it's sinful.

It doesn't matter what someone has done. It doesn't matter what others of a *similar* ethnicity do. It doesn't matter what *crime* rates are in certain neighborhoods.
Feelings of distrust/dislike because of a person's or community's skin color, is wrong.

➤ Now, that doesn't mean you shouldn't be wary and careful in bad neighborhoods. Of *any* color. Or mindful of your surroundings in risky situations.
It just means the *reason* you're wary and careful, should *not* be due to the *skin* color in those areas. Or ethnicity. Whether it's African, Asian, Hispanic, or Arab.

When Becky and I entered the airport in Beirut Lebanon last year, we were *very* wary.
Because we were keenly aware of the *risk*. We felt it.

Not because we were surrounded by Arabs, but because we were in a massive crowd of people, in a country that's home to a terrorist organization.

The point is this: conclusions based on the behavior and *character* of individuals or groups, are just fine.

Concerns based on the presence of people who do bad things, is wise.

But fears or assumptions based on skin color and ethnicity, is sin.

And if we're ever going to expunge it from our culture and our lives, we have to call it what it is, and admit that it exists. Racism exists, and racism is sinful.

I think that much is clear.

➤ What's *not* so clear, is how much . . .

Racism is contrary to God's heart.

From what he thinks, to what he desires, to what he's done, to what he's doing.

Racism is the furthest thing from the heart of God. For 5 reasons.

1. All people are created in the *image* of God.

All. And to disapprove of even one, is to disapprove of God.

After creating the animals, **Gen 1:26-27** says . . .

Then God said, "Let us make man [mankind] in our image, after our likeness . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him [he says it 3 times]; male and female he created them."

And **Acts 17:26** says that – *He [God] made from one man [Adam] every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.* Their ethnicity.

Because we're descended from Adam, and Adam was created in God's image, we are too.

Every single one of us bears the image and likeness of God. From the ability to reason and choose, to the color of our skin.*****

And to disapprove of someone because of that, is to disapprove of God.

Or to say it another way, racism is contrary to God's heart, because it disapproves of God's image.

2. God affirmed diversity over and over again in the Bible.

6 examples here. Starting with Moses. Who was *married to a black woman*.

A Jewish, olive skin, man of God, commended for his humility and leadership, was married to a black, Cushite woman. True. **Nu 12:1**.

[1] Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman.

And history tells us, both biblical *and* extra-biblical, that the Cushites were a black *nation*.
Occupying the region south of Egypt in those days, later referred to as Ethiopia.

And we know that God *affirmed* Moses' marriage to this woman, because the rest of the chapter records the punishment of Miriam for opposing it.

Striking her with leprosy for 7 days.*****

Which means, that God's prohibition against interracial marriage in *other* parts of the Old Testament was to prevent believers from being unequally yoked.

Prevent those who feared and followed him from being adversely influenced by those who didn't. Those who worshipped *pagan* deities.

In other words, interracial marriage was prohibited on *theological* grounds, not ethnic.
For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? None. Doesn't now, didn't then. (2 Cor 6:14)
So ethnicity is not the issue. Worship is. That's the first example.

➤ The 2nd, is *Rahab and Ruth*. God affirmed diversity by including Rahab and Ruth in the genealogy of *Jesus*. Mt 1:5. Because Rahab was a Canaanite, and Ruth a Moabite. The furthest *thing* from Israelites. Like we talked about last week with the curse of Canaan. It's a stunning and open affirmation of diversity.
It would be like a white man in the late 1800's of the Jim Crow South, finding out that he was the offspring of a black slave woman 200 years earlier, and being proud of it.

3rd, God affirmed diversity by involving the Cushites in many of Israel's *national* affairs.
From trade relations, to soldiers in David's army.
Even a full-scale *military* alliance. When Judah was attacked by Assyria and the Cushites fought alongside them in victory. 2 Kings 19. (9)

And don't miss the Cushite/Ethiopian officer named *Ebed-melech*. The 4th example.
His story is found in Jeremiah 38-39. Where he interceded for Jeremiah before the king, rescued him from a cistern where he had been thrown by his opponents . . .
And was promised deliverance from Israel's enemies because of his trust in *God*.
It's an affirmation of diversity.

➤ 5th, God affirmed it through *Isaiah*. Who proclaimed that God's kingdom is for foreigners too. *Non-Israelites*. Even in that day. (**Is 56:6-7**)
"The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD . . . [7] these I will bring to my holy mountain [God says] . . . for my house [my kingdom] shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Something Jesus *himself* affirmed. Mark 11.*****

And last but not least, a *black* man was the first non-Jewish convert recorded in the New Testament. The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8). Descended from the Cushites.

Over and over again in the Bible, God affirms diversity. Because that's his heart.
Contrary to racism.

3. God doesn't show favorites. (Acts 10:34-35)

Racism is contrary to God's heart because he doesn't show favorites.

Peter realized that in Acts 10:34-35 after his experience with the Roman centurion from Italy. *"Truly I understand [he said] that God shows no partiality . . . [35] but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.* Red, brown, yellow, black, or white. God doesn't show favorites.

4. God designed us for unity. (Gal 3:28)

Racism is contrary to God's heart, because he designed us for unity. Especially in the church. Breaking down the barriers that divide us, and making us one. (Eph 2)

Gal 3:28 – *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.* Unified in Christ.

It's not that our distinctions don't matter, but that they don't matter to our *unity*. They don't matter to our harmony. Our accord.

Which takes us back to Ph 2:1-2.*****

[1] So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

That's God's heart. That's the goal for which he designed us. Unity. The very *antithesis* of racism. And a defining characteristic of the church . . .

That sets us 180 degrees apart from the world.

The world's against racism, but not necessarily for unity.

And then last, racism is contrary to God's heart, because . . .

5. Eternity will include people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. (Rev 5:9; 7:9)

Like the Apostle John saw in his vision of *heaven* (**Rev 5:9**).

Where worshippers sang to Jesus, *"Worthy are you . . . for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."*

And towards the *end* of The Great Tribulation (**Rev 7:9**), John *sees* those people.

A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. (Rev 7:9)

Every tribe. Every people. Every color. Every ethnicity. They're *all* going to be present, because that's God's heart. The furthest *thing* from racism.*****

Which means that feelings of distrust or dislike will *have* no place. And shouldn't now.

➤ 5 reasons (**Summary**). To look not only to your own interests, but *to the interests of others*. (Ph 2:4)

Allowing God to conform *your* heart to *his*. Contrary to racism in every way.

Pray – Lord, open our eyes to this issue. Help us to see it for what it is, see it around us, and see it in us. We repent of any feelings of distrust or dislike. May your power break down walls more and more in Jesus' name, so that we shine your light more and more.

For more reading:

Article – ESV Study Bible, *Racial Discrimination*, p. 2557-58

Book – *From Every People and Nation*, J. Daniel Hays