



Race and Reconciliation

Elder Position Paper

Racial tensions are prominent in America right now, and certainly this is nothing new. Indeed, the United States – as so many countries do – has a sordid history of slavery and racism, which is a blight upon our nation and an affront to the triune God in Whose image all people are made (Gen 1:26-28). So often the cultural conversation about race and reconciliation seems filled with hopelessness, as if the brokenness and sins of the past must necessarily be the defining characteristic of a nation and its people moving forward. Thanks be to God, there is a better way; a way filled with the hope of Christ. We confidently believe that the Gospel changes everything!

The reality is that all of Adam’s descendants are guilty, no matter what their ethnic heritage or nationality (Rom 5:12-21), and no one can atone for their own sins (Ps 49:7-9). This is why the only sinless descendant of Adam – the God-Man, Jesus Christ, Who is the promised Seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) – is the only hope for every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev 5:9). Through His sinless life of obedience, atoning death on the cross, and glorious resurrection, Christ has reconciled to Himself in one body all who come to Him by faith (Col 1:15-23). Because every sin is worthy of condemnation, it is only through repentant faith in Christ that we find hope of putting sin to death, including the sin of racism (or ethnic pride).

In one way, racism doesn’t make sense, because there is only one race – the human race. Speaking to the cultural elite at the Areopagus in Athens, the Apostle Paul declares:

“The God Who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him.” (Acts 17:24-27a)¹

In this, we see at least four truths that come to bear on a biblical view of race: (1) Every person, no matter his ethnicity or nationality, is made by the one, triune, living, and true God; (2) all people on earth are from the same original parents, Adam and Eve, and therefore there is only one human race; (3) peoples and nations throughout human history are under the divine providence and sovereign purpose of God; and (4) the purpose of God for all people of is to know God.

In light of these truths, it may be asked why hostility and prejudice between people of different ethnicities is such a prominent feature of human history. The answer was alluded to above: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

¹ All biblical quotations are from the Holy Bible: English Standard Version (ESV) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

(Rom 3:23), are by nature children of wrath (Eph 2:3) and at war with one another because of selfish passions (Js 4:1). Perhaps the closest we've come to global unity was at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-4), which was an act of direct disobedience to the Culture Mandate to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28, 9:27). In judgment, God scattered the world's population and confused their speech, and thus people groups and their languages began. Ever since that time throughout biblical history (which is human history), people of different tribes and ethnicities have been at war with and enslaved one another.

While the Lord could have abandoned people to their sins and wars, He nevertheless called out a people for Himself – Israel – to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation among all the peoples of the world, in order that the light of His glory would be made known, and all the nations drawn to worship the one true God (Exo 19:5-6). And where Israel failed, the promised Seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) would come as Israel's Messiah, Who would not only restore Israel but would be a light for the Gentiles, that God's "salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6). Having accomplished the redemption of His people at the Cross and ascended to the Father as the risen and exalted Lord, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, where Jews from around the world were gathered together in one Church through faith in Christ, and the judgment of Babel was reversed as they understood one another's languages (Acts 2). And while this was fantastic in and of itself, the Lord soon began to gather His elect from the Gentiles, which was a radical challenge to the ethnic hostility that existed between Jews and Gentiles. As Scripture says, "[Christ] Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility... 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" (Eph 2:14-16). *The Gospel changes everything and gives hope of racial reconciliation where no hope exists apart from Christ.*

While ethnic prejudice and pride run deep in the human story, we believe that the eternal story of the Gospel runs deeper, and that this Gospel is the only hope for the heart-level regeneration that must take place for hostile sinners to move from death to life, and from hostility to love. This is all in keeping with the glorious love of the triune God within Himself from all eternity, as Michael Reeves writes: "So it is not just that the Father, Son and Spirit call us into fellowship with themselves; they share their heavenly harmony that there might be harmony on earth.... And that is what the family of God—by its very existence—makes known to the world: that the God of harmony is *the* hope for world peace; that He can and will unite enemies, rivals and strangers into one loving family under His fatherly care."² The work of racial reconciliation is not easy, yet we have every hope that the Church of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit and armed with the Word of God, may humbly and graciously take up the hard work with joy. True reconciliation between hostile enemies has already been accomplished at the Cross, and no worldly idea of reconciliation can compare to what God is doing and will do. Racism has no place in Christ's Church, must be repented of where it has existed in the hearts of any of God's people (whether implicitly or explicitly), and the indiscriminate love of Christ for His for those of all tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations joyfully proclaimed and practiced. May God's triune glory thus be magnified as He makes all things new through Christ!³

² Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 104.

³ A helpful resource in the preparation of this paper was Voddie Baucham, "Racial Reconciliation," in *By What Standard? God's World... God's Rules*, ed. Jared Longshore (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2020), 127-35.