



In our continuing preaching series in Trending Now, today we address the topic of race. To put it mildly, the last couple of years have not been good for race relations in America. The cases of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Trayvon Martin in Florida are just a few recent examples that the U.S. has a long way to go. On the Peninsula, the race conflict involves more than blacks and whites. We have large percentages of Hispanics and Asians in our cities. Are the relations between these races any better? No.

There is a long history of antagonism between African American and Asian communities and between whites and Asian communities, but it has gone generally unnoticed in the United States because the discussion on race is often framed between blacks and whites. And a quick look globally will reveal that racism isn't limited to America. It's a global problem because it's a humanity problem. Racism is about making quick judgments on the characteristics of a race to rate a group as inferior or superior.

What should a follower of Jesus do about racism? To help frame this topic biblically, there are some things Christians can agree upon and some things that we won't agree upon.

Agree

- All people are created in the image of God.
- All people have equal dignity and value.
- Since God created humanity in his image, all ethnicities have the same inherent dignity as God's image-bearers.
- Based upon these, hopefully, we can all agree that racism is sin.

Disagree

- What's the level of importance of racism today?
- Should accommodations be given to some races to create equal opportunities? And if so, to what degree?
- How do people preserve cultural distinction and heritage without discrimination and creating division?

In no way do I claim to be an expert on the issue of race. I'm a pastor, not a sociologist or an anthropologist. As a pastor, my thinking and worldview is formed by the Bible and thankfully, the Bible does speak to the issue of racism. God's design is for a multi-ethnic church because He's preparing a multi-ethnic heaven. The Apostle John gives us a beautiful picture of what's

to come in heaven, *"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb"* (Rev. 7:9).

This vision of heaven describes racial harmony and God's plan for humanity on earth includes racial harmony as well. Let's turn to our scripture for today—Ephesians 2:11-22—to see why and how God intends racial harmony to exist.

The early church had a major racial issue that was threatening to destroy the movement of Jesus Christ: The division between Jews and Gentiles. In Ephesians 2:1-10, the Apostle Paul lays the foundation for his logical argument for racial harmony. He starts with each person's individual relationship with God: All of humanity, born in original sin, is spiritually dead and condemned, but God saved us through the power of the Spirit and gave us the free gift of salvation. This is wonderful!

But a problem remains: not only does our sin separate us from God, but our sin alienates us from one another. And in the 1st century, when Paul wrote this letter, the most significant wall of separation was between Jews and Gentiles. They wouldn't even eat with one another.

To illustrate how prejudiced the Jews were against the Gentiles, there were signs posted at the Jewish temple with a warning in Hebrew, Greek and Latin that read, "No foreigner may enter... Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." Talk about an insulting and offensive way to communicate to a different race!

Let's begin reading Ephesians 2:11-13 to see how all Christians, of every race are on equal ground, are saved by the grace of God.

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Their form of racism was a Jew calling a Gentile "uncircumcised." They looked down upon them. They felt superior, as God's chosen people. They even called themselves "the circumcised." Paul is

saying that this division is completely unjustified and naïve because “in Christ Jesus” the Gentiles have been “brought near” to God’s holiness just like a Jew was “brought near” to God’s holiness. It’s all by the blood of Christ, referring to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, a Gentile who had faith in Jesus was closer to God than a Jew who didn’t have faith. So there’s no justification for one race to project superiority over another. God sees all races as equally lost without salvation and equally saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

But that’s certainly **not** the way humanity sees race. AMC has a show called *Hell on Wheels*. It’s the story of the Union Pacific building the railroad across America in the late 1800s. I’ve just started watching it and it’s quite good. I was thinking about racism this week and the racism of the whites in this show is so uncomfortable I cringe.

- The blacks are only paid half of what the whites earn, although they work harder than the whites.
- The Christian pastor was called by God on a great mission to help “the inferiors,” the Negroes and the Indians.
- When the Indians went to the railroad workers camp, they felt superior as they looked at the mess and the workers disgusting behavior.

All of the different races feel they are superior to everyone else.

Deep inside the fallen human spirit is a “curtain” that wants to exclude. In the act of exclusion, we divide the world up into “us” and “them.” But “in Christ Jesus” this division is broken and Jesus wants his followers to live in peace with one another. That’s what Paul expands upon in verses 14–18.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

After we remember what we once were—alienated from God—Paul explains how Christ brought peace. He did this in two ways: First, He established peace by setting aside the law. Look at verse 15, “*Jesus set aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.*”

Paul is talking here about the ceremonial law. This included all the animal sacrifices, dietary regulations, festivals and all the rules about “clean” and “unclean.” Those things erected a serious barrier between Jew and Gentile. Jesus fulfilled every one the requirements of the Ceremonial Law so they are no longer relevant

or necessary. When he fulfilled the ceremonial law, he did that for all races—Jews and Gentiles, for all the races in the world. This brings the opportunity for there to be peace between people.

Second, He created a new humanity with equal access to God. This is awesome! Jesus made the two groups one (v. 14); Jesus’ purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two (v. 15); His death would reconcile both of them to God through the cross (v. 16).

All of these verses are telling us that Jesus created “one new humanity out of the two.” The human race is no longer divided between Jew and Gentile or any other racial divide. Jesus makes us one people. “*His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two*” (v. 15).

The word for “new” is very important. In the original language there are two predominant words for “new”—*neos* and *kinos*. *Neos* means new as it relates to time. It’s the newest model of a Tesla or it’s the latest model of a 747 airplane. But in verse 15, Paul does not use the word *neos*. Instead, he uses the word *kinos*, which speaks of something new as it relates to kind, like a completely new invention. So while *neos* may be the latest Tesla, *kinos* is the Model-T, the first car ever invented. While *neos* may be the latest 747 airplane to come off the assembly line, *kinos* is the Wright Brothers’ plane, the first plane ever invented.

When Paul says Christ died to create in himself one new man, it’s the idea of *kinos*, the idea of invention. In other words, Christ died to create something the world had never seen. Jews, Gentiles, and all races, coming together, doing life with one another, sharing meals together, and worshipping together. There was no paradigm in Jesus’ day for that.

God not only reconciled us to him, but also to one another. This means that salvation is more than just believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of our personal sins. No. Every person who’s a follower of Jesus is with us as part of a new humanity. Verse 18 tells us that “through Christ” we all enjoy the most amazing privilege: “*For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*” Equal access to God. The curtain walling off the Holy of Holies has been torn in two. Through Jesus everyone can barge right in with full access to the Father. We are equal brothers and sisters with the same loving dad.

As a college student, I started going on mission trips to Mexico border towns. Although close geographically, the Hispanics we met were as different from us as a group of humanity could be. They were living in extreme poverty: living in one-room cinder-block homes with one bare light bulb and outhouses; everything was dirt, literally no grass or green bushes or trees anywhere. They had almost no physical possessions—one pair of shoes, no TVs, no savings accounts, the kids had no toys; they spoke a different language.

In virtually every way they were different; there was a dividing wall between us. However, the Mexican Christians showed me that the dividing wall had been destroyed in Christ Jesus. They extended hospitality to us. They opened their hearts to us. They kindly taught us. They didn't treat us as their "rich saviors" like the Mexican street beggars, who just wanted to use our riches to make their lives better for a day. They treated us like brothers and sisters in Christ. They were a living lesson of living in peace with one another through Jesus Christ. That trip started a love for all the different races in my heart. They showed me the powerful bond of Christ we shared in the skin of different cultures. I was intrigued and hooked.

Salvation means union and reconciliation with every other Christian in the world. Race means nothing. Christians are now seen as part of the Body of Christ and part of a new society, a new race of men and women. And that's what Paul describes next. We've not only become a new humanity, but a new society.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (verses 19-22).

We've seen what we were and what He's done. In the last few verses we see more of what we've become. The result of the tearing down of this wall of hostility is to create one new humanity out of the two, but now he describes what we've become collectively in greater detail. Paul uses three images to describe this new society: God's kingdom, God's family and God's temple.

First, we're fellow citizens of God's kingdom. We were "excluded from citizenship in Israel" but now we're "fellow citizens with God's people." Being a follower of Jesus means our highest allegiance is to the Kingdom of God and its fellow citizens, not people who look like us.

Second, we're "members of his household," God's family. We move from a kingdom to a family, a household. Since we have a common Father, we're brothers and sisters in Christ. I've traveled all over the world and whenever I meet another Christian, there is always an instant bond and connection we have. We're joined together and united in God's family.

Third, we're part of a building, God's temple. We're not just part of any old building, but God's temple. We already talked about the old temple with its wall; this new temple is different. The foundation is the Apostles and Prophets. They're the ones who gave us the Scriptures. And our strong cornerstone is Jesus, the

key to our unity and growth. And that's not all. Paul says that we too are the dwelling place of God. We're the manifestation of His glory, just as the temple in Jerusalem was designed to be.

In other words, if people are going to come to know God they'll have to see Him in our lives together. This is why it's so important that when the world looks at us they see us living out the unity and racial harmony described in this passage. They need to see the walls of pride and self-righteousness come down. They need to see the walls of racism and division of rich and poor come down. They need to see walls of jealousy and resentment being smashed and unforgiving spirits being released.

Through the work Jesus accomplished on the cross and His resurrection, He has literally changed the way the world operates. He made it possible for people who were spiritually dead to become spiritually alive through salvation. He makes His followers into a new humanity that no one has ever seen before. As His followers live out their lives in this new humanity, we function as this living kingdom, household and temple.

Racism has nothing to do with Jesus and it should have nothing to do with His followers. That's why I am so thankful that we have a multi-ethnic church. Two races that are obvious in our church are Asians and Filipinos. We'd estimate these races represent 50% of our church. But there are many more! People from Russia, the various countries of Africa, people from India, Mexico, South America, Australia. Lots of people from Eastern and Western Europe. Literally, the entire world is represented in our church. We are a beautiful tapestry of God's diversity.

But this doesn't mean there isn't benefit from each of us examining our hearts and eliminating any trace of racism. Allow me to offer three helpful ways we can work towards racial reconciliation.

First, don't turn away. We need to ask the Lord to give us eyes to see and ears to hear the racism that surrounds us. Second, speak out. This is one reason why we are tackling this issue from the pulpit. But all Christians must speak out against racism when we encounter it and work for reconciliation. Third, we need to look inward. We need to have the courage to look inside our own hearts and repent of our tendencies toward racism and prejudice. We need to take responsibility for our own racism. And as we humble ourselves and confess our sin, God will continue His work of sanctification as we move toward holiness.

Father, thank you that you sent your son Jesus to not only reconcile us to you, but to reconcile us to each other. We believe that only you, Jesus, can destroy the racial dividing wall and create a new, unified community. So we confess our sins of racism, prejudice and indifference. We want to fully love our neighbor. Help us to do that. Help us to continue to be a church that is a picture of heaven, where all tribes,

nations and tongues come together to worship you. We cannot do any of this alone. We need your help. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2016 Central Peninsula Church South, Redwood City, CA
Catalog No. 1422-3S

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, June 26, 2016 at Central Peninsula Church South
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