

Racism and the Church Pt.4

In our Biblical Theology of Race Life Group we are learning what the biblical story tells us about race. It is through this understanding that we can better apply our lives to love mercy, do justly, and walk humbly with our God toward all peoples for the fruit of racial unity in our church and community.

There are five specifics regarding what we can do to pursue faith and repentance as a gospel centered church in regard to the fruit of racial unity - **Learn, Pray, Acknowledge, Relate and Commit**. Last week we looked at Acknowledge.

You can read that article [here](#). Acknowledging the ethnocentrism of our own hearts and our complicity in racial pride is not easy. We need the gospel of grace for our humility and to form a love in our hearts for all people. If we do not acknowledge that racism is a problem and we do not aspire to racial reconciliation and Gospel unity, it won't happen. We must acknowledge that we've been and are a part of the brokenness, and that only in Christ can he make the two one, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility. Acknowledge and then we're ready to relate for the building of relationships with others that reflect the glory of the gospel and his kingdom.

Relate

This week we are considering our need to Relate. The apostle John says,

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love...Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:7-8, 11)

Our learning, praying, and acknowledging is for the purpose of change. One of the things that needs to change in our lives in regard to racial unity is, we need to make friends with people of different races. We need to pursue relationships with people who are different from ourselves. The apostle John wrote these words to the church in the first century. But the need for loving friendships with people who are different from ourselves is as important in the 21st century as it was then. John knew what it meant to be in a friendship with someone who was different from himself. Jesus had befriended him. He referred to himself in the Gospel of John as, “the one whom Jesus loved”. Jesus came into the world as the sinless God-man and made friends with sinners of all races. He says to his disciples, “You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants,...but I have called you friends,” (John 15:14-15) The incarnational life of Jesus was to make friends with people different from himself. He is the true humanity and he set for us the pattern of that new humanity in our union and communion with him to be in relationship with people who are different from ourselves.

We must make friends. The entire discussion of racial unity will remain abstract if we are not befriending a person different from ourselves in race, who we grow to care about, and who gives us a different perspective than our own on the issue of race. We are a predominately white congregation. For someone of a different race to be a part of our church they have to make friends with white people. Therefore, as mostly white Christians we need to make interracial friendships deliberately and willingly.

We can make friends with the Acts principle. Jesus said his disciples would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Start with deliberately seeking to cultivate friendships with Christians of other races in our church, then with other Christians of other churches, then reach out and befriend people of other races in your neighborhood, work place, and community.

There are people in our church who are racially different from one another. Take time to build a friendship with them by spending some time in more serious conversation than is possible on a Sunday morning. Invite them out for coffee, or over to your house for a meal. This is a natural, organic way to deepen a relationship you already have with them. There are people in the places you live your life everyday who are of a different race than you. Try to get to know them. Invite them to do something with you so that they become more than

someone you shop at the same store with, drink coffee in the same coffee shop with, walk in the same neighborhood with, or who serve you in the store or the doctors office.

We have to learn to be intentional in building relationships with people different from ourselves. We naturally gather with people who are like us. It's safe, but it's not the expression of our Lord's love for all people. The letter to churches from our 44th PCA General Assembly said, "We don't naturally gravitate toward those who are different from us. We have to do something unnatural, or rather, supernatural to break the cycles of social sameness that hinder racial reconciliation." Jesus and his apostles were criticized by the religious people of their day for their intentional interracial relationships. Peter found out how easy it was to give in to the pressure of this criticism. But Paul corrected him by showing him how much in step with the gospel it was to have relationships and friendships with those who are different and of different races (Galatians 2:11-14). The gospel is God's grace for the supernatural work of God in our hearts to be intentional about building relationships with people different from ourselves, people of different races. The gospel does not constrain us to either a racial superiority or a racial inferiority. The gospel constrains us to love, and to no longer regard anyone according to the flesh. The gospel fills us with all the fullness of a God who does not show partiality but gives himself in relationship with all people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. His life in us is to relate in interracial friendships that our church may reflect his glory.

Growth Groups

At Christ Covenant church it is our desire to see a movement of the gospel that forms us in relationship with one another. We over use the word "community", but the meaning is crucial to the lives of God's children. He does not merely convert and renew individuals. His gospel is his power to form those individuals he's converting and renewing by his grace into the body of Christ. This is community. One of the ways we seek to grow community is through the organization Life Groups, Shepherding Groups, and Growth Groups. Last week we wrote to inform the congregation regarding Shepherding Groups. You can access that article at ccotc.org.

We are beginning Growth Groups in September. These groups meet twice a month September up until Thanksgiving, and January through May.

The goal of Growth Groups is to provide an opportunity for a movement of the gospel to develop community formation for worship, life, and ministry together.

Small groups are not the end all or missing link to church life. However, we trust they will provide greater opportunity for investment in the life of the body as well as in the life of the community.

Below are some bullet point descriptions of Growth Groups:

- ❖ Who - Growth Group facilitators will lead those in the congregation who live near them and commit to participate in Growth Groups .
- ❖ What - Growth Groups are committed to participation twice a month including a curriculum and a focused ministry objective.
- ❖ When - Growth Groups will meet twice monthly from September - November and January - May.
- ❖ Where - Each Growth Group will determine their host home(s).
- ❖ Why - Growth Groups provide opportunity for building authentic discipling relationships within the body of Christ Covenant Church. These times will be focused on applying the Gospel to the whole of life, including using the Gospel to motivate us towards serving the needs of others.
- ❖ How - Intentional, prioritized and committed participants will be flexible with planning for children and child care while being accountable with attendance. Participation is paramount.

If you are not already a part of a Growth Group and would like to sign up for one please call the church office or use the sign up sheets in the Lobby at Barnwell Street.

Facilitator Training

We need the few, the humble, the willing to be trained to facilitate. We will be having a facilitator training time on Saturday August 24th from 6-8 pm at the home of Jim & Noelle Wilkerson. Phase two of the training will be Saturday September 28th 6 - 8 pm at the home of Jim & Noelle Wilkerson.

These training times are aimed at assisting us in the process of learning what it looks like to facilitate small group gatherings toward our vision for seeing a movement of the gospel affecting a growing church community for worship, life, and ministry together.