

Racism and the Church

Eradicating racism as a social injustice is not at the heart of the gospel, nor is it the goal of the gospel. But a church that is centered upon the gospel bears the fruit of brotherly love among all races or ethnicities.

Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, *Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.*” (Ephesians 2:12-14)

Racial hostility is not new to any people or culture. We have all seen the effects of it in our own lives or the lives of others. We have all seen the detriment it has had on our culture, especially the culture of our churches. For example, can a person of color feel safe, welcomed, and find it easy to become a part of life together at Christ Covenant Church? But it is the gospel that is the power of God bringing salvation to all peoples, so that all kinds of people become one in Jesus Christ. The church of Jesus Christ sits as a city on a hill to demonstrate, in the unfolding cultural stories she’s a part, that Jesus has the power to break down the walls of hostility and bring peace. The church does not have an irrelevant voice in the issue of race. She speaks with the voice of Jesus in an unfolding story that says he is actively pursuing the one in the many, a diverse unity, in himself. But in the midst of this truth the church is still riddled by our own false and blinded hearts.

Therefore, faith and repentance are necessary. In 2016 at the 44th General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) pursued this path in regard to racism. Here is a partial quote of one of our statements of repentance:

Therefore be it resolved, that the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America does recognize, confess, condemn and repent of corporate and historical sins, including those committed during the Civil Rights era, and continuing racial sins of ourselves and our fathers such as the segregation of worshipers by race; the exclusion of persons from Church membership on the basis of race; the exclusion of churches, or elders, from membership in the Presbyteries on the basis of race; the teaching that the Bible sanctions racial segregation and discourages inter-racial marriage; the participation in and defense of white supremacist organizations; and the failure to live out the gospel imperative that “love does no wrong to a neighbor” (Romans 13:10)

It is through the gospel that God leads his church to repentance and faith in this matter, not social pressure. The gospel makes it known that God, through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, welcomes all into his presence and life, who come by faith in him. Therefore, all who come by faith in Christ alone cannot stand in judgement of anyone, for all are guilty before God, no matter who you are or what you’ve done, but have been accepted by grace. It is faith in this kindness of God that leads the church to repentance regarding her racial and ethnic pride.

What can we do as a church to continue in faith and repentance walking in the way of loving our brothers and sisters and not pursuing any wrong toward them? It was during the 44th General Assembly that a letter was suggested to be read to our churches. In this letter there were five specifics about what we can do to pursue faith and repentance as gospel centered churches in regard to the fruit of racial unity - **Learn, Pray, Acknowledge, Relate and Commit**. I want to spend the next several weeks writing on these five in the hopes that Christ Covenant Church will grow as a church that is not divided in regard to race, but one that tells the story of God’s love for all people.

Learn

As a younger person I can remember hearing, “You have a lot to learn.” That was probably due to the fact that I demonstrated by my attitude that I thought I already knew it all. This is a mistake young and old make.

We are to be always learning. And one of the best ways we learn is not by speaking but by listening. James wrote, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (James 1:19). We are quick defenders of ourselves and the entities that we’re a part of, and that defense typically comes out in a lot of words.

We need to listen and learn from others not like ourselves. As those primarily influenced by our culture we need to listen and learn from our African American brothers and sisters in Christ. We can read, ask questions, listen, and ask God for the open heart and mind to consider what we’re learning. We need to get a proper perspective from people who are not like us but who are like us in Christ. Learning requires that we not assume we - “know what it’s like” or “understand how you feel”, or “know what you’re thinking.”

Here are some resources online that might help you get started listening and learning:
Ellis Perspectives <http://www.ellisperspectives.com/> Dr. Carl and Karen Ellis. Dr. Ellis is a black PCA minister, teaches for RTS, and his wife Karen is an expert in the persecuted church.

The Front Porch <http://thefrontporch.org/> Where black Reformed ministers talk about the Bible, the Black Church, Culture/Ethnicity, Family, God, the Gospel, Leadership, Missions, Preaching, Salvation, Shepherding, Theology, Women and Worship.

The Reformed African American Network <https://www.raanetwork.org/> Here you will encounter the voices of many younger, black, Reformed people (and others committed to a multi-ethnic church) talking about the Bible, church, race, culture and current events.

Pure Church <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/> This is the blog of Thabiti Anyabwile, a black pastor of Anacostia River Church in southeast Washington, DC.

Another way to learn is by participating in the adult life group, A Biblical Theology of Race. We are taking a look at God’s story in the whole of Scripture regarding race. Come and interact and learn together. Some helpful books that I am gleaning from to teach this class are:

J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* in *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, edited by D.A. Carson (IVP Academic, 2003).

Jarvis J. Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology* (B&H Academic, 2010).

Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford University Press, 2001)

Jamari Tisby, *The Color of Promise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2019)

In all our learning we should aim to better understand our presuppositions, actions or inactions, our history and our context. If we are unaware of our presuppositions, lack knowledge of the history of racism in the churches, and have failed to scrutinize how our context may have unwittingly influenced our attention to and understanding of how the Bible speaks to this issue, we will be hampered in our consideration, discussion, interactions, and the activities of our lives to live out the gospel in a manner that accurately reflects our knowledge of and communion with our God and his people.

Catalyst Planning

As we follow our timeline for 2019 we have one final week in Catalyst Planning. This Wednesday we will be prioritizing goals that will enable us to develop a plan for fulfilling our Mission and Vision.

❖ Prioritizing Our Goals - Wednesday July 24th 5:00 - 7:00 PM

We will begin at 5:00 PM with dinner provided for \$5/individual or \$10/family. We will provide a nursery for children 0-4 and a children’s program for boys and girls ages 5 - 11. Students 12 and up are encouraged to participate in the Catalyst Planning sessions with adults.

We will begin with a brief large group orientation at 5:50. At 6:00 pm we will divide into smaller groups led by facilitators. The facilitators will lead the small groups to accomplish the groups purpose for prioritizing the goals we write from the ideas shared. You can sign up on the sign up sheets in the Narthex at Barnwell Street, or, online at the church’s website.