



The Godly Delight of a Multi-Ethnic Church

Gospel Culture – Part 16

Romans 15:5-13

David Sunday

May 20, 2018

We're coming toward the end of our journey through Romans and we're going to talk about race today. It's a difficult, thorny subject that I do not wade into it lightly. I agree with Kevin DeYoung that it's too easy to say something hurtful or dumb, and it's hard to say something insightful and profound. But we cannot be faithful to the Word of God and pretend that silence on the issue of race is acceptable. No. Part of loving our neighbor as ourselves is trying to understand them. So when it comes to race, we can't take a hall pass—not if we want to love our neighbor and be faithful to the gospel.

I want to begin by illustrating how your neighbor may be thinking very differently from you when it comes to race. This is from a recent article about an African-American NFL coach:

Talk to white players who play for a black coach and they will tell you that the color of their coach's skin does not matter. Of course it doesn't matter. Why should it matter? It doesn't matter one bit.

Talk to African-American players who play for a black coach and they will tell you that the color of their coach's skin matters deeply, powerfully, necessarily, unavoidably. Of course it matters—and it had better matter because it matters, just for starters, to them.

This is the insoluble paradox at the heart of the racial conversation in the United States in 2018. White America speaks of race as a consideration to be transcended, and black America speaks of race as a force to be acknowledged.

White America believes that the purpose of talking about race is to one day end the conversation, and black America believes that the purpose of talking about race is to one day get the real conversation started.

I can imagine that some of you are already feeling tense. So I want us to open our Bibles to Romans 15, to words from God that will shine light into our darkness. It brings clarity, wisdom, hope, encouragement and health so that our thoughts can be aligned with the thoughts

of our Lord Jesus Christ. So let's begin with a strong biblical foundation beginning at Romans 15:5. Hear the Word of God.

⁵ *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁷ *Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

⁸ *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,* ⁹ *and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,*

*"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and sing to your name."*

¹⁰ *And again it is said,*

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

¹¹ *And again,*

*"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples extol him."*

¹² *And again Isaiah says,*

*"The root of Jesse will come,
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope."*

¹³ *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, and may the power of the Holy Spirit cause you to abound in hope.*

Let's pray together.

God our Father, we thank You for how You woo us and win us to Yourself. You're drawing us by the power of hope today, and oh, how we need hope. We pray for our dear friends, the Whitchurch family, that You would comfort them with the hope of the gospel, by Your Spirit, and that in Your mercy You would provide everything needed for Arthur's healing. O God, hear our prayer. We cry out to You, God, for the community of Santa Fe, Texas, as they are mourning after yet another school shooting. Our nation mourns with them. O God, draw near to that community. Empower Your people to be messengers of hope. Hear our prayer for mercy, God.

Lord, we live in a time when our politics are cynical. Our televisions are filled with toxic filth. Our neighborhoods are crime-ridden. And behind closed doors, homes are haunted by untold stories of abuse and neglect. God, we are crying out to You for the hope that only the Holy Spirit can bring through the gospel. We pray for our leaders, Lord. We pray for those in Texas

and here in the Fox Valley. We pray for our state leaders, as well as our representatives and senators in Congress. We pray for our President and those who serve in his administration.

As we face perilous times and confront insoluble issues, we pray, O God, that You would bring a widespread turning to You and humbling under Your hand; that we would look to You for the solutions only You can bring. We, Your people, ask now that by the power of Your Holy Spirit, Who filled Your church at Pentecost, You would fill us afresh. We pray for after-effects of the great spiritual earthquake that took place at Pentecost to be happening in our world and church today. May we abound in hope through the power of Your Holy Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hope is the direction all the Scriptures are moving us toward. We saw that in Romans 15:4: *“Whatever was written in former days was written that...we might have hope.”* That's where we were last week and that same emphasis runs through our passage today. We see this in verse 12: *“...in [Jesus Christ] all the Gentiles hope”*—or you could say, all the nations. Then we see this twice in verse 13: *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, and may the power of the Holy Spirit cause you to abound in hope.”* God is the God of hope, Who fills His people with all joy and all peace, as we trust in Him, so that we will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's what this passage is about.

So this is a great text for Pentecost Sunday, because on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came in power upon the church, we see something happening that hasn't happened ever before in the Bible. Just listen to the account from Acts 2, beginning at verse five:

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Do you hear that? People from all over the world are hearing the mighty works of God. They're finding hope in God. At the end of the day of Pentecost, 3,000 souls from diverse ethnicities and many nations are brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and united under His rule as one harmonious people. Praise the Lord for what He began doing at Pentecost. God is

bringing together a diverse multitude to live in harmony with one another and in accord with Christ Jesus.

That's exactly what Paul is praying for in verse five of our passage today. He's praying that what happened at Pentecost will continue to happen in multiple churches, like the church at Rome or the church in St. Charles today. It's a vigorous, hope-fueled prayer. Paul is looking to the God Who poured out His Spirit, and he's saying, "A new King is now ruling the nations. He's the King of endurance and encouragement, and He brings people together who are able to live in harmony, so that with one voice they will glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul's excited about a multi-ethnic church delighting in God together and living in harmony under the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wants you and me to get excited about that too. This is why Jesus came. Look at verse eight. He came as a servant to the Jewish people, the circumcised, to confirm that God is faithful to the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He also came for the Gentiles—for all the other nations and peoples. As we saw in the Day of Pentecost, He came "in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy" (verse nine). That's what we've been doing this morning. We've been glorifying God for His mercy.

This has been a major theme through the whole theology of Romans. Remember way back in Romans 1:5, the design and plan of the gospel is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of the name of Jesus among all the nations of the world. Paul is bringing Romans to a conclusion here in chapter 15. He quotes from four Old Testament passages:

- First, in verse nine, from the historical books—2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18—about God's Messiah King singing praise to God as He rules among the nations.
- The second quotation in verse ten is from Moses in Deuteronomy 32, as Moses speaks of one multi-ethnic, multi-cultural people of God.
- The third quotation in verse 11 is from Psalm 117, the whole world praising the God of Israel for His steadfast love and His covenant faithfulness.
- The last quotation in verse 12 is from the prophet Isaiah, who is promising that one day King David's greater Son—Who is both David's heir and His origin, the Root of Jesse—is going to rise up to rule the world. People from all around the world will put their hope in Him and will joyfully submit to His rule, because it's only under the rule of Jesus that this world can be restored and united.

So Paul gives four quotations from all four sections of the Hebrew Scripture—from the historical books, the law, the prophets and the writings—and he is bringing it all to a conclusion. I like the way Christopher Ash summarizes what Paul is saying here in Romans 15:

All these quotations make the point that the only hope for a broken world is to be reunited under God's Christ, the King in David's line,

Who will one day rule the world. (Believers are) to anticipate this final worldwide rule by bowing together in harmony before Christ.

He's coming to rule the world and we bow underneath His rule in harmony before Jesus. This is one of the main reasons Romans was written. Paul was writing to a church that was becoming divided by race and ethnicity—Jews and Gentiles. He wants them to be one under the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I want to move from theology to application. We could think of two different pathways we could take in applying this passage. One very good pathway would be to think about how this passage motivates and mobilizes us to bring the gospel to the nations. That's one of the reasons we give over 22% of our church's budget to world missions. We care about that here. This passage lays a great foundation for that.

But notice, that's not the main thing Paul is thinking about when he writes the verses we've read today. Right now, Paul is more concerned about attitudes of superiority in the church at Rome. He's concerned about subtle and overt forms of prejudice. He's appealing to them to be people who demonstrate the kind of unity and harmony that only God and His gospel can produce. That's why Paul is writing this. He's writing this so that verse seven will be true of us and so we will welcome one another as God has welcomed us in Jesus Christ for God's glory. Paul is writing these words to speak to us about racial and ethnic harmony.

Next week's passage that Patrick's going to preach on talks about Paul's desire to take the gospel to Spain—and it's a great missions passage. But today I want us to think a bit about our own prejudices. I want us to repent of any racial or ethnic prejudice that's in our hearts or attitudes. I want us to rejoice in hope as we think about what God is able to do in a multi-ethnic church. Let's see this, friends, as an opportunity for love and growth. Let's pray that God would help us now to temper our natural defensiveness on this issue.

I'm not here to advance a political agenda. I'm not here to lay guilt on you and make you feel like you can never do enough. No, I'm here to preach the gospel and its implications, and I believe this is an important implication of the gospel. I'm calling us to respond to the grace of a Savior Who was lifted up on the cross so that He could draw all people to Himself. Friends, there are a lot of people out there who are not going to believe the gospel until they see a united church, bowing under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, living in harmony, love, joy and peace.

I heard about a student who said, "Christianity doesn't seem real. It seems true, but it doesn't seem real." What she's saying is, "I need more than historical evidence of the truth of Christianity. I need to see some living proof. I want to see how it affects the way people live together."

One of the greatest evidences of the reality of the gospel is when people look at the church of the Lord Jesus Christ and they see that what the world is not able to accomplish, God in Christ has done. He's brought people together who love one another who naturally would be incompatible with each other.

God wants us to have hope that this is possible, that He's able to produce something in us that the world cannot produce. You know that our world is torn apart by racial and ethnic strife. Our nation is embroiled in racial conflict. Often when I hear conversations about race, I'm not hearing hope. I hear frustration, anger, despair, hatred, condescension, impatience, misunderstanding, confusion, weariness—but not a lot of hope. God's giving us hope today through this passage.

Can you imagine the government of the United States saying, "You know what? This race problem is so big we cannot solve it. But when we look at the Christian church, we get hope—hope that this is a problem that can be resolved, because we see black and white, Hispanic and Asian, male and female, living in such harmony with one another in the church." Wouldn't that bring glory to God and praise to the Lord Jesus Christ?

We've been working on some goals as elders—things we want to see God do in our church over the next 20 years. Here is our statement of these long-range goals:

Racial, ethnic and gender harmony. Against the rising spirit of indifference, alienation and hostility in our land, we will embrace the supremacy of God's love to take new steps personally and corporately toward racial and ethnic unity and diversity, expressed visibly in our community and in our church. We will also strive to value women and men, not only as equals who are created in God's image, but as valued partners in ministry who are one in Christ.

That's what we want to see God doing in our church over these next 20 years. That's 2038. Some of you are thinking, "Well, I'm not even going to be around then." I'll be 68 that year. I'm thinking if you're gracious enough to keep me around that long, and God is kind enough to allow me to stay that long, that's going to be when I'm in the process of handing the baton of leadership to a new lead pastor.

I don't know who the next lead pastor of our church is going to be. I guess he's probably not going to be a kid from Kenosha, Wisconsin. Sometimes I get excited thinking about this. I think, wouldn't it be wonderful if the next lead pastor of our church was an African-American or a Hispanic-American or an Asian-American? Wouldn't that be exciting? The main thing is that he be a person who loves Jesus with all his heart, soul, mind and strength.

What we are saying must happen in our life together is that we need to be taking new steps personally and corporately. I'm grateful that we're just talking about steps here, because this is a daunting subject that can be frustrating, like we're always just hinting around at the conversation but not really doing much about it. It can feel like we're gazing into a bottomless chasm when we think about this topic. So we're talking about steps, prompted by faith and love for God. We're saying, "Let's take some steps. Let's be relentless and practical and earnest in our efforts."

This is not the number-one priority of our church, but it needs to be a priority. It needs to be an emphasis—and here's why. There are delights in God that can only be experienced to the degree that we are pursuing in our lives what Christ was pursuing through His death. What was Jesus pursuing through His death? Earlier we heard it in Revelation 5:9: "*By your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*"

That's what Jesus was doing with His blood. He paid a high price to purchase a church from every people group on the face of this globe, and it brings glory to Him when we unite together in praise to Him. Just like a choir singing in multiple parts has more depth and beauty in their music than one that only sings in unison, a church that is diverse yet harmonious shows forth the beauty of the glory of Jesus.

As more people recognize the beauty of God in Jesus Christ, Jesus is seen to be greater and greater. John Piper compares this to the work of an artist:

If only a small group of people admire an artist's work, the art is probably not truly great. But if a work of art continues to win more and more admirers across cultures and decades and centuries, then its greatness is irresistibly manifested. So when God says, "Praise the Lord, all you nations," He is saying that there is something about God that is so universally praiseworthy and so profoundly beautiful and so comprehensively worthy and so deeply satisfying, that God will find passionate admirers in every diverse people group in the world.

What will be the focus of our admiration? The Lamb Who was slain to purchase us for God. We will praise Him for the price He paid. Jesus is the kind of Leader Who can bring diverse people together and make them one. We will only enjoy the beauty and power of the gospel of Jesus to the degree that we care about pursuing the kind of diversity and harmony Jesus died to obtain. If Jesus shed His blood for this, we need to care about it. We need to make it a priority. We can't ignore it. Jesus did shed His blood for this.

Some of us might be thinking, “I’m not a racist. So why do I need to hear a sermon about racial and ethnic harmony?” I want you to know, friends, I’m not preaching this sermon because I think our church is full of racists. In fact, I think almost all of us agree that racism is a serious sin. It is evil. I believe our church is filled with people who believe all people are created equally in the image of God. Most of us believe that the Civil Rights movement of 50 years ago was heroic and necessary. We detest blatant discrimination. We’re appalled by racial violence.

I say “almost,” because probably in a group this size there are some people who are racist in their attitudes. And if that is you, and you call yourself a follower of Jesus, you need to understand those two things are incompatible. You can’t follow a Savior Who shed His blood to purchase people from every tribe, language and nation, then claim to hate or look down on some of those people, thinking you’re better.

If that is you, I pray that the Holy Spirit will be convicting you of your sin right now and showing you the evil of that heart attitude, using that to cause you in desperation to say, “Oh, I need a Savior.” Then Jesus, Who died for you and Who loves you will save you and cleanse you of your racist sins. He will also create in you a new heart—a heart that loves all people. That’s what Jesus does.

I believe there’s widespread agreement in our church family about the evil of racism, but we still need God’s Word to recalibrate how we think about this, whether we’re white or non-white, because each of us are part of the problem and part of the solution. Each of us have things we need to repent of, and I also believe that being part of the solution means that each of us need to realize that even though progress has been made in America on this issue, it is not true that racism is over and done with in America. Racism is not over and done with in our nation—and to think otherwise is naïve.

So we need to understand there’s a difference between saying, “I hate racism,” and actually taking steps to pursue racial and ethnic harmony in the church. I think it would be really easy for us to think, “You know, St. Charles and Geneva are 90% white. Our church fairly represents the demographics of our surrounding communities, so there’s not a whole lot we need to do or to change.” [I know this is less true of some of our other communities like Elgin.] I’ve heard good, sincere people in our church say things like that. What I want to do is challenge that point of view in three ways.

1. Diversity is more than just racial.

Here’s a good definition of diversity from Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop: “Diversity is any multiplicity of backgrounds where unity is possible only through the gospel.”

There's age diversity. What would it look like to see young single people from The Rock going on Friday night to visit the elderly in a nursing home? That's gospel creating oneness where normally it wouldn't exist. Or if there are any octogenarians in our church who want to invite your 40-something pastor on your next trip to Cancun, that would be an example of age diversity—and I'm all for that!

Then there's economic diversity. This is probably more of an immediate challenge for us in our affluent suburbs. We might be tempted to show partiality toward those who are wealthy and not have God's heart for the poor.

There's political diversity. Now, we recognize that there are some political views that are clearly out of step with the gospel. But can we not admit that either major political party in America fully represents the Kingdom values of Jesus? If you're really following Jesus, can you feel totally at home in the Republican or Democrat party? Do you not feel, "I'm marching to the beat of a different drummer; Jesus' values shape the way I think politically"?

Then there's social diversity. Do socially awkward people feel that in New Covenant Bible Church they find a refuge here? They're welcome. They're accepted. Or do they find it as cold and impersonal as the world outside?

There is cultural diversity in our backgrounds. We've got people from suburban and rural and urban backgrounds. We've got liturgical backgrounds and Pentecostal backgrounds, African-American religious traditions, different countries of origin—as we've heard in both services this morning. And unity will often require sacrificing our interests for those of our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Now, this morning we're talking about racial and ethnic diversity and you might wonder, "Well, what does that look like right now?" Let's not just think about 20 years from now. What about right now? One of the things the elders have been thinking about is how could we partner with other churches that are more racially diverse than ours? I'm not talking about us partnering with them so that we can help them or serve them only, as if we're the norm and they're different.

No, I'm talking about partnering with other churches so that we can learn from them; so that we can benefit from the diversity of the body of Christ; so that we can have an attitude of saying, "Would you help us understand more of the body of Christ so that we can experience more of the breadth and richness of the glories of God that are experienced by a multi-ethnic church?"

2. The Fox Valley of today probably does not look like the Fox Valley will 20 years from now.

This is another reason why we can't ignore this issue. Just consider some projections made in 2008 by the U.S. Census Bureau:

- Minorities, which are now roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are expected to become the majority in 2042.
- By 2023, minorities are going to comprise more than half the children born in our country.
- The non-Hispanic, single-race white population—people like me—is going to be losing numbers, going down to 46% of the total population by 2050, down from 66% in the last decade.
- The Hispanic population is projected to nearly triple. By 2050, nearly one in three U.S. residents will be Hispanic.
- The black population is going to increase from 41 million to 65 million.
- The Asian population will climb from 5.1% to 9.2%.
- The number of people who identify themselves as being of two or more races is projected to more than triple, from 5.2 million to 16.2 million.

So you might wonder, “How will this affect St. Charles and Geneva over the next 20 or 30 years?” I don't know and I don't need to know. But what I want to know is this: are any of us secretly hoping it won't affect our communities? Are any of us secretly hoping things will stay stable and look the same around us? If so, why? Why are we thinking that way? Are we more eager to send missionaries to far-off nations than we are to welcome the opportunity God might be giving us to be missionaries to many nations all around us? Are we as eager to see a multi-ethnic, multi-racial church as Jesus was when He shed His blood to redeem a people who are united and harmonious, a Kingdom of priests from every tribe and language and people and nation? Are we?

3. If we don't pursue racial and ethnic diversity and harmony here and now, then we are moving in the opposite direction of our eternal home.

When we sing, “I am bound for the Promised Land,” do we know what we're saying? We're saying, “I am bound to live in an ethnically and racially diverse community for all eternity.” I don't think heaven is going to be predominantly white. In fact, the average evangelical today is not a white American. The average Evangelical today is a poor woman living in sub-Saharan Africa.

The diversity of the nations and peoples will be brightly on display in the new creation. Friends, God is not color-blind. He's a God Who celebrates diversity. He's the Creator of diversity. I know what we mean when we say, “I am color blind.” We are trying to say, “I agree

with Martin Luther King's vision to judge people by the content of their character, not the color of their skin." But I was talking to Justin Taylor about this and he said, "Color-blindness is actually a visual deficiency." It's like bragging, "I don't even see the colors in a rainbow." Why would you boast in that, as if it's a virtue?

Secondly, you don't actually do it. It's like saying, "I don't even see height. I don't see gender." Well, yes, you do. And further, it's the sort of thing that only white people say. People of color don't feel relieved or believe you when you say it.

Friends, we find our identity and unity in Christ, and we bow as one people underneath the cross of Christ. But the cross doesn't erase color. The cross makes the colors shine all the more brightly—and they will shine in the new creation. So we've got to be taking steps now to listen and love, opening our hearts and homes to those who are from different backgrounds, different colors. How diverse has your table of hospitality been this past year? That's one thing you might think about.

Now, let's close with this. In order to take steps, you need three things. You need to know what direction you're going. You need to have a firm foundation underneath your feet—otherwise you're going to be stumbling. And you need energy to keep on moving. Our passage gives us all three. It gives us a direction, a foundation and energy to keep moving forward in this.

The direction we need to be looking is in Romans 15:5. Verse five tells us that harmony among diverse people is a gift given by God. It's a gift He gives in accord with Christ Jesus as we follow Him. So the direction we need to be looking with every step we take is toward Christ. We need to keep our gaze fixed on Him, because unity is a supernatural gift. No method can create it. You don't get unity by seeking unity—you get unity by glorifying God with one mouth, by singing and praying together, and by looking to Christ together. That's the direction we need to go.

What's the foundation under our feet? That's in verse seven: justification by grace through faith alone. "*Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*" How has Christ welcomed us? Not because we were worthy; not because we were good; not because of our economic or social status; not because of our skin color. He accepts us into His favor by grace through faith. All we deserve is judgment for our sins, but Christ welcomes us.

If you think you need to earn God's favor through your character or behavior, you're always going to be trying to justify yourself. And one of the ways people try to justify themselves is by viewing themselves as superior to others. Underneath the evil of white supremacy, for instance, is a deep insecurity. You cannot believe that you are accepted by God only by grace through faith in Christ and remain a racist. Racism is a human attempt—or more accurately, a

demonic attempt—to prove yourself worthy or acceptable because of your race. It’s an abomination of the gospel of justification by grace through faith alone.

But if you grasp the gospel and see that you are completely welcomed and accepted as a son or daughter in the family of God because the guilt of your sin has been covered by the righteousness of Christ, then you will gladly and warmly and whole-heartedly welcome and accept all the brothers and sisters that God has accepted into His family. You’ll say, “Come into the Father’s house, not as a guest, but as a permanent resident.” You’ll listen to each other and learn from each other and adapt to one another’s preferences. You’ll be willing sometimes to change the way we do things around here—not altering our foundational commitments but being willing to flex on some of our cultural preferences, so that our church can extend a broader welcome and grow into looking just a little bit more like the church will look in the new creation.

So our direction is Christ, our foundation is justification by grace through faith—and where’s our energy? Prayer. Don’t you love that this passage ends with prayer? *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”* You know what? This is a big problem, friends. It takes a miracle to solve this problem of racial strife.

Our God is a God of hope. He’s a miracle-working God. As He brings people together and we abound in the hope of the gospel, we see each other through new eyes and we love each other deeply. We welcome one another as God in Christ has welcomed us. So we need to pray.

“This kind comes out only by prayer and fasting,” Jesus said. That’s true of some demons. Only by prayer. Racism is a legion of demons in our nation and only through prayer will it come out. Pretending that racism is no longer a problem only intensifies the pain and alienation that is felt by our non-white brothers and sisters. We need to pray about this.

I asked one of our own members, someone you love, someone who worships with us, a member of our church, to read through my manuscript which I wrote out pretty detailed for this sermon. I asked her to read it and give me her candid feedback. And she did—four pages of candid feedback that were so helpful. I want you to hear the heart of one of our own members on this. She wanted to stress this is not just a black and white issue; we’re all in this.

I do believe so many people, non-whites included, have this flawed and dangerous thinking.

I have grown most saddened by close friends of mine who have been pretty blatant about their dislike for a lot of activities involving blacks who protest. And I’m not saying all those protests are right. In fact, I disagree with so much of the hate and violence that ignite these riots. But I grow deeply saddened when a white friend of mine protests or makes a statement demeaning someone of my

race. What they fail to see is that in doing so, I am almost instantly made to question my worth. Am I really this animal? Am I really incapable of being just as brilliant and promising? Am I not as pleasing to the eye? I hate that I start to feel inferior when I know I am not secondary to another.

I often look at my skin or my baby's skin and wonder, how could someone look at us and see filth? Then I think of the Jewish people. How could one man get an entire nation to view such a beautiful people as total trash and worthless? How could someone I worship in church with or call a friend look at me and deem me one of God's less worthy creations? And the same that arises is quickly silenced by a truth I hope one day every man and woman will understand. Because of who I am in God, I am just as worthy and important and loved. My skin color has very little to do with my identity in Christ. This is what I want my boys to be mindful of for all their lives.

I think we need to hear our fellow members. I think we need to not assume we know and understand what someone else feels or experiences, but instead ask questions, listen and grow deeper in wisdom, slower to speak, learning the ways of love. To do this, we need hope and we need prayer.

God is the God of hope. He's the God of miracles. So look to Him Who poured out His Spirit on Pentecost, asking Him to pour out His Spirit in our hearts that we may abound in hope—hope that a new creation is coming, hope that justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, as Amos says. Hope, for we the redeemed shall be strong in purpose and unity, declaring aloud, "Praise and glory, wisdom and thanks, honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

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