

Racial Prejudice: Out of Sync with the Gospel

Galatians 2:11-14

Southern Hills Baptist Church

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WELCOME

As always it is good to be with you tonight as we come to sit under the teaching of God's Word together. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and open up to Galatians 2, we will be there momentarily.

INTRODUCTION

As we mentioned last week, we are taking a break from our study of John this week to consider a topic that is incredibly relevant in our country and that is the issue of racism or racial prejudice. This topic is a pressing one. It is controversial. It is a topic that makes many of us uncomfortable. It is a topic that many of us would like to ignore. It is a topic that many of us are unable to ignore. With any topic that becomes pressing or controversial in our country or in our lives we need to humbly come to God's Word for guidance and truth.

Here to Hear God's Word

In many respects I find this topic a difficult one to talk about. What does a 34-year-old white guy have to say on the issue of race? Honestly, I have very little to say and I think that is a good thing tonight. I don't want you here tonight, or any Sunday for that matter, for what I might say, but rather I want you here for what God would say to you. Tonight, my goal isn't to deliver Thomas' assessment of racial prejudice, but to deliver God's holy assessment, His time-tested, unaltered truth.

God Help Us

I know we just had a word of prayer, but I feel it necessary to continue praying right now. Let's ask God to speak to us on this very important issue in ways only He can.

Heavenly Father,

Every week I have the blessing of preaching your word I am inadequate. I am especially reminded of that tonight. This is a good reminder for me. My preaching has never, nor will ever, be about my adequacy, it is always about your adequacy, your sufficiency. Father, we come to your word tonight looking for answers on a very heavy and controversial issue. It is an issue that weighs upon some of our brothers and sisters very heavily. It is an issue that some of us have been able to easily ignore or overlook most of our lives. That makes it complicated in many ways. This topic is very sensitive for some and off the radar of others, which can make it an even more sensitive issue for others. God please speak to this issue clearly, parse it for us, help us to see the ugliness of racism and give us a heart for others. Do what only you can through your word tonight and may I be your vessel.

We pray this in Jesus name,

Amen

My Story

Let me share a little about myself. I grew up with 2 wonderful parents. My Mom and Dad never made race an issue. People were judged by their character and achievements, not by the color of their skin in my home. I grew up going to public school in San Antonio, meaning I was around a fairly diverse population most of my life. I had friends of all different kinds of ethnicities and I never gave it much thought. Yes, I heard jokes that racially stereotyped people every now and again, but it wasn't prevalent by any stretch of the imagination. I did have a grandparent who made racially insensitive and borderline racist

comments, but when he would say these things the family as a whole would jump on him and shut it down.

Oblivious

This was my situation. I don't know how common of a situation this was. My story may not sound like yours at all. While I am so very thankful that people were never judged by the color of their skin in my home, **I wish we did talk more through the issue. Because race wasn't an issue in my home, because I never faced any roadblocks or any trials for the color of my skin, and because, by-in-large, the laws in our country when I was growing up had been course corrected to avoid racial prejudice, I thought racial prejudices was an issues reserved for history books or at least the very fringe of our country.**

Living in a Bubble - Easily Dismissed

So when racial issues were brought up in the news it was **easy for me to dismiss them as over-sensationalized, agenda-driven stories.** Of course, it was easy for me to dismiss these stories because I lived as a part of the majority in America. I carried no burden because of my race. I never faced an uphill battle due to my race. **I have lived most of my life in a bubble, a bubble that left my unscathed by the sting of racial prejudice as well as clueless about the experiences so many people faced for the color of their skin.**

My Change

Now this began to change for me when I started really listening to the stories of Christians of other ethnicities and the struggles they had faced because of the color of their skin. I read and heard stories that made me furious. I read and heard stories that made my heart hurt. **While the racism that I read about in history books didn't exist anymore racial prejudice was still alive and well.**

Can't Rewrite Hearts

You see, you **legislators can rewrite laws, but they can't rewrite the hearts of men and women.**

Can't Undo 500 years over 50 years of Drama

The Christian artist and author Lecrea said something that has stuck with me as I have thought about this issue, let me share it now. He said,

“If you enslave and torture a people for 400 years, tell them they are free but torture them another 100 years, and then kind of give them rights, but only begrudgingly, just 50 years ago, how can you expect zero systemic effects?

You can't wipe away a 500-year trauma in 50 years.”

While many today want to tell you that racism and racial prejudice is a thing of the past we have to remember that it was only 50 years ago, only 50 years ago that segregation truly ended. Just 50 years ago we separated schools, restrooms, drinking fountains, hotels, restaurants, swimming pools, seats on buses, and so many other things by race! How disgusting is that?!? Actions like this communicated that being black or being a minority was a disease of some sort. You were less than human. What a disgusting lie! As much progress as we have made in the past 50 years, we have to come to grips with the fact **that wounds don't heal over night.**

We would be fools to think that the sins of our forefathers would not have haunting implications upon us today, wouldn't we?

Signs of the Struggle

So as a country we are struggling still. We see it expressed in the Black Lives Matter movement. We see it in professional athletes taking a knee during the national anthem. We see it in the many other forms of protest that are going on today. We see it in nationalist movements like the Alt Right.

Can't Ignore

As Christians it should grieve us that there are people who feel marginalized for the color of their skin. This disharmony that exists between races in our country isn't something we can in good conscience overlook or ignore.

We can't ignore these issues because they matter to God.

My Goal for Tonight

My goal for our time together tonight is to increase our commitment to racial diversity and harmony. I want us to see that it is good, beautiful, right, and most importantly, God-glorifying when Christians of different skin colors, ethnicities, different races live life together, work together, relax together, laugh together, worship together, eat together in a spirit of love and unity.

CONTEXT

With that said, I want to open up by looking at an important interaction had between Paul and Peter in Galatians 2. Let me fill you in on the context before I read our specific passage that starts in verse 11.

Paul has been sharing his testimony and specifically he has been sharing the authenticity of his apostleship. He tells a story about how he was commissioned by the other Apostles. The other Apostles evaluated his understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and commissioned him to go to the Gentiles. In the midst of Paul's commissioning and ordination it was brought up that Titus was not circumcised. Now, the ceremonial law had been fulfilled in Christ so Christ is our circumcision, a physical circumcision was no longer required. The Apostles all understood this and thus didn't call for Titus' circumcision, much to Titus' relief I am sure.

False Brothers

However some of the audience in attendance included some "false brothers", men who had claimed faith in Jesus, but who had not let go of their trust in the works of the law. So when they heard that Titus had not been circumcised they began to put pressure on him and Paul to follow through with circumcision. Paul shares that he didn't give into their pressure. This is important as this theme carries over into verses 11-14.

Let's pick up there now...

Galatians 2:11-14

[11] But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.
[12] For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. [13] And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.
[14] But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

OUT OF STEP WITH THE GOSPEL (Gal 2:11-14)

So Paul had not given in to the pressure of those claiming to have faith in Jesus, yet still living under the law as a means of favor with God. When Cephas, which was another name that Peter went by, when Cephas was in Antioch he found himself in a similar situation, yet he caved to the pressure.

Peter Sharing Life with Gentiles

Peter had been sharing meals and life with Gentile believers. This is a good thing. This is a wonderful thing. Peter was sharing life with other believers in the church, believers of other ethnic backgrounds. This is the kind of thing that we should strive for. We should strive to share meals, share life, with people who have different background, people of different races, people in different life situations.

Pressure to Segregate

Yet at some point men who followed James came down from Jerusalem and much like the “false brothers” in verses 1-10, they pressured Peter to conform to the Old Testament ceremonial laws. This included separation between the Jews and Gentiles at the meal table.

The Feeling of Segregation

So Peter withdrew from eating and sharing life at a more intimate level with the Gentiles. Segregation at the dinner table became a thing. **How would have made you feel as a Gentile believer?** Now that these men from Jerusalem came into town all of the sudden the Jews there, the Apostle Peter in particular, would no longer eat with you because you were unclean. Would it make you feel like **a second-class citizen in the church?** Would it make you feel like there was **something wrong with you?** This wasn't happening with some random person in the church, it was happening with the Apostle Peter, one of the foremost leaders in the church.

Paul's Courage to Confront

Paul catches wind of this and we read that when he encounters Peter he confronts him. I love Paul. What a man of courage and integrity. He went to go confront the great Peter. The most outspoken of the Disciples of Jesus. The man who led the way in the early chapters of Acts. The man who was the spokesman for the church in the early years. This was a gutsy move by Paul.

Out of Step with the Gospel

Paul felt compelled to go and confront Peter though and why was that? Paul says what he saw in Peter's behavior was out of step or out of sync with the truth of the Gospel.

Paul Said it Nicely

What Peter had done, segregating himself from the Gentiles, treating the Gentiles as if they were lesser, treating other Jews as if they were more holy, this was out of sync with the Gospel. **Paul is being nice when he says this by the way.** I think he could have been far more harsh with his description and yet every bit as accurate. **He could have said that Peter was behaving in a disgusting way that totally forgets the creative work of God and the redemptive work of Jesus.**

What Racism Is

That is what racism and racial prejudice are. **They are disgusting actions, vile thoughts that are full of a false pride that don't understand or embrace the design of God in creation or the goal and the power of Jesus' redemptive cross work.** As Paul said, racism is out of step with the truth of the Gospel. **Racism is antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus.**

A Gospel Issue

Notice that when Paul confronts Peter **he doesn't merely appeal to the hurt feelings he caused towards the Gentile believers, he goes much deeper.** He points to Peter's drifting from the Gospel. **He shows that racism, racial prejudice is a Gospel issue through and through.** Peter's act of segregation

was the external symptom to an internal spiritual problem. Paul saw the outward problem, but confronted the inner, spiritual reality that fueled Peter's racial prejudice. That inner, spiritual reality was a lack of faith in Jesus, it was the creeping in of a false Gospel that combined good works with faith in Jesus. The spiritual problem was also a fear of man, rather than a fear of God.

How is Racism Out of Step with the Gospel

What I want to do with the rest of our time tonight is explore more deeply Paul's statement of how racism is out of step with the Gospel. Why does Paul say this? What is true about the Gospel that repudiates racial prejudice?

Roadmap

We will consider 3 Gospel truths tonight that force us as Christians to reject racial prejudice and embrace ethnic diversity and racial harmony.

1. Racism is out of Step with God's Gospel Design
2. Racism is out of Step with Jesus Gospel Mission
3. Racism is out of Step with Our Gospel Identity in Christ

1. RACISM IS OUT OF STEP WITH GOD'S GOSPEL DESIGN (Gen 1:26-27 | Psa 8)

Racism is out of step with the truth of the Gospel because it is out of step with God's Gospel Design. To say it another way, racism or racial prejudice rejects (knowingly or unknowingly) God's good design of humanity in creation.

Let me read you Genesis 1:26-27...

Genesis 1:26-27

[26] Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." [27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Created in God's Image = Value/Worth

God created humanity uniquely. Humanity was created in the image, after the likeness of God. Now there are books dedicated to answering what exactly this means. We won't take time to dive into that question tonight, but something that is meant by this is that **man was created with inherent value and worth.**

God's Image that Gives Value

This can be seen in Genesis 9...

Genesis 9:6

[6] "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

So here we have God talking to Noah, preparing to establish His covenant with Noah and he lays out this law, saying that anyone who takes the life of another, speaking of murder, should himself be put to death. God is giving approval for capital punishment. Why? What is the basis for this? Does God give the green light for capital punishment, for the death penalty because human life is worth so little? No, the opposite.

He says that death should be required of those who murder because they have taken the life of someone created in the image of God.

You see, **it is God's image, His imprint upon humanity that gives us special worth and value.** Have you ever wondered why we don't put animals on trial when they attack one another? Their lives are of different value and worth, they were not created in the likeness and image of God.

Listen to how the Psalmist talks to this in Psalm 8...

Psalm 8

[1] O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. [2] Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. [3] When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, **[4] what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?** [5] **Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.** [6] You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, [7] all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, [8] the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. [9] O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The Psalmist's flow of thought here is this... Consider the mighty and majestic work of God's hands. He has hung the moon and the stars in the heaven. His work is infinitely big and utterly complex.

Who is Man?

This recognition leaves the Psalmist wondering why it is that this God of unrivaled and limitless power would give any thought to man whatsoever. We are specs and God is all encompassing. We are but a grain of sand and God is the ocean. Yes, God doesn't only think of us, but He has given us high places in creation, places of honor. He has made us a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned us with glory and honor.

Crowned with Glory = Image of God

This is an incredible statement to the worth of man and I believe it is another way to speak to being created in the image of God. As the Psalmist continues he says that God put all things under man's feet, referring back to Genesis 1 and the dominion that God instructed man to exercise. **Thus, to say man was crowned with glory and honor is to say that man was created in the image of God. And God's image in man clearly points to the worth, the value, the dignity of man.**

Man's Worth is for God's Glory

As the Psalmist closes out he finds himself where he started, singing the praises of God. Which we have to take to mean that **the point of God creating humanity with so much worth and value was for the glory and praise of God.** The Psalmist is in awe of what God has done in creating man in His image and this is to God's glory and praise.

Application – Devaluing Someone Dismisses God's Glorious Work

So here is the implication we need to walk away with... **if we demean, devalue, belittle another person created in the image of God, and we are all created in the image of God, then we are dismissing God's incredible creative work.** We are overlooking that God created this person in front of you a little lower than the heavenly beings. We are ignoring that God has crowned this person with glory and honor.

And in doing all of this we are stealing glory from God. We are disrupting His good and perfect creative order.

The Tie to Racism

Do you see how all of this ties into the issue of racism and racial prejudice? To treat someone better or worse because of the color of their skin dismisses God's creative design and thus steals His glory. **There is ZERO room for this in the life of the believer.**

Learning to See People as Image-Bearers

Thus, brothers and sisters, we need to learn to **look at people through the lens of God's creative purposes**. We need to start looking at people as **image-bearers of God**, created after His likeness, crowned with glory and honor.

No Ordinary People

Listen to how C.S. Lewis talks to this...

"There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously - no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption."

There are no ordinary people. There are only people created in the image and after the likeness of God. **Some are black, some are white, some are brown, some are tan.** Regardless of the color of their skin, everyone in God's green earth carries inherent dignity and value as image-bearers. We need to see people in light of this biblical truth and treat them with the respect that they deserve from God's creative design.

God Values All People, So Should You

God has been clear in His word tonight. He values all people. He has put His imprint upon them.

Christian, you need to value what God values. He values people of all skin colors, of all ethnicities, of all nations, and we must as well.

2. RACISM IS OUT OF STEP WITH JESUS' GOSPEL MISSION (Rev 5:9-10)

Racism is out of step with the truth of the Gospel because it is out of step with Jesus' Gospel mission.

A Look Into the Future

I want to read you a passage from Revelation 5. Get yourself in the right mindset, we are getting a glimpse into eternity future. These are events that have yet to happen. Reading verses like this should excite you because they give us all something to look forward to. Ok, ready to look into the future?

Revelation 5:1-10

[1] Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. [2] And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" [3] And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, [4] and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. [5] And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." [6] And between the throne and the

four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. [9] And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

The Only One Worthy

What a powerful scene! Jesus, the only one worthy to open up the Scroll, which likely represents God’s will that is to be executed. Only Jesus is worthy and once again He comes to our rescue. **And what happens in that moment? Everyone there fall down in heart-pounding, joy-giving, soul-thrilling worship and we sing of Jesus’ worthiness! Can you wait to stand before Jesus and sing Him praises?** We will have that chance in a bit tonight. I could end the sermon here and we could go into worship and I would be happy.

Purchased People from Every Race

In the praises the elders sing, what is one of the glorious things Jesus is praised for? **He has ransomed, He has purchased, He has rescued, He has saved people from every tribe, language, people and nation.** Now, something I want you to take notice of in verse 9 is that Jesus purchased people FROM every tribe, language, people, and nation. He didn’t purchase every tribe, language, people, and nation. **The difference speaks to intentionality.** Jesus didn’t generically purchase all people, He specifically chose to purchase people from every race and ethnicity. **Jesus purchased a racially diverse people for Himself, an ethnically diverse church that was Jesus’ plan and mission.**

Diversity at an Infinitely High Price

Racial diversity was absolutely central to Jesus work in the Gospel and we read that He and God the Father were **willing to pay an infinitely high price to achieve this goal.** The cost to save a racially diverse people was the perfect and innocent life of the Son of God. Jesus had to give up everything.

- He had to face separation from the perfect fellowship with God that He knew.
- He had to endure torture.
- He had to face shame that wasn’t His.
- He had to die in an excruciating way.
- He had to bear the sins of any and all who would put their faith in Him.
- He had to stand under the wrath of God taking the punishment that believers deserved.

This ethnically diverse church that Jesus sought and saved came at an impossibly high cost, telling us that this **racial diversity is no small issue to Jesus or God the Father. This matters.** Racial diversity matters, it is big, it is important, it is huge in God’s eyes and thus it ought to be all of those things in our eyes as well.

Racism is Antithetical to Jesus’ Mission

Can you see how racism, how racial prejudice flies in the face of Jesus’ work on the cross? **Jesus loves people of every skin color, people of every tribe and nation.** We sing this to Addy every night at bed.

“Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

Nothing could make this more evident and obvious than what we have read in Revelation 5. Jesus shed His blood, gave up His life, bore our sins, died a shameful death so that people of every tribe, nation, people, and language would be saved into His family.

Racial Prejudice at Odds with Jesus

If that is Jesus' heart, what is revealed in your heart when you think about someone for better or for worse because of their skin color? Your heart is at odds with the heart of Jesus. You are thinking down about people that Jesus literally died for! You are demeaning someone that Jesus suffered for. If they matter that much to Jesus, how can you in good conscience think so little of them?

Seeing People as Those Jesus Died For

We talked earlier about how we need to look at the people around us as image-bearers, people who bear the image of God, made after the likeness of God with value and worth. **Now we need to look at people see them as valuable because they are people that Jesus died for, they are people that Jesus loved enough to suffer for. Should we not be willing to love and serve those that Jesus suffered for? It doesn't matter what color their skin is, where they are from, who their people are, they are loved by Jesus and thus they ought to be loved by us as well.**

Racial Diversity Cost Jesus, It Will Cost Us

Take note of this as well... it cost Jesus dearly to purchase this diversity. Would be so naïve to think that it wouldn't cost us anything? Pursuing racial diversity and harmony will be costly, it will require an investment, it will be work, but it will be worth it as it is the mission that Jesus came on and thus it is our mission as well.

3. RACISM IS OUT OF STEP WITH OUR GOSPEL IDENTITY IN CHRIST (Eph 2:11-22)

Racism is out of step with the truth of the Gospel because it is out of step with our Gospel identity in Christ.

Fundamental Shift in Identity

When you place your faith in Jesus there is a fundamental shift in your identity as an individual. Ephesians 2 speaks to this a great deal. In verses 1-10 we learn that before Christ we were...

- Dead in sin
- Following sinful desires
- Follow the Prince of the Power of the air
- We were children of wrath

But, in Christ we...

- Have found unspeakable mercy
- Have been made alive in Christ
- Have been saved
- Have been promised eternity
- Are God's workmanship

Things took a radical turn for us in our spiritual lives because of Christ. The impact does not stop there though. Paul speaks to the incredible unifying nature of the Gospel as well. **Relationships are also**

reconciled, even relationships that once saw the great strain of racial animosity. Listen to what Paul writes starting in verse 11...

Ephesians 2:11-22

[11] Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—[12] 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. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility [15] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. [17] And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. [19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The Jew/Gentile Animosity

If you have read much of the Old Testament you know that there was great strain between Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles were anyone who wasn't a Jew. Almost all of us here tonight are Gentiles. The animosity between Jews and Gentiles was great. These groups actively avoided each other. They would never dream of lending a helping hand. There was great disdain for the other's culture.

The Shock of the Good Samaritan

This is why the story of the Good Samaritan is such a shocking story from Jesus. This Jewish man is laying on the side of the road beaten and bloodied after having been mugged. His fellow countrymen pass him, but offer him nothing. Then a Samaritan comes along. Samaritans were part Gentile. The Jews hated the Samaritans and for this the Samaritans hated the Jews. One would sooner expect the Samaritan to spit on the helpless, beaten Jewish man before offering a helping hand. The Samaritan helps. This story would have been shocking as Jesus told it. It would have been unthinkable. That is how great the racial animosity and prejudice was between these two groups.

The Gospel's Impact on Racial Unity

Yet, did you hear how the **Gospel of Jesus changes our identity as we relate to those of other ethnicities?** Did you catch some of those key phrases?

- You who were **once far off** have been brought near.
- Jesus, who is our peace, has **made us both one** and **broken down the dividing wall of hostility**.
- He has **created one new man** in place of the two, making **peace**.
- He has **killed hostility**.
- You are **no longer strangers and aliens**, but you are **fellow citizens of the household of God**.

Jesus Wanted More than Diversity, He Wanted Harmony

The work of Jesus has not only purchased our salvation, **but it made racial reconciliation and harmony possible. Jesus wasn't just interested in purchasing a diverse people, He wanted a diverse people that loved each other and more importantly that loved Him so deeply they could get over their differences.** It is our common love and pursuit of Jesus that allows for this racial

harmony. **It is our deep love of Jesus that fuels our genuine care for one another. Jesus is our goal, He is our joy, and as we pursue the same thing any differences we may have culturally become secondary, preference issues that we are willing to set aside for the primary goal of living for Jesus.**

Common Identity

This is what empowers us to become “one man” as Paul says. **We are one in Christ. He is our common identity.** Which is why Paul says this in Colossians 3...

Colossians 3:11

[11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Christ is our identity more than anything else. **He defines us more than our skin color, more than the nation we were born in, more than the culture that drives our traditions, more than the families we come from, more than anything else. Jesus is our all in all and when you have that in common with someone else there isn't anything you can't overcome in the pursuit of unity.**

The Cross is the Great Equalizer

Additionally, the cross is the great equalizer. We see our common need in the Gospel. All men are sinners in need of a Savior. We all need the same salvation. No one needs just a little, while others need more. We are all DEAD in our sins. We are LOST, we are BLIND. Our only hope is grace and mercy. **When this is your posture, when this is your understanding of life, there is no room for boasting or pride to think that you are better than someone else on the basis of skin color.**

Not Just an Implication of the Gospel

As we consider all of this, I believe something that we see from this Ephesians passage is that **Racial Diversity and Harmony is not merely an implication of the Gospel, it was one of the primary objectives of the Gospel.** It is not a nice side effect or a bonus, it was something that was essential to the mission of Jesus. He not only came to purchase a people for Himself, but he came to purchase a diverse people who would live in unity and harmony.

Racial Harmony is Essential

So for us as a church, racial and ethnic harmony is essential. This can't be something that we merely think would be nice to have, it has to be core to who we are. **It is a hallmark of Gospel community. Without it we have to question if we have trusted in the true Gospel or a gospel made after our own image, tailored to fit our desires.**

I Would to See More

Let me say now that I love the diversity that we have represented in this room. Can I tell you though, I would love to see greater diversity? **I would love to see Southern Hills become a vivid example to our community of the impact of the Gospel in how we reach out to all people regardless of the color of their skin, the depth of their bank account, or the number of years they have lived.** That's right, diversity has other categories than race. Race is what is in view tonight, but let's not limit ourselves to just race as we consider these truths.

The good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that this kind of harmony and unity is possible, it is possible because Jesus purchased it at the infinite cost of His own blood.

Transition to Application – No Room for Racial Prejudice

I don't think the Scriptures could be any clearer. **There is no room in Gospel-Centered communities for racism or racial prejudice.** Any and all racial prejudice is out of step with the truth of the Gospel as Paul said. It denies God's good creative design, it misses on some central truth in the mission of Jesus, and it lacks understanding of our new identity in Jesus.

Not Far Enough

Based off of what we have learned from God's Word tonight about the Gospel I don't think it is enough to say that racial prejudice has no place in Gospel-Centered communities. This is true, but it doesn't go as far as the Gospel takes us. **We must also conclude that Gospel-Centered communities must intentionally pursue racial diversity and harmony. This is where the Gospel takes us.**

What Now?

So where do we go from here Southern Hills? **How do we become a church that more actively pursues racial diversity and harmony?** This is not a question that can be quickly and easily answered in the remaining time that we have here, but I want to share 4 important things that we ought to do as a church in pursuit of racial diversity and harmony.

1. Eyes Wide Open

First, we need to recognize that **there are real race relation issues in our culture.** There always will be as long as there is sin. I have heard more than one person try to deny that racism and racial prejudice are still issues today. **If that were the case we would be witnessing for the very first time a sin go extinct.** That would be nice, but it isn't reality. Look, if Peter and Barnabas could fall into racial prejudice don't you think that we need to watch for it carefully in our own lives and within our community and Christendom as a whole? Yes, of course!

A Politicized Issue

Here is the temptation I have seen though. Race has very much become a politicized issue. We have one party that likes to view many things from a racial perspective. They believe many issues have racial foundations. We have another party that thinks the racial argument is overplayed and because these two parties are in a culture war they go to extremes. One making everything a race issue. Another denying racial issues even exist.

Rise Above It

Brothers and Sisters, we have to rise above this silly political drama. We need to make sure our ultimate allegiance isn't to a political party, but to truth, to the Gospel, to God's Word. God's Word tells us that racial prejudice is a real thing, it is a real thing that Jesus came to remedy. It was a real thing that existed in the early church.

Be Aware, Be on the Lookout, Pursue Harmony

So we need to be sensitive. We need to live with our eyes opened, recognizing that this sin can creep in to many places. We can't bury our heads in the sand to carry some political talking points. Let's strive to be the kind of community that Christ purchased us to be. Let's be on the look out for this very real and lurking sin that stands in opposition to the very truth of the Gospel.

2. Pursue Racial Diversity

Secondly, we need to pursue racial diversity. We need to pursue this in our own lives first and foremost. **We need to be interested in people who look different than us. What does your circle of friends look like? Do they all look like you?** What kind of diversity exists? I want to encourage you tonight to

look to make friends of different ethnicities. Jesus saved you to live within this kind of community. Go and be a tool to fulfill the mission of Jesus.

It Won't Just Happen

Racial Diversity generally isn't something that just happens, it needs to be sought out. Jesus called us to seek it out when he commanded the disciples to go to all nations. We live in a multi-cultural and ethnically diverse city. This is a gift from God. The nations have been brought to your doorstep. Go!

3. Pursue Racial Harmony

Thirdly, we need to pursue racial harmony. The world around us is diligently searching for answers on the matter of racial harmony. This topic has never been more high profile and cared about than today. **Southern Hills, we have an incredible opportunity before us. We have a chance to show the world that we have the answer and His name is Jesus. Let's show the world that Jesus' community is the kind of community that they dream of.**

Your Role

We are a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who love one another, who sacrifice for and serve one another. Is that true of you? **Do you look to invest into the lives of those who look different than you or do you stay in your comfort zone?** It isn't enough to come to church on Sundays and sit in the same room as someone who looks different than you, you need to go and be a real friend to them, you need to share life with them, take a real interest in them. This is what it looks like for the Gospel to live itself out!

4. Gospel Conversations

Fourthly, we need to speak to the issue of race relations when God gives us the opportunity. We live in a culture where racial harmony or usually the lack thereof is in the headlines regularly. These kinds of topics get brought up in office conversations and amongst friends. Generally speaking, at least in my experience, when these topics are brought up it is so people can rag on the idea of racial prejudice. **When these conversations come up we are being presented golden opportunities to share the Gospel and introduce people to God.** We can join in the chorus of condemnation as we share that racism is such an ugly thing because all humanity was created in the image of God and Jesus laid down His life for people for people of all skin colors. Let's look to use these conversations to share the hope of the Gospel.

CONCLUSION

Southern Hills, this is an important issue. I hope you feel that way as well. How could you not?

- **God implanted His image** into every man and woman, regardless of their ethnicity. To ignore racial prejudice is to live in apathy to the glory of God in a key area.
- How could you not feel this issue is important when **Jesus had made a sacrifice of infinite value to purchase this diversity** when He shed His blood?
- How could this issue not matter to you when **part of your new identity in Christ** is to live as one new body amongst a very diverse group? Jesus wove diversity and racial harmony into our very identity, don't ignore who Jesus saved you to be!

As I said earlier, **racial harmony is not merely an implication of the Gospel, it is one of the key missions of Christ when He laid down His life. May we live like this is so.**

Let's Pray