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WHEN RACES COLLIDE



What do you appreciate most about other cultures?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Our relationship with Christ should be reflected in our unity with one another.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

For most of us, our source of information about other cultures doesn't extend much further than the menu at the ethnic restaurant. After all, who doesn't love to eat? Our world is full of wonderfully creative and different ways to prepare food. Of course, food is just one thing that distinguishes each culture from others. Other external customs and traditions include music and dress. We're wonderfully unique.

I pastored a church in a town that was divided between the fan bases for two sports teams. Their rivalry was real! No fundamental difference existed between the two groups. They were all people made in God's image. Their hostility was over something external: their team colors!

Unfortunately, we often focus on the externals—those outward things that make us look different—while paying little attention to those things we might share in common. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul pointed us to the most important thing Christians share: a relationship with Christ!

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Ephesians 2:11-12

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.

It is not a fun feeling to be lost—separated from others! We’ve all been there in one way or another. In this passage, Paul addressed the Gentiles—the non-Jews—with a truth that applies to all of us: we are *all* lost at one point and separated from God spiritually. No matter what country of origin, racial or ethnic background, or the socioeconomic class we were born into, we all entered this world as sinners separated from God. We were:

- ▶ **Without Christ.** Paul had earlier noted that we “were dead” in our sins (Eph. 2:1). We were not just sick, but dead! We were bound by sin, in bondage to the world, and, therefore, we were separated from Christ.
- ▶ **Without citizenship.** We were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel.” I live in the Commonwealth of Virginia, which refers to the “common good.” Israel had the blessing of God, which meant they had God’s protection, law, priests, promises, and guidance. God’s blessing was for their common good. But as long as we were lost in sin, we could not share in that good.
- ▶ **Without the covenants.** *Covenant* is one of the most important words in the Bible. A covenant is simply an agreement in which God binds Himself to a promise. For Israel, the covenants were God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David. God desires for us to live under His “covenants of promise,” but we couldn’t do that as long as we were apart from Jesus.

How does racial prejudice impact the church’s witness?

QUESTION #2

- ▶ **Without hope.** Many have no confidence in their government or their leaders. Many can't even count on their parents or friends. Evil surrounds us, but we need not fear the future. Our greatest hope is found in Christ, but as long as we are sinners separated from Him, that hope is absent.
- ▶ **Without God.** The phrase "without God" does not mean God had forsaken us, but that we have forsaken Him. It does not mean He did not know us, but that we did not know Him.

It's so important to remember we are all alike on the inside. The Declaration of Independence says: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," but the Bible said it first! God created us in His image and we were dead in our sin apart from Him. We are all descendants of Adam and Eve, and, therefore, we are part of a single race—the human race.

So let's call racism what it is: sin. It is evil. No race can claim superiority when we are all equal before our Creator. The only answer to our nation's racial problem and our only hope for reconciliation is Jesus!

Ephesians 2:13-18

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.

When have you seen the love of Christ tear down barriers between people?

QUESTION #3

MY PREFERENCE

For each of the following pairs, choose the one you prefer. Then evaluate ways in which you've allowed personal preferences to affect how you view others.

1. Regular soft drink or Diet soft drink
2. Peanuts or Pretzels
3. Football or Basketball
4. Broccoli or Carrots
5. Cookies or Chips

While this is a fun activity, if we aren't careful our preferences concerning people's personal traits can lead us to make distinctions that lead to disunity. What are some personal characteristics we sometimes favor that are really more of a preference than a choice of right or wrong?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How can we differentiate between things that should really matter to us and things that shouldn't?

"The moment you experienced the love of Jesus Christ at salvation, you chose to forfeit the right to whom you would love!"

— OSCAR THOMPSON

We were sinners without God, but He did not leave us there. Our sin created an inner conflict (see Jas. 4:1), but we manifest that conflict in many ways. It's been said, "A man at war with himself will be at war with everyone else around him." Only one solution to this conflict is available: the blood of Christ. God sent His Son, Jesus, a Middle Eastern man with a dark complexion, born to save sinners from every race and walk of life. (See John 3:16.)

Through Jesus, we now have peace with God. Since I have peace with God, and you have peace with God, shouldn't we have peace with each other? There is no "good race" and "bad race," we are all only sinners saved by grace. God is building a "new race" of people bought with His blood, filled with His Spirit, and called the Church. What unites us in Christ is far greater than our differences. At salvation God makes all things new; where many groups once existed, God is putting together a chosen people out of every race, every tribe, language, people, and nation. Heaven is not going to be a white church, black church, Hispanic church, or Asian church. It will be all the redeemed—all people who have received forgiveness through Jesus' death and resurrection.

We should not assume that we, or our churches, are free from racial prejudices. In the early church, the Greek "widows were being neglected in the daily distribution" (Acts 6:1). We may have similar biases, but we should reject any temptation to value one racial or ethnic group over another. Through Christ we all have access to the heavenly Father.



How does our reconciliation with God help us reconcile with others?

QUESTION #4

Ephesians 2:19-22

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.

Because believers are united with Christ, they are united with each other. As believers, we are a single church, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” who proclaimed the message of Christ.

So why is Sunday morning still the most segregated hour in America? Most of us have grown up in circles where everyone looks like us and talks like us. We naturally tend to stay within our circle. We can counter this as we step out of our comfort zones and into someone else’s experience. Let’s learn about one another’s ethnic culture, while celebrating what we share in Christ.

When our family moved to Hampton, Virginia, in 2006, the population in the area was half African-American, but you could count on one hand the African-American families in our church. We began to pray about how we could reach everyone in our community. By God’s grace, He is now building a church that looks like our community and, most of all, looks like heaven!

One night as we were leaving church we saw a car on fire. The lady driving the car was trapped and unconscious. An older man was doing everything he could to rescue her. The flames almost engulfed him. Finally, he was able to break the window, unlock the door, and pull the woman to safety, saving her life. The lady was Caucasian and the man was African-American. In that moment, though, no one noticed the difference. All that mattered was a lady trapped in a car going up in flames.

People all around us are trapped in sin, seemingly unaware of the death that awaits them. God has called the church to work together with the same urgency. We are one in Christ—and we should act like it.

What are some practical steps our group can take to positively impact race relations in our community?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How does God want to use you to bridge the divide and be an ambassador of peace this week? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Admit.** Racism still exists. Confess to God any prejudice you feel toward another person.
- ▶ **Meet.** Get to know your neighbors and coworkers who have a different ethnicity than yours. Don't treat them differently—treat them simply as a neighbor or coworker. You can build bridges by focusing on what you share in common.
- ▶ **Invite.** Invite someone of a different race or ethnicity to come with you to your Bible study group. The smaller group environment is a great way for them to build relationships with other believers.



We can all do more to understand one another and learn to cross cultural boundaries in healthy ways. Let's allow our common lineage as God's people to help us be a unified family of God!

My thoughts