



REDEMPTION AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION

*We cannot live redemptive lives and hate our neighbor.
Diversity in relationships not only shows unity to the world
but also builds in our own hearts a love for others.⁷*

A NEED FOR RECONCILIATION

In the twenty-first century, our eyes have seen a seemingly endless number of racially-charged acts of violence in America. While it may be tempting to take a passive stance if you are not personally affected, remember that racial reconciliation is a gospel issue. The gospel is a call to reconciliation—first to God and then to others.

Our kids see the ugliness of racism and prejudice every day. As parents, we must

be ready to help our children understand and grapple with the complexities of racial issues. There are many reasons to avoid the subject of race when talking to our kids: it is too sensitive, we aren't equipped to respond, or we don't know what to say. But there is a greater danger in keeping quiet. Our silence tells our kids we don't care.

Jesus was in the business of reconciliation. We all—no matter our nationality—were far from Christ and “have been brought near by

[His] blood” (Eph. 2:13). Christ’s crucifixion tore down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles. In the same way, we are called to be agents of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18).

Genuine reconciliation only comes through the peace Christ brings through the gospel. He has freely reconciled us to Himself, and we can follow Him by working toward racial harmony. And just like us, our kids are called to follow Christ as ministers of reconciliation. Are you prepared to equip them?

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

Let’s consider a common obstacle in conversations about race: You are not color-blind, you don’t need to be color-blind, and you should strive to not be color-blind. If you’d like to grasp the full beauty of God’s creation, see color. Instead of pretending like we are color-blind, let’s celebrate God’s creation. Ethnic differences aren’t the result of the fall; celebrate the unique beauty of each and look forward to seeing heaven filled with the colors of all nations.

Celebrate the diversity (including ethnic distinctions) of those who are called into the family of God. Just like the human body is made of many parts that all need each other, the body of Christ is made of many members working together (1 Cor. 12:12).

Encourage your kids to ask questions about other cultures. Children are often curious when they see people with a different skin color or unique cultural clothing. If they ask questions, don’t shame them or make them feel as if they’ve done something wrong. Help them to see the beauty in our differences.

When those who the world thinks should hate each other instead love each other, the church is testifying that our identity is in Jesus Christ.

RACE AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

How does our understanding of all humanity as God’s image-bearers change the way we treat people who are different from us?

As God’s image-bearers we are all equal. We are equal in dignity and worth. We are created equally in His image. This is a profound mystery, and yet a great privilege. Understanding our equality as image-bearers changes everything we think about our human relationships.

Everyone we deal with, everyone we come into contact with, is an image-bearer who has intrinsic value. They are not just temporary. They are not an interruption in our day, but rather they are a living, breathing representation of our God. And this is why the subjects of racial reconciliation and kingdom diversity are relevant to all Christians. No one is exempt from recognizing and respecting the image of God in others.

In Ephesians 2:19, Paul declared that those who are in Christ “are no longer foreigners and strangers,” but are all “members of God’s household.” The most important thing about us will never be whether we are white, black, Asian, African, or Hispanic. The most important thing about us is whether or not we belong to Jesus Christ. And if we do, we are all one in His body, brothers and sisters bonded together in love. The family of God

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is a diverse family, but we experience unity and harmony because of the work of Christ.

Citizenship in the kingdom of God is not dependent on the color of our skin (Gal. 3:8). Salvation isn't attributed to status, class, or ethnicity. It is a gift offered to all the nations of the world. This is much more than a "black and white" issue. It's about how we respond to the refugees seeking safety in our country. It's about the way we treat the immigrant looking for hope and a future within our borders.

How should we see people? The only answer is to see them as people God loves who are made in His image (Gen 1:26). When the family of God gathers to worship around His throne, every tribe, every language, and every ethnicity will bow down together to offer praises to our King (Rev. 4–5).

We should get comfortable sitting across the table from those who are different from us here on earth, because we will be with all types of people in heaven as part of that "vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number" (Rev. 7:9). And if that is true, then we should pursue it here and now. After all, that is what we pray in the Lord's Prayer:

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

MATTHEW 6:10-11a

RACE AND OUR MISSION

In 1 Corinthians, after Paul's discourse on the body of Christ, he went on to say, if one member of the body suffers, everyone

suffers with him (1 Cor. 12:26). Why is race an important issue? Because people have suffered, and continue to suffer. And our silence only serves to intensify the pain. Once our eyes are opened, we sin when we are apathetic toward the work of reconciliation.⁸ This isn't an issue for "those people" to deal with. This is an issue for all of God's people.

Reconciliation begins with us and it begins in the church. In a racially-divided world, the church of Jesus Christ ought not simply advocate for racial reconciliation; we ought to embody it. Just as we should speak to the structures of society about principles of morality and righteousness, we also should model those principles in our congregations. The quest for racial unity comes not just through proclamation but through demonstration.

Racial and ethnic division and bigotry are rooted in a satanic deception that tells us we ought to idolize "the flesh." The gospel doesn't just call us individually to repentance, but also congregationalizes that reconciliation in local bodies of persons who may have nothing else in common but the image of God, repentance of sin, and the redemption found in Jesus Christ.

The church, the apostle Paul said, is a sign of God's manifold wisdom, to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10). When God joined together in one church, those who are both Jewish and Gentile, He was doing more than negating the bad effects of ethnic strife. He was declaring spiritual warfare. When those

who the world thinks should hate each other instead love each other, the church is testifying that our identity is in Jesus Christ (Col. 3:11). We cannot be pulled apart from each other, because we are one body, and a body that is at war with itself is diseased.

If we begin to see more churches so alive to the gospel that they are not segregated out as “white” or “black” or “Hispanic” or “Asian” or “white collar” or “blue collar,” we will start to reflect something of a kingdom of God made up of those “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). And as we know one another as brothers and sisters, we will start to speak up for one another, care for one another, and bear one another’s burdens.

We must not merely announce what unity and reconciliation ought to look like. We must also show it. How do we do this? We must first be convinced of the worthiness of the task. Jesus has called us to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Ask yourself, *Am I willing to subjugate my preferences in obedience to this command?* Second, James’s words are also helpful here:

My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness.

JAMES 1:19-20

How do you listen to people who are different from you? What steps can you take in your family, in your neighborhood, and in your church to listen and love?

The burden of racial reconciliation is one that every Christian shares. Commit yourself to “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18).

A practical place to begin is to invite those different from you into your circle. Welcome a family of a different ethnicity into your home for dinner. Expose your family to other cultures through food and music. Encourage your son or daughter to extend friendship to a child who is new to our country. Host an exchange student for a semester. Pray about international adoption. Model the tangible love of Christ to a diverse world.

The ministry of reconciliation is really about God’s love. As we pursue unity amidst diversity, we portray God’s love to the world. It is an incredible task, but His grace is sufficient for us. Through the ministry of reconciliation, our God empowers us to be His vehicles of grace in a fallen world.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How is racial reconciliation a gospel issue?
2. Are you currently having conversations about racial issues in your home? If not, why not?
3. How do you celebrate diversity in your home?
4. What steps will you lead your family to take to practice the ministry of reconciliation?
5. What one thing stood out to you from this article?