
The Gospel and Race

What do we mean by “race”?

- ❖ Definitions

- ❖ **Race:** “The word ‘race,’” as used in this pastoral letter, is not a scientific classification; rather, in the language of one author, the term ‘race’ is used to denote ‘a social phenomenon with a biological component’ (Sowell, *Race and Culture*). That is, the term ‘race’ not only pertains to the color of skin and other biological factors, but also may include the cultural factors, associations, and assumptions that we attach to certain races as well” (PCA Pastoral Letter on Gospel and Race)

What do we mean by “race”?

- ❖ Definitions

- ❖ **Ethnicity:** “Because ethnic identity is ‘socially constructed and subjectively perceived’ it is impossible to find an objective set of criteria that defines the ethnic group in every situation (J. M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*). Traditionally, ethnic identity has been understood as connected to either genetics (physical appearance), language, and/or religion” (Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 28).

- ❖ Overlap

- ❖ There is obvious overlap between “race” and “ethnicity” as used sociologically.
- ❖ There is also obvious difficulty in trying to define “race” biologically (e.g. we are all mixed “races”; there are no clear boundary lines; we are all related in Adam/Noah).
- ❖ That said, the Bible does recognize the reality of differences based on physical appearance, language, cultural development; it has language to account for this reality.

Why are we talking about this now?

- ❖ Not “political correctness,” “social gospel,” or “cultural Marxism”
- ❖ Rather, an application of the Gospel to every area of life.
- ❖ The PCA has spoken twice on this issue:
 - ❖ 2002-04: confession of covenantal involvement in chattel slavery followed by the Pastoral Letter on the Gospel and Race
 - ❖ 2016-18: confession of covenantal involvement in injustice during the Civil Rights Era followed by the Paper on Racial Reconciliation.

Reconciliation: Colossians

- ❖ Colossians 1:15-23, 3:1-4, 11
- ❖ Who Christ Is: person, position, purpose
- ❖ What Christ Does: “through him to reconcile to himself”
 - ❖ All things to himself (20)
 - ❖ You to God (21-23)
 - ❖ You to each other—across racial, religious, cultural, and economic lines (3:1-4, 11)
- ❖ “But Christ is all, and in all”

Reconciliation: Ephesians

- ❖ Ephesians 1:7-10; 2:14-22
- ❖ 1:7-10: the divine purpose “to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”
- ❖ Context: the ongoing tensions between Jew (circumcision) and Gentile (uncircumcision) in the church
- ❖ What happened
 - ❖ At that time you were separated from Christ
 - ❖ But now you have been brought near in Christ

Reconciliation: Ephesians

- ❖ Ephesians 1:7-10; 2:14-22
- ❖ Who did this: Christ our Peace (cf. Micah 5:5)
- ❖ What did he do
 - ❖ He made us both one
 - ❖ He has broken down “the wall of hostility”
- ❖ Why he did it
 - ❖ That he might create “one new man” (the New Humanity) in place of two
 - ❖ That he might reconcile us both to God in one body (the church)

Reconciliation: Ephesians

- ❖ Ephesians 1:7-10; 2:14-22
- ❖ How did he do this?
 - ❖ Through the cross
 - ❖ Through his coming to preach peace
- ❖ What's the result?
 - ❖ Jew and Gentile together are fellow citizens and family
 - ❖ Jew and Gentile together are the New Temple
 - ❖ Jew and Gentile together show what it looks like when Jesus "unites all things"

Reconciliation is the goal of the Gospel

- ❖ Jesus' mission is to reconcile all things / unite all things in himself so that he might have the preeminence in both creation and new creation.
- ❖ His means for doing this is reconciling us to God and to each other through the blood of the cross, which serves as the basis for our union with Christ and each other.
- ❖ His church is to be a place where this reconciliation is lived out, where we live as a diverse-yet-unified people across lines of races, ethnicities, and cultures.
- ❖ The failure to do this is a failure ultimately to understand, believe, and obey the Gospel.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ We all come to this conversation on Gospel and race from different places—listening well to one another is key to growing in maturity and unity across racial and ethnic spaces. What about this conversation on the Gospel and race makes you nervous? Excited? Concerned?
- ❖ Along the same line, what is one way that you hope you will be different as a result of this time spent tonight and tomorrow morning? What is one area that you hope your church will grow as a result?
- ❖ In your opinion, why is it a temptation for us to limit redemption/reconciliation to our own personal reconciliation with God? How should the Bible's larger story of God's determination to reconcile all things (us to God, us to one another, all things to God) shape the way we think about the Gospel and its reach?