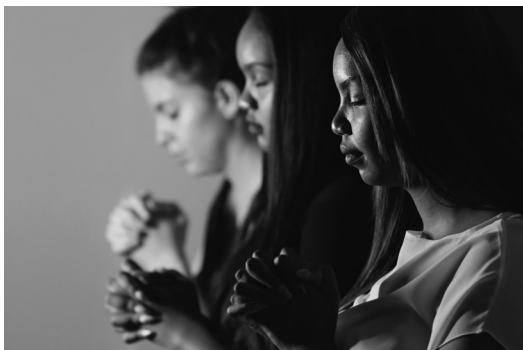


A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
RACISM



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RACISM



Humanity has been divided by race and racial attitudes for millennia. Though explicit racism may not be as frequent as in the past, racial stereotypes and racist ideas persist to this very day. A Google search on the term “racist” generates hundreds of millions of hits, demonstrating how prevalent the term has become.

Those numbers also illustrate the problem with the overuse of the word. It has unfortunately become quite

common for people to label a person or a comment as racist as a means of stopping discussion and debate. We devalue the term “racist” when we use it as a slanderous epithet. When everything is called racist, then the term loses its meaning.

A proper dictionary definition for racism would be any prejudice or discrimination against a person of a different race based on the belief that your race is superior or that person’s race is inferior. Often it surfaces with assumptions that “all [fill in the race] are [fill in the negative stereotype].”

Race is Imprecise

Before we go any further, we should acknowledge that the term “race” is not a very precise term for two reasons. First, the Bible only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups, but the Bible does not provide any justification for treating

people differently simply because of these physical differences.

The Bible teaches that God has made “from one blood every nation of men” (Acts 17:26). Here, Paul taught the Athenians that they came from the same source in the creation as everyone else. If you have ever watched people at an international airport, you can conclude that human beings come in so many shapes, sizes, and colors. Yet all of these differences go back to the parents of the human race (Genesis 1-3, 1 Corinthians 15).

Science has also shown us that “race” is not a precise term. Research on the human genome project shows us that such racial characteristics (such as skin color) are insignificant genetically.¹ People of every race can interbreed and produce fertile offspring. One study of human genetic material of different races concluded that the DNA

¹ Noah A. Rosenberg, “Genetic Structure of Human Populations,” *Science*, Vol. 298, 20 December 2002, 2381-2385.

of any two people in the world would differ by just 2/10ths of one percent.² And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. These “racial differences” are trivial when you consider there are 3 billion base pairs of human DNA.

Another reason the term “race” also lacks precision is because of interracial marriage, which is blurring distinctions even more. Consider one well-known athlete: Tiger Woods. His heritage is Thai, black, white, Chinese, and Native American.

Even skin color can vary in unexpected ways. One example is the rare occurrence of black and white twins. It occurs when the two children have different genes for the pigment called melanin that affects skin color. There are a number of examples of fraternal twins born “black” and “white” that have been documented in the news.³

² J. C. Gutin, “End of the Rainbow,” *Discover*, November 1994, 71–75.

³ Ken Ham, “It’s Not Just Black & White,” *Answers*

Racial Issues in America

Nevertheless, race relations and racism is still a problem in America. According to a 2019 Gallup poll, 40 percent of Americans say they worry a “great deal” about race relations and another 26 percent say they worry a “fair amount” about race relations.⁴ That means that two-thirds of Americans still believe race relations is a big issue in this country.

A recent Pew Research Center poll found wide differences between black and white adults on key questions.⁵ More than seven in ten (71%) of blacks believe that race relations in the US are generally bad, while only 56 percent of

in Genesis, February 13, 2008, <https://answersingenesis.org/racism/its-not-just-black-and-white/>.

⁴ Gallup poll, “Race Relations,” 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1687/race-relations.aspx>.

⁵ Pew Research Center, “Race in America 2019,” 9 April 2019, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019/>.

whites agree with that statement. More than three fourths (78%) of blacks believe the country hasn't gone far enough in giving blacks equal rights with whites, compared with about a third (37%) of whites. And half of all blacks are convinced that black people will never have equal rights.

Barna Research finds similar disparities.⁶ For example, more than eight in ten (84%) blacks believe that "people of color are often put at a social disadvantage because of their race," while a bare majority (56%) of evangelicals agree with that statement. A similar difference can also be found with regard to reverse racism (providing advantages to blacks). Large majorities (71%) of whites complain about reverse racism, but less than a majority (46%) of blacks see it.

Racial stereotypes still exist for

⁶ Barna Research, "Black Lives Matter and Racial Tension in America," 5 May 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/black-lives-matter-and-racial-tension-in-america/#.V45Hf5MrKb8>.

many Americans. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago used a sophisticated questionnaire with a range of possible answers to evaluate different characteristics about a variety of groups.⁷ They discovered that more than half (57%) of whites rated African Americans as less intelligent than whites. They also found that three in ten (30%) of African Americans themselves rated African Americans as less intelligent than whites. Also, high percentages of the entire sample rated African Americans as lazier than whites (62%) and more than 3 out of 4 survey respondents said that African Americans are more inclined than whites to prefer welfare over work.

One government study on discipline in the nation's public schools documented that black children are much more likely to be suspended. According to the report, black children

⁷ Jeff Nesbit, "America Has a Big Race Problem," *U.S. News and World Report*, 28 March 2016.

make up 18 percent of preschoolers, but make up nearly half of all out-of-school suspensions. And across age groups, black students are three times more likely than white students to be suspended.⁸

Racial stereotypes also surface in the workplace. One study found that people with “black-sounding names” had to send out 50 percent more job applications than people with “white-sounding names” just to get a return call.⁹ Black college graduates are twice as likely as whites to be unemployed.

On the street, a black man is three times more likely to be searched at a traffic stop and six times more likely

⁸ NPR, “Black Preschoolers Far More Likely to Be Suspended, March 21, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/03/21/292456211/black-preschoolers-far-more-likely-to-be-suspended>.

⁹ National Bureau of Economic Research, “Employers’ Replies to Racial Names,” <https://www.nber.org/digest/sep03/w9873.html>.

to go to jail than a white man.¹⁰ The Sentencing Project argues that blacks aren't pulled over or jailed just because of criminal behavior but because of the "implicit racial association of black Americans with dangerous or aggressive behavior."

Racism may surface from generalized assumptions made about a particular racial group or cultural group. But it may also develop as a mindset among a people group that will use political, economic, or cultural means to suppress another race. Although racism has existed for millennia, it gained an unexpected ally in the scientific realm during the nineteenth century.

In 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous work *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection of the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. The last part of this title undoubtedly furthered some of the ideas of racial superiority that flourished dur-

¹⁰ Jeff Nesbit, "Institutional Racism Is Our Way of Life, *U.S. News and World Report*, 6 May 2015.

ing Darwin's time. He expanded on this in his later book: *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*.

This is the interesting irony. Darwin was a gentleman, a loving father, and a strong opponent of slavery. On the other hand, his writings unleashed a theory that justified racism and eugenics. It is easy to follow the path. Darwin's half-cousin, Francis Galton, formed the first "Eugenics Society." Galton proposed the idea of instituting "breeding methods" for humans – much like those used for livestock and other animals. Darwin's son, Leonard, succeeded Galton as head of the Eugenics Society. You can trace these ideas all the way to Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, and her desire to use abortion, birth control, and sterilization to prevent "the unfit" from reproducing.

Biblical Perspective on Race

As I have already mentioned, the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences

in anatomy and physiology do not provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences. The Bible teaches that God has made “of one blood all nations of men” (Acts 17:26).

The Bible teaches that we are all created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). That means that each person is valuable because God placed His own divine image in each one of us. Each person is sacred and equally valuable. This theological truth vividly illustrates why racism is sinful and evil. Racial attitudes and prejudice diminish the intrinsic value of each human being.

The Bible also teaches that Christians should not feel superior to anyone. In Philippians 2, Paul admonished the Christians to live in harmony with one another. They were to have a gentle spirit toward one another, and to let this gentle spirit be known to others.

Christians are also admonished to refrain from using class distinctions

within the church. In James 2:1–13, believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people. They are not to show partiality within the church. Showing favoritism is called sin, and the one showing favoritism is convicted by the law. Surely these commands would also apply to holding views of racial superiority and inferiority.

Likewise, Paul instructed Timothy (1 Tim. 5:21) to keep his instructions “without partiality and to do nothing out of favoritism.” This command would also exclude making racial distinctions based on a view of racial superiority.

Finally, we see that Paul taught the spiritual equality of all people in Christ. He abolished all racial and social discrimination in his various letters to the early churches. For example, he taught in Colossians 3:11 that “there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” This passage is significant because

it shows that Christ has removed four kinds of distinctions: national distinctions (Greek or Jew), religious distinctions (circumcised or uncircumcised), cultural distinctions (barbarian or Scythian), and economic distinctions (slave or free).

Another passage is Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Christ, our human distinctions lose their significance. No one is superior to another. A believing Jew is not superior to a believing Greek. A believing slave is of no higher rank than a believing free person.

Practical Suggestions

If we are to become more sensitive to racial tensions, we need to search our hearts and take an accurate assessment of our values. You have probably heard people say that they have no prejudices and concluded they were in denial. What about your views about other people who are different from you? Each of us perceive the world

differently and find it easier to accept people who are like us and harder to understand people who are different from us. An important first step in becoming more racially and culturally sensitive is to evaluate ourselves.

Second, learn to empathize with others. We should look at life and our circumstances from the viewpoint of others. Instead of trying to make others think like us, we should strive to begin to think like them. We don't always have to agree with another person's viewpoint. But becoming empathetic will help in bridging racial and cultural barriers.

Third, watch for pride and a feeling of superiority. As we have already discussed, one of the root causes of racism is a belief in racial superiority. Paul wrote in Romans 12:3 that you should "not think of yourself more highly than you ought." Differences in race and culture should never be used to justify feelings of racial superiority which can lead to racist attitudes.

Finally, take a stand. We should speak out against racism and racial attitudes. We should not allow others to tell racial and ethnic jokes. These jokes are demeaning to others and perpetuate racism and racial attitudes. Instead, we should be God's instruments in bringing about racial reconciliation. We should seek to build bridges and close the racial and cultural divide between people groups and reach out with the love of Jesus Christ.

Additional Resources

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