



Southwestern

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY



The Doctrine of Humankind



A GOSPEL-CENTERED APPROACH TO THE ISSUE OF RACISM: Race, Ethnicity, and the Gospel's Influence towards Racial Reconciliation

Carl Bradford*

Unresolved racial grievances in America and among Christians have caused an obtrusive separation. For recent evidence individuals may observe peaceful civil protests during national sports games or marches regarding the sentiment “Black Lives Matter.”¹ However, the current problem is not a new phenomenon. The American Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement demonstrate earlier evidence of racial injustice. Consequently, the question arises, “Where is the voice of the church on the matter of racial reconciliation?” The American church’s voice has been heard but not always informed by the gospel as it relates to Christian social engagement.

Some have interpreted the issue of racism as merely a social issue. Christian minister and civil rights activist John Perkins stated, “For too long, many in the Church argued that unity in the body of Christ across ethnic and class lines is a separate issue from the gospel. There has been the suggestion that we can be reconciled to God without being reconciled to our brothers and sisters in Christ.”² Others who profess Jesus as Lord complied and assimilated into a culture of racial segregation and or racism rather than applying a biblical reconciliation to the race problem. This cultural adaptation to racial prejudices even found its way into the lives of some of the most notable revivalists, including George Whitefield, Jonathan

¹The use of the phrase, “Black Lives Matter,” refers to the sentiment, not the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation.

²John Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 33.

*Carl Bradford serves as assistant professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Edwards, and Charles Finney.³

By contrast, Tony Evans offers these thoughts on the problem of racism: “Once you admit that racism is a sin problem, you are obligated as a believer to deal with it right away. As long as the issue of race is social and not spiritual, it will never be dealt with in any ultimate sense.”⁴ Thus, given the unresolved reconciliation regarding racism and racial segregation, evidence suggests that Christians have failed to realize the influence of the Christian message, the gospel, has on the issue. How should Christians approach the issue of race? Is racial reconciliation a gospel issue? How does the gospel influence racial reconciliation? This article will investigate biblically the concept of race, ethnicity, and the gospel to determine whether or not the gospel addresses racial reconciliation, and if so, how it should be addressed in our day.

I. ONE IMAGE AND ONE RACE

In a world permeated by depression and the pursuit of identity and affirmation, the biblical doctrine of humankind provides pivotal insight into God’s creation. Consequently, any biblical investigation involving the worth of human beings is obliged to examine the concept of the *imago Dei*. What does it mean to affirm the creation of an individual in the image of God?

Genesis 1:27 announces the creation of man in God’s likeness: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”⁵ Historically, the “image of God” has been interpreted in various ways. One view considers the phrase to refer to particular characteristics of God held by the created man. The attributes may be either physical or psychological. A second view does not emphasize an intrinsic attribute, but rather

³Mark Galli, “Slaveholding Evangelist: Whitefield’s Troubling Mix of Views,” *Christian History* 38 (1993); Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); and Roger Joseph Green, “Charles Grandison Finney: The Social Implications of His Ministry,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 48, no. 2 (Fall 1993), 17. Of the three mentioned, Charles Finney is the only one who did not own slaves. However, he did believe in the segregation of blacks and whites. Although Finney granted membership of blacks to the Broadway Tabernacle, they were segregated to a reserved place at the side of the sanctuary and could not vote or hold offices.

⁴Tony Evans, “Not a Skin Problem, But a Sin Problem,” *The Urban Alternative Blog*, <https://tonyevans.org/not-a-skin-problem-but-a-sin-problem/>.

⁵All Scripture passages are from the Christian Standard Bible or my own translation.

the experience of a relationship between God and man. A third position regards the image of God as a function shared with the human from God.⁶

Two words help in the understanding of the phrase “image of God.” These words are *tselem* (image) and *demuth* (likeness). The Hebrew word *tselem* appears approximately fifteen times in the Bible. Seven times the word describes images of idols (Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17; Ezek 7:20; 16:17; 23:14; and Amos 5:26). Once in 1 Samuel 6:5, the word references images of tumors and mice that the Lord sent upon the people. Another time in Genesis 5:3, the reference is describing the resemblance of man in another person.⁷ The verse employs the same nouns used in Genesis 1:26–27, although the nouns and the prepositions used with each are in reverse order as compared to Genesis 1:26. This construction suggests that how a son resembles his father is, in some sense, analogous to how the human is like God. Last and most specific to the topic of human worth, the word occurs twice as the “image of God” in the previously mentioned verses, Genesis 1:26 and 27.⁸ Thus, *tselem* conveys the idea of representation of an image similar to the cast of a shadow.

Victor Hamilton provides further insight into the meaning of the phrase. He states, “It is well known that in both Egyptian and Mesopotamian societies the king, or some high-ranking official, might be called ‘the image of God.’... In God’s eyes, all mankind is royal. All humanity is related to God, not just a king. Specially, the Bible democratizes the royalistic and exclusivistic concepts of the nations that surrounded Israel.”⁹ Hamilton explains that all humans are God’s most cherished creations.

Additionally, the Greek equivalent, *eikōn*, is found twenty-three times in the NT (Matt 22:20; Mark 12:16; Luke 20:24; Rom 1:23; 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7; 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Col 1:15; 3:30; Heb 10:1; Rev 13:15; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; and 20:4). The word carries the meaning of an artistic representation, an impress of a coin, or

⁶Erickson refers to the three views of the “image of God” as substantive, relational, and functional. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 517–36.

⁷F. J. Stendebach, “צֶלֶם,” *TDOT* 12:390–93.

⁸Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 166–67.

⁹Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 135.

the image of a god.¹⁰

The second word demuth appears much more than its counterpart, tselem. It occurs approximately twenty-five times throughout the OT (Gen 1:26; 5:1, 3; 2 Kgs 16:10; 2 Chr 4:3; Ps 13:4; Isa 13:4; 40:18, Ezek 1:5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 28; 8:2; 10:1, 10, 21, 22; 23:15; and Dan 10:16). In each of the occurrences, the word describes the similitude, model, or shape of an object.¹¹ Similarly to “image,” “likeness” emphasizes the representation of a thing. However, in the case of “likeness,” it does not always reference the exact representation.¹²

The meaning of both words, “image” and “likeness,” refer to a representation of something. Furthermore, the second word, “likeness,” suggests that the “image” of Genesis 1:26 and 27 is not an exact representation. “Likeness,” therefore, functions as a supporting term to signify something less than the object. Thus, man is not God but bears some representation of him.

A survey of the two words offers three vital conclusions of mankind’s worth before God, and among creation. First, whatever the specific interpretation of the two phrases is, the previous study of both words yields the idea of the representation of the divine in the earth. No other creature did God create in his image. God, having made man in his image, distinguishes humans as the only image bearers, representations of God himself. Second, the first humans, male and female, bore the image of God and passed it to others. Genesis 5:1–3 states, “When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them ‘Mankind’ when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.” Genesis 5:3 highlights the fact that the transferal of “likeness” is thought of in a physical sense. Last, Genesis 5:3 suggests that the image of God did not become lost

¹⁰Hermann Kleinknecht, “εἰκὼν,” *TDNT* 2:388–89.

¹¹“דְּמוּת,” *HALOT* 1:226.

¹²Grudem observes at least four examples of likeness referencing a similar fashion rather than an exact representation. He writes, “King Ahaz’s model or drawing of the altar he saw in Damascus is called a “likeness” (2 Kings 16:10), as are the figures of bulls beneath the bronze altar (2 Chron. 4:3–4). And the wall paintings of Babylonian chariot officers (Ezek. 23:15). In Ps. 58:4, the venom of the wicked is a “likeness” of the venom of a snake: here the idea is that they are very similar in their characteristics, but there is no thought of an actual representation of substitution.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 443.

regardless of the effects of humanity's fall in chapter 3. Additionally, support exists in Genesis 9:6's use of "likeness" prohibiting murder due to the divine resemblance that man still possesses. Thus, murder is not only a crime against humanity but also a violation of God's glory, his image. James confirms the unlost image of God in man as he references the power of the tongue (3:9). He states: "With it, we bless our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God." Regarding the passage, Liefeld and Pao write, "The worth of other human beings, formed in the image of God, demands a carefulness in the speech used to address them."¹³ As humans relate to one another, God expects their actions to be void of ill intent.

Thus, the "image of God" in man at the fundamental level means that man's very existence displays the glory of the Creator. This image of God signifies the presence of the singularity of the race, which God established at creation and still exists among all men today. God created man, Adam, in resemblance of his divine DNA, and the same passed on to every man since. The apostle Paul confirms the fact to the men of Athens as he testifies to the nature of God in Acts 17:26, "From one man he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth." Furthermore, Scripture does not indicate that God created another race besides Adam and Eve, the human race. Thus, biblically, all men bear one image and exist as one race.

II. ETHNICITIES AND THE INFLUENCE OF SIN

1. One people. Genesis 11 records the beginnings of diversity among the people of the earth. Essentially, God restarts the world. However, this time the world involves the existence of sin at the onset. Again, one common group exists just as in Genesis 1. Consequently, verse 1 records the people sharing "the same language and the same words." The narrative continues,

As people migrated from the east, they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make oven-fired bricks." (They used brick for stone and asphalt for mortar.) And they

¹³Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, "Luke," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 10, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 247.

said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let’s make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth” (Genesis 11:2-4).

According to verses 3–4, the people set out to build an edifice that is majestic and monumental. These verses convey the motivation of the group’s human project. The unified people group expressed their desires in the following way, “Let’s make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth.” The people of the earth decided to bring glory to themselves rather than to God. Furthermore, they constructed a plan of security among each other rather than relying upon God.¹⁴

2. The sin of racism. If asked to name a list of sins, some Christians, particularly in America, may offer a list of the following: abortion, murder, adultery, stealing, lying, illegal use of drugs, etc. Towards the end of the listing, or perhaps not even mentioned, would be the sin of racism and racial prejudice. The previous statement is not an attempt to propose that “racism” should be understood as a more egregious sin compared to the others. Neither, does the statement suggest an articulation of “racism” every time the subject of sin arises. Rather, the statement simply suggests that racism is a sin, not a blind spot, or just a moral shortcoming as some have suggested. Why should Christians understand racism as sin?

The term “racism” is a learned dogma in which one ethnic person or group claims or assumes superiority over another. The acceptance of the belief emphasizes cultural, intellectual, physical, and/or social-economic differences among the groups. Over time, the prejudice of the perceived superior group most often manifests itself through discriminatory attitudes and practices.¹⁵

Theologically and biblically, racism is a sin for multiple reasons. Racism is a sin because it contradicts the nature of God. Prejudice which has its root in racism distorts a person’s view of God. Individuals misunderstand God to prefer or care for one person or group over another. The apostle Peter came to terms with this erroneous view of

¹⁴Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapter 1–17*, 352–53.

¹⁵C. D. McConnell, “Racism” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 978.

God due to his prejudices observed in Acts 10:1–34. However, Peter eventually concluded, “Now I truly understand that God doesn’t show favoritism, but in every nation the person who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34–35). Thus, rather than understanding God as just and holy, Christians who condone or practice racism convey him as prejudiced and partial.

3. Racism is a sin because it persuades the practitioner to replace God. In essence, racism involves a person declaring that he or she knows better than God or has the authority to act as God without his permission. The disobedience of Adam and Eve demonstrates the previous statement. The account of the fall in Genesis 3:4–5 records that the couple acts apart from God, thus usurping the commandment of God. The author of Genesis alerts us to this posture in Satan’s words, “No! You will certainly not die. In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” The serpent convinces the couple that God does not have their best interest in mind. Rather than heed the divine wisdom of their Creator, the pair acted as a god.

4. Racism is a sin because it violates the image-bearer of God. As mentioned previously, one reason the Bible prohibits murder is because of the divine resemblance that man bears of God (Genesis 9:6). In a similar fashion to murder, racism is a crime against God’s glory and a violation of those that bear his image. God commands individuals to love others, not to violate them. In Matthew 22:37–40, Jesus sums up all the laws of God into two: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.” According to Jesus, the motivation for keeping all God’s commandments is love. Furthermore, Jesus affirms the two objects of a believer’s love: God and man.

Consequently, the wickedness of racism can no longer pass for something other than an atrocity to mankind. The ill of racism sets itself against the creation and nature of God. Thus, racism is an affront to all that it means to be a Christian, one who loves God and loves the people whom God created.

III. THE GOSPEL AND BIBLICAL TEACHING OF ITS EFFECTS ON RACISM

What is the relationship between the gospel and racial reconciliation? More precisely, what is the meaning of a prejudiced society and its relationship to the creation of the new person in Christ? The previous questions receive an answer by examining the meaning of the gospel and a survey of biblical teachings regarding racism.

1. The gospel. Gospel is the English equivalent of the Greek term *euangelion*, meaning “good news.” The term occurs approximately seventy-six times in the NT. The word carries the idea of glad tidings regarding a coming kingdom and its king, Jesus Christ. Additionally, the term refers to the good news of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ regarding salvation. For the apostle Paul, the previous statement is the heart of the gospel. The Pauline writings utilize the term approximately sixty times.¹⁶ Notably, in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Paul sets forth an explicit gospel message,

Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel they received. He explains that the *euangelion* is the same message he had declared to them previously as he lived with them for approximately eighteen months. He establishes the fact that the message he intends to explain is nothing new, nor is it progressive. For Paul, only one gospel exists (Gal 1:6). Additionally, he highlights the act of their faith in that they received the *euangelion* he preached and were saved by it. He assures his hearers of salvation which results from belief in the gospel message.¹⁷ The previous statement is important because some have

¹⁶Friedrich Büchsel, “εὐαγγέλιον,” *TDNT* 2:727–35.

¹⁷Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* 11, ed. Tremper

redefined how an individual becomes saved. However, in Ephesians 2:8–10, the apostle establishes that individuals receive salvation by grace through faith, and then good works follow as a result of being created in Christ.

In Paul's lucid explanation in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, regarding the gospel, he outlines the pivotal tenets of his conceptualization regarding the good news. First, he declares that "Christ died for sins." Paul's use of *hyper* (for) demonstrates the necessary act of Christ's death for the sins of the world.¹⁸ Thus, the gospel is Christ dying instead of us. He died in our place, as a substitute, to atone for the world's sins and allow men to enter into a right relationship with the holy God. Furthermore, the phrase functions as a support to the witness of the OT.¹⁹

Second, Jesus "was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection are central to the good news. Jesus's burial and resurrection not only confirm his death but also highlight the authority he has to pick his life up after experiencing death, namely he is Lord (John 10:18). Additionally, Paul states, Jesus was *egēgertai* (raised) in the passive voice, signifying the divine power of the Father, that God was at work in raising the Son back to life.²⁰

In Ephesians 2:10, Paul demonstrates that the gospel not only saves an individual from sin but also saves him or her for something (works of Christ) and to Christ. Paul states: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do." The apostle's use of *poiēma* (workmanship) in verse 10 is not emphasizing a result of effort or labor. The use of *poiēma* underscores God's intention for those he has saved to live according to 4:1–6:20.²¹ For Paul, Christianity did not consist of solely performing good deeds. He understands that the works performed are a result of being created in the person of Christ. In other words, Christ is at work in us, and Christians are God's

Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 391.

¹⁸"ὕπερ," BDAG 1030.

¹⁹Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 373.

²⁰Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985), 198.

²¹Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 146.

work in progress. The preposition *epi* serves as a marker of purpose, goal, result to or for something.²² Thus, in this passage, the goal of Christians is to walk in the “good works” God purposed at creation.

In Jesus’s death, burial, and resurrection is found the power to wipe away the sins of the whole world for all time, past, present, and future. Additionally, salvation calls us to live out the effects of the gospel through the “works of Spirit” (Gal 5:22–23).

2. Jesus’s teaching on ethnic prejudice. For individuals to reconcile with others, they must first love them, and if believers seek to love them, believers must first love God. Scripture has made us aware of the prejudices and enmity which exist between the Jews and Samaritans. Consequently, Jews avoided any interaction with Samaritans. In John 4, we observe the extent of the hatred between the two ethnicities. Having left Judea for Galilee, Jesus “had to travel through Samaria” (4:4) because of the divine cross-cultural appointment that awaited him. Jesus, weary from his journey and sitting by a well, asked for a drink of water from a Samaritan woman (4:6–7). Taken by surprise that Jesus would engage her, the woman replied, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (4:9). Due to the enmity between the two groups, the woman could not fathom Jesus asking her for water, not to mention him placing his Jewish lips on her Samaritan water jug. Noteworthy is the fact that Jesus does not engage in a theological debate regarding the two ethnicities and their religion. Rather, he reveals himself to her. The encounter ultimately led to this conclusion in verse 29: “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”

IV. THE DEMONSTRATION OF A BELIEVER’S LOVE (LUKE 10:25–37)

On another occasion, Jesus’s use of a parable demonstrates the kind of love expected from those who profess to love God. Similar to the previous example, the story involves a Jewish lawyer who holds disdain for another ethnicity. Noteworthy is the genesis of the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer. The religious lawyer asked, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25). The question highlights that the proceeding interaction regards a gospel

²²“ἐπί,” BDAG 366.

issue. Afterward, the remainder of the encounter proceeds in this way:

“What is written in the Law?” he asked him. “How does it read to you?” And he answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and “your neighbor as yourself.” “You’ve answered correctly,” he told him. “Do this and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:28–29).

Next, Jesus, through the use of the famous parable of the “The Good Samaritan,” answered the questions for the lawyer. Furthermore, he answered his first questions as well, demonstrating how those with eternal life behave. He explained that a Priest and Levite both neglected to demonstrate love to an unidentified, beaten, half-dead man in the road. By contrast, a Samaritan (one whom the Jewish man would have hated) demonstrated a love that is characteristic of a believer, one who has eternal life.

Jesus concluded the lesson on love by asking the lawyer, “Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The Jewish lawyer, unwilling to set aside his prejudice even for the sake of demonstrating the love he supposedly had for God, could only answer, “The one who...,” rather than “The Samaritan...” (10:36). Jesus revealed the heart of this Jewish man despite the man’s knowledge and claim as a believer.

Additionally, he demonstrated the love of a Christian in at least three ways from this parable. First, a believer’s love manifests itself by unification, not separation. The Samaritan does more than observe the unidentified man; he ministered to the man’s needs. He did not worry about blood or whether the robbers were lurking around. He touches him, uniting with him rather than separating himself like the Priest and Levite. Second, a believer’s love manifests itself by integration, not racial discrimination. Regardless of the ethnic makeup of the beaten man, the Samaritan commits himself to help the man. A believer’s love manifests itself by godliness, not sinfulness. The man’s deeds demonstrating eternal life should resemble the compassion of God, rather than the prejudice of men. In Jesus’s

teaching, he demonstrates a relationship between belief in the gospel and living out the gospel's effects.

In the same vein as Jesus, the apostle Paul addresses the hostility and enmity between the Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2. In verse 14, we observe the Jews' disdain for the Gentiles motivated them to construct a separation even during worship. Paul wrote of the wall of separation, the former condition, and their current condition:

So, then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death (Eph 2:11–16).

Paul calls the Gentile audience back to remember their former condition before having been created in Christ Jesus. The apostle highlights the previous statement by the use of “therefore.” He explains to them that they were not only separated from the Jewish group but also from God. Paul reveals racial (ethnic) profiling through the use of the derogatory term “uncircumcision.” It is noteworthy that Paul does not let the Jews off the hook. Although Paul does not ethnically profile the Jews, they are understood to be outside the salvific grace of God by his statement, “so-called circumcision.”²³

In verses 13–16, Paul argues that Jesus's death has brought Gentiles into the family of God. Furthermore, he declares that Jesus's establishment of peace brought an end to ethnic prejudice between the

²³Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 134–36.

Jews and Gentiles. Thus, Christ's death on the cross permanently destroyed the wall between Jews and Gentiles. Klein writes, "The barrier was destroyed. In contrast to ethnic Israel—all descended from Abraham—the body of Christ is not ethnically or racially delimited. It has no Jewish boundary markers that demarcate the insiders from the outsiders."²⁴ Consequently, Jesus recreates two groups (Jews and Gentiles) into one new person. Concomitantly and chiefly, Jesus's death reconciles them both to God.

In the following verses of Ephesians 2, Paul expresses that Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, have access through the same Spirit to the one God, the Father. After the work of reconciliation by God, no one Christian group has exclusive access to him. Paul expresses the active fitting of each group together into one holy temple. Thus, whatever ethnicity, Jesus has strategically and divinely placed them through his reconciliation at the cross, namely the elimination of enmity between all races and eradicating of hostility between man and God.

V. THE GOSPEL ADDRESSES RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Historically, Christianity has been summarized as the human response to God's love, namely the gospel, revealed in Jesus's life, death, burial, and resurrection. Additionally, for those who have begun to experience God's grace, the grand narrative of the Bible (Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration) shapes their understanding and appreciation of the extent and the effects of God's love. Thus, regarding all the previous investigations, this section will evaluate racism in light of the gospel and the Bible's grand narrative to determine whether the gospel addresses racial reconciliation and if so, how we should respond.

1. Creation contradicts racism. God, through his infinite wisdom, created a "good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and "very good" (Gen 1:31) world. The goodness of God's creation is highlighted by the use of the Hebrew word, *to*, which means pleasant, good, beneficial, and right.²⁵ The apex of God's creation, man, has been created for the demonstration of his glory. The prophet Isaiah attests to the

²⁴William W. Klein, "Ephesians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 12, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 76.

²⁵"בָּרָא," BDB 373–75.

previous statement as he records the Lord's words regarding the sons and daughters of the earth, "whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (Isa 43:7). Furthermore, the goodness of God's creation finds its expression in the absence of sin. Because sin does not exist, man enjoys intimacy and fellowship with both God and one another. Consequently, God and man walk in the coolness of the day together.

Additionally, at creation, the man was in harmony with God rather than separated from God. The Creator provided food from "any tree of the garden." Second, the Creator in Genesis 2:18 blessed the man with a companion just right for him: "Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.'" The man relied on the Creator for a purposeful life. God assigned the mankind to cultivate, populate, and rule the land, thus he stated, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth" (Gen 1:28).

Racism, like all sin, seeks to distort God's glory by establishing others as less than God's created image-bearing identity. Furthermore, racism makes others unworthy of certain God-given rights. The Bible demonstrates before man's choice to disobey that God's creation existed in fellowship with him, experienced intimacy with him, and sought to glorify him.

2. The fall is the cause of racism. Sin ties itself theologically to human civilization's fall in the Garden of Eden. Due to the fall of mankind, individuals found themselves at odds with one another. Whether Adam assigning blame to Eve (Gen 3:12) or Cain murdering Abel (Gen 3:8), the disease of sin had begun to reveal itself throughout creation. Prejudices and discrimination remained rampant throughout Jesus's day. The enmity between Jews and Gentiles was manifested in disputes regarding worship and human worth. Additionally, Hellenistic Jews experienced neglect at the hands of Hebraic Jews in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6). Likewise, today, the problem of prejudice exists and is pervasive, extending among all races and ethnicities.

Racism, along with all other sins, destroys the unity of creation. The oneness of creation, fractured by its fallen state, bears the marks of an estranged community where we become separated from God,

neighbor, nature, and our true selves. The fracturing of relations is a result of a corrupt heart resulting in enmity against God as seen in Scripture (Gen 6:5; Isa 29:13; Jer 17:9; Matt 15:19).²⁶ Acts of racism do not reflect God's intentions made known prior to the fall of creation. Furthermore, all humans need a transformation of the heart. Thus, Paul identifies that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

3. Redemption in Christ purges racism. The effects of humans receiving the gospel are three-fold: First, the gospel saves a person from something, racism (1 Cor 15:3–4). Second, the gospel saves a person for something, love towards others (Eph 2:10). Third, the gospel saves a person to someone, the Lord Jesus, who despises the pride of racism (Eph 2:10). In the person of Jesus Christ, we are continually being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

The Christian gospel exists because of sin. Sin first reared its head in the third chapter of Genesis, and since then, manifests itself in many ways, racism among them. At the same time, God prophesies of the forthcoming solution, the gospel: "And I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He will strike your head, and you will bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15). The sin of racism and its evil ideology of hate and prejudice can never be put to death nor will the agents of it receive forgiveness without placing faith in the finished work of Jesus.

Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are to be characteristic of followers of Christ. The effects of the gospel reveal the Christian's love for his or her neighbors, regardless of their cultural, physical, or intellectual differences. The sanctifying power of Christ enables believers to denounce racism in all its forms because they are in Christ and Christ is in them. They victoriously proclaim: "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). The gospel saves a person from the sin of racism to something and someone. Thus, the church stands armed with the gospel of Jesus Christ, equipped to respond to the sin of racism. Believers are called to the work of reconciliation.

²⁶John Kinney, "The Theology of Fallenness: The Roots of Racism" in *Baptists against Racism: The United Christ for Racial Reconciliation* (McLean, VA: The Baptist World Alliance, 1999), 14–22.

4. Restoration points toward ultimate racial reconciliation. Like every great story, the Bible's grand narrative is moving toward a goal. The destination is the restoration of a relationship. The apostle John saw at least two visions that give us hope for final racial reconciliation. John beholds the glorious reconciliation: "After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands" (Rev 7:9). The individuals are united together for one purpose with white robes that are free from the stain of racism and all other sins.

Additionally, and chiefly, he envisions a reconciliation of a relationship with God, the Father. John describes the reconciliation in this way: "Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away." (Rev 21:3). According to John, the misery which came from sin's distortion of God's purpose for creation will no longer exist. Thus, once again, humanity will be able to have intimacy with God and fellowship with others. Because of the nonexistence of sin, every individual will experience eternal bliss purposed in the Garden of Eden. Amen!

A WAY FORWARD

Given the current racially charged climate of our culture, Christians of all ethnicities have a long way to journey toward accomplishing true reconciliation. However, after examining specific arguments from Scripture, we see that the biblical gospel provides the means for racial reconciliation. With racism defined as contradictory to God's creation, a result of the fall, individuals will only find a reversal of racism by the redemption found in Christ. However, some Christians may still struggle to know what particular steps to take moving forward. I suggest the following points of application.

First, Christians must acknowledge at the onset that racism is sinful. Racism is more than a blind spot or a social ill; it is a sin against humanity and God. The Christian gospel and the effects

thereof allow no room for prejudice. Thus, regardless of where racism exists, Christians must repudiate every existence of the sin.

Second, Christians must understand the gospel exists as the only solution for the problem of racism. Reconciliation, whether with God or man, can only happen when both repentance and forgiveness take place. The practitioner of racism must seek repentance. In this, a person must come by way of Christ, placing faith in his finished work on the cross. Additionally, the one wronged must grant forgiveness, understanding that he or she also has been forgiven by God (Eph 4:32).

Finally, Christians must welcome those of different cultures and backgrounds into fellowship, personal, and institutional. Believers must seek to understand and appreciate differences. They must refuse to practice racial accommodation, which is a convenient arrangement of lesser compromise. Followers of Christ must desire Christ-centered reconciliation and allow themselves to be brought near by the blood of Christ, who breaks down enmity between the various ethnicities, so that God may make us all one again.

