

Race and the Gospel **Jan-term Sunday school, 2019**

SESSION 1 - A matter of the Gospel. A matter of the heart?

Introduction: Ephesians 2:11-22

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

"Today's church may no longer face the question of the integration of Jew and Gentile into a single family, though there are places where that is still a major issue. But we face, quite urgently, the question which Paul would insist on as a major priority. If our churches are still divided in any way along racial or cultural lines, he would say that our gospel, our very grasp of the meaning of Jesus' death, is called into question. How long will it be before those who claim to follow Jesus.....come to terms with the demands he actually makes?"¹

Assumptions: A matter of the Gospel

- God created all people in God's image, equally loved and cherished. God created all people to be in relationship with Him, with each other, and with

¹ NT Wright, *Paul: The Prison Letters*, 27-28

creation. A Biblical word to describe this wholeness/flourishing/peace is shalom.

- The fall has left God's shalom shattered and ripped apart our relationships with God, with one another, and with creation. This includes enmity and distrust between people and groups of people. This enmity and distrust is human-made, a result of our sin. All prejudice and racism is sin, plain and simple. This is understood both individually and corporately/systematically
- The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, God has made a way for shalom to be restored between people and God, and between people, and with creation.
- One day, God will complete the restoration of shalom, begun and centered in Jesus, and when that day come, all nations, tribes, and tongues will bow before him as one humanity.
- In the meantime, God has called us to be a part of this shalom (justice, reconciliation) work in the present. AKA: It is our problem.

Uncommon decency: guidelines for discussion

Ephesians 4:1-3 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

- **We are all Image bearers:** the person standing in front of you is valuable to God.
- **We have the same goal:** to honor Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and help others, in all ways we can, do the same.
- **Decency doesn't negate conviction:** reread Ephesians 4:1-3. The call to live lives worthy of the gospel (conviction) and to be humble, gentle, and patient with one another (civility)

- **Ask and discuss in freedom:** there should be no fear in asking questions and discussing. Asking the question doesn't imply consent or heresy. We can safely assume that we are all learning and growing.

Understanding Systemic Racism - Tim Keller

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhJjCTKTVGo&feature=youtu.be>

Your notes here:

Working vocabulary

- **Prejudice:** set of personal feelings and/or preferences for particular things/people/groups.
- **Discrimination:** when a person acts on prejudice in a way that excludes people.
- **Racism:** structure of power that enacts discriminatory laws and practices based on prejudices.
- **Reconciliation:** "The ongoing spiritual process that involves forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and broken systems to reflect God's original intention for all creation to flourish."²

² Rev. Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil. From "The New Activist" podcast, December 6, 2018

Discussion Questions

We likely won't have time in class (at least Sessions 1 and 2) to discuss much of the material we will cover. But we highly encourage you to verbally process with someone else - a friend, your small group, etc. Here are suggested discussion questions:

- What is your reaction to NT Wright's quote?
- What parts of Keller's talk stand out to you?
- Do you agree, disagree, or partially agree/disagree with Keller's assessment that we need to understand evil and racism as corporate/systemic?
- Assuming that racism is systemic, and not simply a matter of an individual's heart, what implications does that have for us as people called to participate in God's redemption work?
- What questions are you left with?
- Finally, consider engaging in the scripture studies on the next page and share your thoughts together.

Reading/Listening List

- *A Vision of Biblical Justice* by Terry McGonigal. <https://vimeo.com/293749950>
Summary: This 35 minute video is not specifically about race. It does, however, lay the foundation for an understanding of Biblical justice as unfolded in Scripture. Biblical justice is part of the gospel foundation we must understand and be shaped by if we are to understand God's call to reconciliation.
- *White Awake* by Daniel Hill. Available for
- *The Myth of Equality* by Ken Wystma
- Rev. Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil <https://www.saltermcneil.com/> Multiple books, podcasts, and other materials about racial justice and reconciliation.
- *Dear White Christian* by Jennifer Harvey

Scripture study

1. **EPHESIANS 2:11-22** (keep in mind that all the references to “you” are plural - y’all! Paul is talking to the church community)
 - “For He Himself is our peace.” This is a profound statement. In your own words, what does this mean?
 - What was Christ’s purpose in destroying the barrier(s) between people (vs. 15-16)?
 - Verses 19-22 describe the church, which includes the *one* people of God, made one in Jesus Christ. What do these verse say about the church?
 - After reading Ephesians 2, what does the church lack and how does it suffer, when we hold onto human barriers of division within the church community?
 - Quite obviously, believers haven’t lived into our new humanity as one in Christ. Divisions still exist. We are not reconciled. Why do you think this is the case?
 - If you have been listening to any of the current discussion about race relations in our country and in the church, you may have heard that the term reconciliation has fallen on hard time (vs. 16). Some ask how races can be re-conciled, if we were never conciliatory in the first place. Rev. Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil encourages us not to give up this Biblical word, but to understand it’s theological heft. She defines reconciliation as:

“The ongoing spiritual process that involves forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and broken systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.”³

- What are your thoughts or questions about that definition of reconciliation?

³ Rev. Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil. From “The New Activist” podcast, December 6, 2018

2. GALATIANS 2

- In this passage, Paul describes how racism (against the Gentiles) infiltrated the church. In particular, he calls Peter (Cephas) to account. Why does Paul oppose Peter?
- What is interesting in this passage is that Peter had probably been preaching the gospel and following Jesus for 20 years. What does this tell you about our journey to follow Jesus?
- None of us is yet perfect in the Lord. We are all learning to be like Jesus and follow Jesus' ways through the power of the Spirit. Ask the Spirit to gently reveal, both now and in the weeks/years to come, the places in which your life - your inner thoughts, beliefs, and action/inaction - are not in alignment with the gospel, especially when it comes to race/ethnicity. Remember, your worth does not come from having it all figured out on your own or getting it "right" from the start. Our worth comes in knowing that we are sinners in need of a loving Savior, and that we have one in Jesus Christ.

3. Read the passages noted by Tim Keller. What are your reactions and questions to the communal nature of these passages?

- Joshua 7
- Daniel 9
- Romans 5