

What Did Jesus Say About Racism?

"Everyone's a racist in their own way. Everyone, whether they admit it or not, is racist. People may not realize this, but due to stereotypes, bias, and where someone may have grown up, they may feel a discomfort or distrust towards other people of a different race or background." (1)

Dominique Peranich, the author of this statement, captured the common belief prevalent today. Those who agree with Dominique see racism in every segment of society. Nothing escapes its influence:

- education;
- employment;
- earnings;
- advancement;
- laws, rules, and rulings;
- religion; and
- politics, just to name a few aspects of life.

In fact, many people now accept it as undeniable. They point to instances in their own lives and the lives of family and friends where they believe racism brought mistreatment to them. Even a minimal attention to current news media provides abundant evidence of the accusations of racism.

Politicians consult among themselves and propose steps to remove its presence and influence in our culture. New laws and sanctions arise from their deliberations that they believe will fix the problem. Because of the heightened awareness of this issue, the courts examine their rulings diligently to remove even the hint of racism. Employers reexamine their policies to exclude it from their businesses. Schools at all levels attack it with vengeance to preclude its presence in their curricula, classrooms, and corridors.

Even religious leaders propose actions to erase its claimed presence and

effects within the Christian community. They demand that a new awareness of the potential of racism among Christians must lead to a reevaluation of the churches' programs and policies to root out any vestige of racism.

To come to grips properly and effectively with these challenges within the Christian community requires an examination of the Biblical instruction on this important and potentially divisive issue. Does the Bible address it? Where does it arise? Who in the Bible speaks to the issue of racism? What does the Bible say about it? Even more specifically did Jesus address it? If so, what did he say?

Since there is nothing new under the sun, you can expect that the Bible does in fact tackle racism. The culture in which Jesus lived on earth practiced severe racism. The Jews hated the Romans who enslaved and ruled over them. The Jews revulsion for the Samaritans caused a separation between them geographically. In fact, no Jewish person would travel through Samaria to Galilee in the north, even though it provided the shortest route. This separation also meant that the Jews did not communicate with Samaritans. Further, the Jews of Christ's day despised non-Jews, the Gentiles.

I hope that it doesn't surprise you that Jesus himself addressed racism with his disciples and countrymen numerous times which the scriptures confirm. His commentary against it included direct statements as well as behavior which exemplified his attitude towards this ungodly behavior.

What Did Jesus Say About Racism?

John 3.1-21

One time, Jesus met with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, at midnight. During this conversation, Jesus explained the way a sinner becomes a child of God: the unique work of the Holy Spirit imparts a new birth to someone. (2) As the discussion continued, Jesus identified himself as the Son of God, and his mission from God in one of the most well-known verses in the Bible, John 3.16:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that

whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Notice the all-inclusive word "whosoever." This word discriminated against no one: neither race, age, gender, or status. Jesus declared to Nicodemus that anyone and everyone who believed upon Christ inherited eternal life from God. In fact, Jesus frequently used the terms "every, all, whosoever, everyone," etc. (too numerous to list) in his messages and ministry that revealed the absence of racism in him. He proclaimed a message devoid of it.

John 4.1-43

Here, the Apostle John recorded Christ's interaction with the Samaritans, people whom the Jews hated. According to *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, the Samaritans comprised a mixed people: Jews who inhabited the northern kingdom of Israel and Babylonians moved there by the King of Babylon after he conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. He moved some of his own people there after his victory to help repopulate the territory that he captured. Some of the Jews intermarried with the Babylonians. The Samaritans believed that they were the true children of Abraham and the inheritors and protectors of God's Law. Perhaps this brief description gives you enough information on why the Jews hated the Samaritans. (3) In fact, as the story unfolds, it reveals the disinterest of Christ's disciples in his dialogue with a Samaritan woman. (4)

Jesus wanted to return to Galilee in the north from Jerusalem in the south with Samaria in between them. The typical route for Jews circled around Samaria to reach Galilee. However, in the providence and foreknowledge of Jesus, he needed to travel through Samaria to meet with a Samaritan woman. His route took him not in the common circular route around Samaria but into the territory of Samaria to a well outside the city of Samaria in Samaria.

As Jesus knew before hand, on this day, a woman came from the city to draw water from a well outside the city. Using the proximity of the well and her desire for physical water, Jesus spoke to her of the living water

that he could give to her.

In his dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus spoke of living water, i.e., salvation, that he gave to those who asked, even a Samaritan woman. (5)

When Jesus met with this woman, he broke Jewish racism towards the Samaritans plus he met with a woman, another unacceptable behavior of the Jews. Christ's behavior startled the woman who wondered how a Jew like him would speak with her since the Jews did not have any dealings with Samaritans, let alone a woman. (6)

As a result of his meeting with her, she returned to the city and brought many other Samaritans to meet with Jesus. Many of them came to faith in Christ because he refused to follow the racist patterns of the Jews.

Although Jesus did not speak directly against racism in this episode, his attitude and behavior showed his anti-racist beliefs. Jesus extended his loving offer of salvation to the Samaritans, a people whom the Jews treated with racial hatred.

Matthew 15.21-28

In this text, Jesus visited a non-Jewish territory, Tyre and Sidon, cities north of Galilee. A Canaanite woman came to Jesus on behalf of her daughter and pleaded with Christ to cast out the devil that afflicted her child. At first, Jesus did not respond to her pleas. After some time, Jesus told her that he was sent to Israel, a short mention of his primary ministry to reveal the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of his coming as their promised Messiah, King, and Savior.

Not deterred, she continued her pleas. Jesus replied that he should not give to dogs (household pets not vicious mongrels) what God intended for the Jews. This statement reflected the often-racist statement of the Jews toward Gentiles, which some of Christ's detractors emphasized. But obviously Jesus did not mean it in that fashion, or else he would have departed from the woman and left her pleas unanswered.

He said it to test the woman to reveal her faith and humility that he knew existed in her. Undeterred, the woman replied that the dogs, little

household pets, do eat crumbs from the masters' table, a reflection of her humbling and trusting attitude toward Christ. Jesus praised her faith and healed the woman's daughter.

As Dr. John MacArthur points out, Jesus defied the Jewish racial attitude toward Gentiles. What at first appeared to reveal a racial epithet he meant to test the woman's faith and revealed a humility and trust absent in even his disciples who asked Jesus to send her away. (7) He rejected their racially motivated advice and responded in love for this Gentile woman. This story reveals another example of Christ's nonracial attitude and behavior.

Other Examples

The Gospels include numerous examples of Christ's nonracial outlook and defiance of any racial pattern. For example:

- **John 10.16:** Christ mentioned "other sheep," a reference to ethnics other than Jews whom he would save.
- **Matthew 25.31-46:** Jesus included strangers, non-Jewish residents in Israel who submitted to Israel's laws, among those whom he declared as his sheep.
- **Luke 10.25-37:** This story describes the good Samaritan. Jesus told it to describe love for a neighbor. Interestingly it involved a Samaritan who showed love and compassion upon a helpless, beaten man.
- **John 17.9, 20, 24:** In Christ's prayer before his crucifixion, he prayed not only for his immediate disciples but also for those who would believe on him because of their ministry which would include people from every tribe and nation.
- **Matthew 28.19-20, Mark 16.15-16, Luke 24.46-47, Acts 1.8:** These verses quote Jesus' last commands to his disciples to proclaim the gospel to every nation throughout the whole earth, a clear statement of Christ's nonracist provision and inclusion for sinners of every tribe, nation, ethnicity, color, creed, and status, all who believe upon him.

Clearly, Jesus rejected all racial practices of his era during his

ministry on earth. His last commands to his disciples demonstrated his complete inclusion of all people in his provision of eternal life for all who believe in him, without exception.

Why Did Jesus Provide These Illustrations For His Disciples?

What purpose did they serve? Jesus wanted his disciples, the Jews, and the Gentiles, to know that he fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah, the King and his kingdom as foretold, and that his Messiahship and kingdom included all people who believe in him, not just the Jews.

Second, Jesus wanted everyone to know that his death, burial, and resurrection redeemed sinners from every ethnicity, proving his love for them. Jesus commanded his disciples to broadcast the gospel to all nations without exception, teaching them his commands and making them disciples. Christ's redemption, given to everyone who believes in him, reconciled them to God and making them members of his kingdom.

Third, Jesus used these opportunities to reject every racial attitude and barrier that the Jews established. In these instances, he spurned the beliefs of his day, even those of his close disciples. He wanted people to know that he saw only two groups of people, believers and unbelievers, not racial divisions.

Although these examples show only Christ's nonracist attitude, they also show his love for sinners of every kind. He used these opportunities to rebuke his disciples, countrymen, as well as Gentiles and showed that he tolerated no racial divisions or discords.

What Correlation Do These Stories Have For You And Me?

Sadly, the racial conditions which Jesus confronted look like our day. Everything true then is true today. Racial conflicts develop in virtually every segment of society: education, elections, and employment to name only a few of them. White, black, Asian, Hispanic, Native American -people of all ethnics and cultures - battle one another.

Preferential treatment of one ethnic person or group over another one sets the offended person or persons into a retort against the offender. These conflicts arise within Christian congregations, too. In fact, this very issue, racial animosities, rises to the top of problems facing Christians today.

For Christians and Christian congregations to respond Biblically to this condition, we must learn from Jesus how to live with people of other ethnicities and how to treat them in a nonracist manner. He provides a clear example for us to emulate.

- Jesus identified only two groups of people: believers and unbelievers. He declared that the salvation, redemption, and reconciliation to God that he came to provide was for whosoever believed, without regard to nationality.
- He always rejected popular racial epithets.
- Jesus spurned the racial separations that one culture imposed upon another. He did not elevate one nation above another nor subjugate one below another.
- He taught us to love our neighbor, even the racially segregated and abused one.
- He offers abundant life to people in all nations as shown by his commands to Christians to spread the gospel of his kingdom throughout the whole world.

In terms of our day, he was completely anti-racist in the purist form. To fully follow Christ requires acknowledgement of our inability to love others and treat others as he did. Yet, Christians and their congregations must follow Christ's example and treat all people with Christ's love. We can obey his commands and follow his example only by the sufficient power of the Holy Spirit who indwells believers and enables us to conform to Christ.

What Implications Do These Truths Have Upon Our Lives Today?

For Believers

Our natural condition, due to the weakness of our sinful human natures, causes some believers to adopt racist attitudes. Therefore, we need divine intervention in our lives to enable us to obey and follow Christ's pattern. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit who would indwell his followers and who would guide them into the truth and enable them to obey him. (8)

The anti-racist Christ sets the pattern for Christians to obey and follow. The teaching of Christ on racism provides insight for those of us who trust Christ as lord and savior on how the Holy Spirit can use Christ's commands in our lives. Christ followers show their life changing transformations by obedience to God.

If you claim to follow Christ, how does your response to racial tensions follow that of Christ? Many leaders today declare that all believers are guilty of racism. In addition, they specify that people today must repent of the sin of racism their ancestors practiced. Both are false.

You stand alone before God, guilty or innocent of racism. You cannot repent for sins that you did not commit, nor on behalf of any other person. Nor does God require it of you in either instance.

Perhaps you have examined your life and committed yourself to follow Christ's example. That describes how you should live in this racially sensitive time. I urge you to continue to rely upon the Holy Spirit to enable you to consistently follow Christ and obey his command to love even the racially downcast.

However, if you claim allegiance to Christ and profess that you trust him as lord and savior, but adopt racial preferences against others, I call you to repentance. You cannot claim what you do not live in daily life. A true follower of Christ will practice anti-racist attitudes toward others as Jesus commanded. Confess your disobedience and selfishness, repent of it, and turn to Christ to experience his forgiveness. Begin to show love toward all ethnic people as Jesus demands.

Unbelievers

Perhaps you make no claim to salvation. You have never trusted Christ. You show no interest in God or his son Jesus. You live your life to

satisfy your selfish desires. You may even doubt the existence of God. Further, if he exists, you believe that he has no interest in you or your life.

The Holy Spirit can also use these examples from Christ's life on racism to unbelievers like you because it proves that the grace and mercy of God in Christ, as revealed in the gospel, extends to the worst of sinners, like you and me.

Hear God's word to you today. When God created Adam and Eve, he planned for them to honor and glorify him and to fill the earth with their progeny who would also honor and glorify God. Thus, they became the head of all humanity who would originate from them.

But Adam and Eve sinned when they disobeyed God and ate the fruit of the tree in the Garden In Eden that God forbade them to eat. Sin now defiled their natures. They looked at each other differently. Guilt replaced freedom. Fear overcame peace and joy. They knew that they disobeyed God and began to experience the consequences of their sins. Their sins separated them from fellowship with God creating a chasm between God and them, and they fled from his presence.

"The London Baptist Confession Of Faith Of 1689" explains it this way. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, by their sin fell from their original righteousness and communion with God and became separated from him. As heads of all humanity, Adam's sin and death came upon all people, including you and me. Thus sin wholly defiles all the faculties and parts of our souls, minds, and bodies. (9)

In other words, from conception we possess sinful natures and become enslaved to our sin which separates us from God with no desire for him. We have no longing to believe God, let alone worship him. Sin engulfs us into bondage to it and permeates our whole beings. In addition, our sin makes us helpless to remedy our condition.

Because of your sinful helplessness and lack of desire for God, you need divine intervention in your life to redeem you from your sin and bondage to evil, and to reconcile you to God.

Hear God's word to you. The gospel tells us that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to earth, born of a young virgin girl, to secure redemption for

sinners and to reconcile them back to God.

During His life on earth, Jesus obeyed every command and demand of God, living a perfect and sinless life. Though tempted in all ways like us, he resisted every time. Because of his sinless life, he could provide the perfect, complete sacrifice to God on behalf of the sins of others as their substitute. He lived a life that neither you nor I could live.

Major Ian Thomas said it this way:

"The life that He lived qualified Him for the death that He died."

When Christ shed his blood on the cross and died there, he offered himself to God as a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of sinners like you and me. He paid the penalty to God in full that people like us deserve to pay because of our sin. He died the death that we should die.

Our sin separates us from God and requires a suitable sacrifice to God to atone for them and to reconcile us back to himself. The sacrifice of Christ, which God accepted, fulfills that obligation in atonement for the sins of sinners like you and me.

Jesus commanded all people everywhere to repent and believe the gospel which calls us to believe:

- The virgin birth of Christ;
- the sinless life of Christ;
- the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross where he sacrificed his blood for sinners like you and me; and
- His resurrection to new life, victorious over sin and death, destroying the devil and all his evil works.

Jesus promised to accept everyone who comes to Him in faith, turning from their sin, self-reliance, and rebellion against God, to trust his sacrifice to God on their behalf. God promised to pardon and forgive all who come to him by faith in Christ, God's appointed substitutionary sacrifice to God for them.

Further, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to indwell those who

come to Him in faith. The indwelling Holy Spirit enables Christ followers to fulfill his commands.

As a young boy, I called upon Christ to be my savior. I have experienced Christ's transforming power by the Holy Spirit in my life and attest to its reality.

I ask the Holy Spirit to come to you today:

- to give you the new birth that will regenerate you, giving you new life from above;
- to give you the faith to turn from your sin, self-reliance, and rebellion against God;
- to give you the faith to trust Christ's provision for you in his life, death, and resurrection as fulfilled for you and that will reconcile you to God; and
- to come to you today and to indwell you as Christ promised, so that he will begin to form Christ's life in you.

I pray that this will become true for you today.

References

1. "The Race Card Project." Quoted at this online link on May 3, 2022: <https://theracecardproject.com/everyones-racist-in-their-own-way/>
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3. *Logos Bible Software*, v. 9.13.9.13.0.0018. "Smith's Bible Dictionary: Samar'itans."
4. John 4.27.
5. John 4.10-26.
6. John 4.9.
7. *Logos Bible Software*. "MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 15.21-28."
8. John 14.16-7, 26; 15.26-27; 16.1-15.
9. *The London Baptist Confession Of Faith Of 1689*, P. 17, #2.