

Christ-Centered Racial Reconciliation (and Christ-Exalting Diversity)

Working Questions: *What does it mean to engage in Christ-centered racial reconciliation? What does this have to do with the Gospel? And why is this such priority to Westover's mission and purpose as a church? Why not just preach the Gospel and steer clear of this issue?*

Consistent with the reconciling work of the Gospel is Westover's commitment to engage in the Gospel-work of Christ-centered racial reconciliation, and in doing so, better reflecting (as a church) the ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity of our surrounding community. The Scriptures make clear that all humankind is created in the image and likeness of God, which includes people of all ethnicities, and therefore holds equal value before God, and is to be treated with dignity.¹ As the reconciling people of God, we are compelled by the heavenly vision of a day when people of all ethnicities, who have been reconciled to God through faith in Christ, will be gathered together in perfect harmony to worship God forever and to be fully restored to God's good intent for creation before sin entered the world.² In the meantime, the Gospel-mission of the local church is to put into practice the message and ministry of reconciliation as Ambassadors of Christ, to be a called-out, Gospel-people who are active and living demonstration of how peace, healing and harmony can be experienced right here on earth. As we are faithful to the Gospel in the here-and-now, we get a partial glimpse of the future kingdom of God and what humanity will look like under the eternal and just reign of the kingship of Jesus.³

One of the specific ways we believe Ambassadors of Christ in the world today are called to engage in the ministry of reconciliation is through *Christ-centered racial reconciliation*. *Christ-centered* distinguishes the unique kind of racial reconciliation with which we are compelled to be engaged, for without Christ and the power of the Gospel, we believe there can be no substantive or lasting means of reconciliation and necessary reform. We also understand that the Gospel-mission of the church is one that in many ways is countercultural, 'peculiar'⁴, and will at times come into conflict with the ways and norms of the patterns of this world.⁵ Therefore, while racial reconciliation is term that can be broadly defined in culture, we must be clear that our approach to racial reconciliation is one compelled and informed by the Gospel and that seeks to bring glory to God through Christ-exalting diversity; hence the uniqueness of the term, *Christ-centered racial reconciliation*.

The power of the Gospel is demonstrated in the work of *Christ-centered racial reconciliation*, which includes confronting and **breaking down barriers** of hostility associated with the sins of racial and ethnic superiority/inferiority that have historically divided and dehumanized people created in the image of God. This also includes **building bridges** that bring people together under unity in Christ who would otherwise remain separated. When this happens, Christ is exalted; hence the imperative to grow in Christ-exalting diversity as a church body, which includes leadership and collaboration with other like-minded, Gospel-centered churches in our community.

Therefore, let us be clear: racism, in all its forms, is sin, which includes any form of ethnic inequality, prejudice, segregation, or any practice that contributes to ethnic and cultural superiority and inferiority, and therefore, runs contrary to the heart of God as demonstrated throughout the Scriptures, and in violation of the Gospel of Christ. Racism is unbiblical, a human construct born out of sin that has

¹ Genesis 1:26-27, 32; Psalm 8; 1 Timothy 2:3-6

² Revelation 7:9-10

³ Tim Keller

⁴ 1 Peter 2:9 King James Version

⁵ Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:5

contributed to dehumanization, division, distrust, and deep wounds across generations, resulting in systemic and institutional forms of inequality and injustice in our world.

Sadly, we confess that Christians and the Church bear responsibility, both presently and historically, for the confusion and complicity with which racism has been understood and rooted, extending to divides within the Christian faith, as is evident in the lack of diversity that exists across most American churches today in areas with diverse populations.

Among the innumerable forms of brokenness caused by sin, it is clear that sin causes separation – separation from God ⁶, separation from self ⁷, and separation from others.⁸ Sin distorts and disrupts the harmony that God intended to be enjoyed among image-bearers. However, the Gospel reconciles, breaking down barriers of hostility among humanity through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and therefore, creating one new humanity, one holy race, for His glory! ⁹

Key Verses: Genesis 1:27,31; Deuteronomy 24:17-18; Psalm 133; Malachi 2:10; Matthew 5:23-24, 28:19-20; Acts 10:34-36, 17:26; Romans 2:11; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Galatians 3:28, 5:13-15; Ephesians 2:14-22; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 7:9-10

⁶ Genesis 3:23; Romans 3:23; Colossians 1:21

⁷ Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:15-25

⁸ Genesis 4:1-12; Acts 15:36-41; Philippians 4:2-3; James 4:1-4

⁹ 1 Peter 2:9-10