

GOSPEL BLUEPRINTS: RACE RELATIONS, 10/24/21

We are attempting throughout this series to compare the worldview of modern secularism (the dominant worldview) with a Christian Worldview. Covering a variety of worldview topics- this week we are comparing Christian and secular worldviews on racial relations and solutions. Our goal is to be accurate in assessment, loving in our tone and healing in our approach.

What is racism? The suspicion, distrust or prejudice of individuals or groups of other ethnicities or skin colors usually accompanied by feelings of superiority. We tend to think of racism through the modern American lens of black and white primarily because of heinous and high-handed sin of slavery and its aftershocks of segregation, Jim Crow Laws, riots and the ongoing black/white tensions we have had in our country, but prejudice comes in all shapes and colors. In my neighborhood in NoVA we encountered prejudice against people of Hispanic heritage. When we were selling our house, one of my neighbors said to me “Just make sure you sell your house to ‘one of us’, we don’t want them taking over our neighborhood.” Not just modern, racism is a tale as old as time. We see it throughout Biblical history- Racism is the context of why the woman at the well asked Jesus, why he, being a Jew, would be speaking to her as a Samaritan woman? We go further back than that- Egyptians- saw themselves as descendants of the gods and enslaved the Jewish people. Racism is a human problem with deep roots.

There are two errors in responding to racism: minimization and the maximization. On one hand, there are those who would prefer to put their fingers in their ears and minimize, excuse, avoid, even deny racism. “We dealt with racism during the civil rights movement, it doesn’t exist anymore.” Or “I’m sure there are a few racist people out there but if we just stop talking about it, it would go away.” In some cases a denial or minimization of real problems that many people of color experience today such as policy, or a lack of compassion and willingness to listen. In many cases minimization is tied to willful ignorance, the same reason I don’t want to watch the Netflix documentaries about how we get our food in America...some people just don’t want to face the reality that we are still living in the devastating wake of America’s systemically racist past that has generationally disadvantaged millions a myriad of ways- economic, emotional, familial...and that there is still work to be done to heal our land.

On the other side is the maximizing methods of modern secularism. Now we need to spend a little more time here because, to Dr. Os Guinness’ point, this is the dominant worldview in power today, using the academic tool known as **Critical Race Theory**, which that is increasingly being overtly or subtly taught in schools at all levels and dominates media networks. Now Os already addressed some of this last week and the danger and my fear is that I might do the very thing that Jesus had admonished the religious leaders for doing (Matt.23)- being content with fine-theological arguments and yet neglecting the weightier matters of the law justice, mercy, compassion. Not a single critique should be taken as an excuse to sit on our hands and not address the very real issues today. In fact, what I respect about the movement is that I believe many are sincerely trying to do something to address inequalities, although I believe in many ways their methods are deeply flawed.

If you would like to know where I am getting my information I have a resource list attached to the bottom of my message notes. We tend to think CRT is new and seemed to come out of nowhere in the last couple years. While the name CRT is relatively new since the 70s, the concepts are anything but new. As we have seen throughout this series, you won't be surprised to know that the Critical Theory framework is built upon the ideals of the enlightenment and French Revolution of the 1600-1800s, the elimination of truth, the need to tear down the sacred order of religion, the critical view of morality as a power play, personal freedom of expression, and economic Marx's power theory applied to social and class relationships.

What is CRT? I'd encourage you to read broadly and not just take my word for it, but from my research- at the heart of CRT it seeks to address the historical problematic relationship between power, race and oppression. And in doing so has built a comprehensive framework to bring justice, equality and freedom for oppressed groups. Now this is where nuance is needed. CRT has some helpful observations that Christians should be supportive of. History and specifically history in the Bible is rife with examples of the interaction between power, race and oppression and the indictment of that abuse of power. God's liberation of the Jewish people from the oppression of the Egyptians through Moses is an indictment against structural, racial/ethnic injustice. The prophets like Amos and Isaiah stand against the oppressors in power for their unbalanced scales and the marginalization of groups like poor, widow, strangers, and orphans. Jesus cleansing the court of the Gentiles at the temple was Jesus standing against the financial abuse of power by the Jews over the Gentile converts to Judaism. From page to page, the Bible agrees with this basic premise of CRT. Tenants: **1) Root Sin: Racism, Power and Oppression.** CRT doesn't just see oppression as A lens, but rather THE lens to critique society. **2) Class Creation:** In identifying the pattern of oppression, CRT categorized people, groups, tribes into oppressor and oppressed classes. **3) Redefining Oppression:** CT expands their definition of oppressor beyond physical/economic to include psychological well being. Anyone who disagrees with, opposes or does not support a particular group's morality or identity-creation is considered oppressive. **4) Reordering Virtue and Voice-** Tied tightly to CRT is the concept of intersectionality- that is the more intersections of oppressions you have the more oppressed you are and in this system more virtue and voice is therefore ascribed to you. So being white and males puts me in a class of oppressor, with less virtue and voice and if you are a black, female, lesbian you would be among the greatest oppressed class and ascribed greater virtue and voice. **5) Class-Assigned Racism-** The oppressor class is therefore inherently racist and white supremacist and the oppressed classes cannot be racist by virtue of that fact that they lack power and privilege to be racist. **6) Power Deconstruction.** This is not just true of individuals but of groups, structures or systems of authority/power including government, law enforcement, education, business, church. In the most radical arm of CRT they believe these systems all need to be either completely reformed, those in power removed, or torn down altogether.

Three Critiques:

#1 Misdiagnosis of Original Sin: When we make racism and oppression the original sin- we remove equality- because only people with power can be sinners in need of repentance, we don't address the root problem, offer a band aid on the problem. Original sin is not Racism and

Oppression, But Rebellion against our Creator and Self-determination, Genesis 3, that results in the mistreatment of our fellow man. The seeds of superiority, power hunger, oppression and marginalization, xenophobia, favoritism, tribalism, ethnocentrism, racism are in all of our hearts. The Fall is the great equalizer.

#2 Inherently Divisive: CRT actually works against unity because it purposely divides us all into tribes and classes. Even the Political Comedian Bill Maher recognizes this danger. Maher cited a survey of 173 colleges that found that 42% of them offered segregated residences and 72% offered segregated graduation ceremonies. "Well, congratulations, parents. You just paid 100 grand for your kid to move to Biloxi, Mississippi in 1948. We're a nation that professes diversity as our strength. But now half the kids' dorm rooms are determined by racial purity? You see what I mean about becoming so woke, you come back out the racist side?"

#3 Faulty Identity Creation: CRT has no god or creator, therefore the highest and truest identity is tribe, color, gender, sexuality. You are assigned an identity in CRT through the lens of victims, oppressor classes. Scripture sees identity first in relation to our Creator, therefore we are all part of the human race, before any other identity is given to us or one another.

This should not be something that divides Christians and churches, but anything redeemable and good in CRT is already in the Gospel and its blueprints are so much greater if we live them out.

[Title Slide] Invite Todd to come up for dialogue:

Todd- As a black man in America and Christ Follower how do you see your identity?

You know that's a good question. Before I start I want to put a disclaimer out there that what I am about to say is "my experience." I in no way aim to speak on behalf of all minorities on this subject. However, I do believe that my thoughts on this are rooted in a biblical worldview.

There has been a push within our culture for us to define ourselves by our external qualities. Growing up as a black kid in a predominantly Caucasian environment it was tempting for me to identify myself first and foremost by my racial identity. There were realities of my childhood (experiencing racism) that would have made it easier for me to have developed a "us vs. them" mindset. But praise be to God that I was raised in a home where I was encouraged to identify myself *first* as a son of God, created in His image. And then once I accepted Christ I was then encouraged to find my *truest identity by* pursuing Christ and His likeness in my life.

And so, what this means for me is that before anything I am a child of God created in His image, and I am a Disciple of Christ. Knowing and believing both of these things is what has allowed me to live out my identity as a Christian. And this truest identity triumphs over all possible intersectionalities I experience as a black man. Because you see church, the matter of the soul is a matter much weightier; it surpasses and transcends the physical realities.

The Apostle Paul spoke about this reality in Colossians 3:10, 11 stating ¹⁰ *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* ¹¹ *Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

This doesn't mean I cease to be black, or that somehow my cultural heritage disappears- no these are aspects of who I am, but they are secondary and find their ultimate meaning in relation to my highest identity. Friends I think you would all agree that it would be unbelievably beautiful if men, women and children across the world lived out of this perspective. Because you see this is how the Gospel sets us free, to no longer aim for identities tied to human tradition or shifting cultural ties, but instead to aim for an identity that is firmly rooted in the unchangeable God, whose image we bear.

Title Slide Nate- you and I were talking this week about how our culture upholds the ideas of equality and human dignity but fails to recognize that these ideas find their roots uniquely in Scripture's teaching. Can you talk more about that?

Atheist Yuval Harrari in *Sapiens*, admits that we only get to the ideas of equality through the vehicle of Christianity. "Human dignity and equality is a Christian myth." Dr. Guinness- Said something in his book that was eye-opening. "America started as an incredibly powerful idea. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men were created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These truths are anything but self-evident. They would have been regarded as subversive to Plato and incomprehensible to Aristotle. Plato held that humanity was divided into gold, silver and bronze people so that humanity was inevitably hierarchical. The plain fact is that these truths would've been anathema to people as diverse as Nietzsche and to the creators of the Hindu Caste system. These truths are self-evident only to one steeped in the Bible. Slavery is the long-held human tradition, while liberation, abolition and equality are the calling of the Scriptures."

Ephesians 2:11-22, Gospel is the ultimate equalizer.

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 *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.* ¹⁹ *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.*

Christ created one new humanity that supersedes all other identifications, kills hostility and makes a way for radical unity. Revelation 7, portrait of heaven is not segregation. Jesus brings all people groups together in heaven as one people. This is one of the things that made the early church so revolutionary. The early Christ followers were following the radical way of their savior- Pastor Bryan Lorritts, "Jesus refused to see the world through the lens of Critical Race

Theory and the Jews hated him for it. They wanted a political Messiah who would fight for the oppressed Jews against the evil oppressors, the Romans. Instead they got a Messiah who told them to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, to pay taxes to Caesar, and who died on the cross for Roman centurions.” They were utterly unique in history in their desegregation, reconciliation, and progressive expression of unity in diversity all rooted in Christian theology. They uprooted class distinctions: the preacher could have been a slave and choir was made up of Jews, gentiles, men, women of all colors. This is our true and rich Christian heritage that we must recapture and emulate before a watching world.

Title Slide Todd, what are some practical solutions?

We need solutions. AMEN. And what’s sad about this is that I believe we had better solutions to this problem as a nation in decades past. When it comes to race relations in some respects we are regressing instead of moving forward and here’s why. When I was a kid growing up in New Jersey in the 80’s, we were told over and over again that we were to judge a person not based upon the color of their skin, but rather by the content of their character (MLK 1963 March on Washington). And for the most part I do believe that the majority of society was on board with that. Not that we had arrived, Dr. King’s DREAM still hadn’t been manifested. But there was a cultural agreement on how we could move forward on the issue. Not anymore.

Now race is being re-emphasized. Many news articles are capitalizing black and white while describing people. There is even talk by some minority groups of bringing segregation back. You watch the news and you wonder, how did we get here?

Now Dr. King’s principal arguments for racial reconciliation hinged on ideas that are much less popular in the United States today than they were a half-century ago. Dr. King reasoned from theological ethics, specifically *natural law*, the concept of *imago Dei*, and *agape* love. Today, to use higher moral law and transcendent values as justifications in a discussion on race is likely to be met with ridicule.

But that doesn’t make it any less truthful. As our society tries to redefine what it means to be a black man, a white woman, an Asian American, Latin X etc. We need to be prepared to give a better Gospel Vision for humanity. Because within the Gospel we have the answer to all of society’s ills, but friends we cannot speak the truth in anger, we must speak the truth in love. As we follow Christ, we must live as He lived, serve as He served, be willing to be ridiculed and respond in LOVE as He was. Dr. King once said. “I have decided to stick with Love...Hate is too heavy of a burden to bear.” As we model Christian love well. That is the solution.

I am reminded of something Dr. Os Guinness said last week. He said that Jewish Americans are a small percentage of the population but they have a significant impact on our culture. Likewise, the LGBTQ community is a very small % of the American population and yet they have a significant influence in our cultural landscape. Bible believing Christians represent between 30% – 35% of our population. As we model racial reconciliation from a gospel viewpoint, and love the stranger, the foreigner, and as we judge people not based on skin color

but based on the fact they are made in God's image...we begin to move back towards solutions that will truly bless the world.

Nate- Christians are called to be peacemakers. 1) For some of us, there is appropriate confession of favoritism, racism, xenophobia or classism. For some of us, confession of defensiveness, hostility or resentment toward other ethnic or racial groups. Or apathy or lack of concern for our brothers and sisters, that we have sought the welfare of our own, but not of all people. Should be reflected in our church, in our witness, in our social engagement.

2) Peacemaking means we are intentional, proactive not reactive. You reach across cultural lines. Take Todd out to lunch, meet with those that are black, brown, Asian, listen, narrow worldview comes from lack of diversity in your circles.

3) Peacemaking means we stand out in a culture that shouts down, cancels, silences and demonizes our enemies. What is the tone of your social media and conversations? Always snarky? Easily offended? Combative? Never able to give credit where it is due? Assuming the worst? Not the way of peacemaking. Rather they should be discerning, winsome, humble, merciful, patient, not retributive but reconciling.

Church- we have an opportunity to model unity in diversity here in our own church. We might not be able to solve the world's problems, but we can start here... and know that Jesus is coming to be the ultimate reconciler.

Resource List:

- *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Carl Trueman
- *The Magna Carta of Humanity*, Os Guinness
- *Divided by Faith*, Michael O Emerson
- *Fault Lines*, Voddie Baucham
- *Compassion & Conviction*, Justin Giboney
- Bridgetown Church Sermon Series "Race and Justice",
<https://bridgetown.church/series/race-justice/>
- "Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory" - Tim Keller,
<https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/a-biblical-critique-of-secular-justice-and-critical-theory/>
- Academic Tenets of CRT: <https://www.uvm.edu/~vtconn/v31/Hirald.pdf>
- Legacy Disciple: CRT and the Christian:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poKADQbdCHg>
- Dr. Neil Shenvi: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/incompatibility-critical-theory-christianity/>
- Christians for Social Action: Multi-part study on CRT,
<https://christiansforsocialaction.org/resource/critical-race-theory-in-christianity-part-i-the-christian-ethnic-studies-borderlands/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_race_theory