

THE CHURCH *and the* RACIAL DIVIDE

Finding Unity in the Race-Transcending Gospel



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About the ERLC

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission is an entity of the Southern Baptist Convention. The ERLC is dedicated to engaging the culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ and speaking to issues in the public square for the protection of religious liberty and human flourishing. Our vision can be summed up in three words: kingdom, culture, and mission.

Since its inception, the ERLC has been defined around a holistic vision of the kingdom of God, leading the culture to change within the church itself and then as the church addresses the world.

The Mission of the ERLC

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission exists to assist the churches by helping them understand the moral demands of the gospel, apply Christian principles to moral and social problems and questions of public policy, and to promote religious liberty in cooperation with the churches and other Southern Baptist entities.

THE CHURCH *and the* RACIAL DIVIDE

ISSUE I

Finding Unity in the Race-Transcending Gospel

VOLUME 1

How to Use this Study

This Bible-study book includes six weeks of content for group and personal study.

Group Sessions

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word, and with the video teaching.

START. This section includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video teaching.

DISCUSS. This section includes questions and statements that guide the group to respond to the biblical teaching in the video sessions and to explore relevant Bible passages.

ENGAGE. This section helps us apply the truths from the video teaching and make steps towards action.



Personal Study

Each week provides three days of Bible study and learning activities for individual engagement between group sessions. The personal study revisits stories, Scriptures, and themes introduced in the video teaching so that participants can understand and apply them on a personal level.

Each personal study includes the following three sections.

RENEWED THINKING.

This section provides Biblical teaching meant to deepen and further clarify your understanding of the week's topic. Here you will find a substantial interaction with relevant Scriptures passages to help you think biblically.

GOSPEL APPLICATION.

Building on the Renewed Thinking section, this section is meant to help you process what you are learning and should be transforming the way you live. This section is designed to deepen your compassion and empathy towards others.

FAITH IN ACTION.

This section closes out the week's teaching and leaves you with practical ways to begin engaging the world around you with what you are learning.

*Broken Mirrors and
Poor Reflections*

THE CHURCH
and the
RACIAL DIVIDE

THINK

How does the gospel speak
to issues of race?

WEEK 1

Finding Unity in the Race-Transcending Gospel

VOLUME I

Imago Dei

“May men learn to replace bitterness
and violence with love and understanding.”

Renewed Thinking

*Four Girls
Killed in
Church Bombing*

GENESIS 1:27 —
Man Created in God's Image

Gospel Application

**The Image of God
Marred by Sin.**
—
**Opening Blind Eyes to
the Sin of Racism**
—
**Racial Unity Rooted in
the Gospel**
—

Faith in Action

We must
be people of
compassion
and justice.
—

Start

**Welcome to Session 1 of *The Church and the Racial Divide*.
Use these questions to open the group session.**

**Ask group members to introduce themselves by
sharing names, and background information.**

**What excites you about this study? What is
one thing you're hoping to learn?**

We're here together to talk openly and honestly about what the Bible says about race, ethnicity, and how the gospel of Jesus Christ reconciles us to diverse brothers and sisters in one family. In the coming weeks, let's commit to speak honestly, but with love and gentleness, recognizing that God loves the truth as well as a repentant heart.

**When discussing an important topic like race, why must we assume
the best in others and give one another the benefit of the doubt?**

Before watching this week's video teaching, pray for your group to engage with openness to the Scripture and sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to work in your heart, challenge your assumptions, and eliminate defensiveness. Pray for confession, repentance, faith, hope, and love to be the markers of this group.

Discuss

In the video, Dan Darling pointed out that in Genesis 2:7 God, “breathed the breath of life” into the first human. This set humans apart from all other created things. This means all people equally bear God’s image and are different from all of creation, simply because we are human.

What does the image of God have to do with our thoughts about race and ethnicity?

How does the image of God speak to issues like abortion, mental or physical disability, or euthanasia?

What are some of the ways humans are uniquely gifted by God to be like Him?

The video mentioned historical atrocities of genocide and racism—like the Holocaust, apartheid, and slavery. Many of the people that participated in those evils were ordinary people we’d consider good and civil. Some of them even claimed to be Christians.

How should the Bible’s teaching on the image of God shape the way we think about race?

Many today tend to view racism as a sin of the past that’s not part of who we are as a country, people, or church today. Yet, those in the past did not view themselves as racist either. Racism happens any time we judge a person based on skin color or culture. Is there a people group that we might not understand or might avoid? What assumptions do we make about folks who don’t look like us? How can the Bible’s teaching about the image of God change our perspective? All of us have work to do. The goal of this study is to help you along in that process.

Dan said, “Racism is sin in two ways. It demeans both the glory of God and the gospel of God.” What did he mean? What is an example of each?

Other than outright racism, what are common ways we don’t see the image of God in others around us?

To demean another human being based on race is to demean and deny the image of God in them, which is an assault on God's glory. Additionally, because the gospel reconciles all people to God, racism is also anti-gospel. The church is supposed to be a model of the multiethnic kingdom of God.

Think about your church family. How can you contribute to a multiethnic kingdom oriented culture there?

What are some ways a church can show their community they value all people?

Engage

**OVER THE NEXT WEEK CONSIDER THESE THINGS
IN LIGHT OF WHAT WE'VE STUDIED TOGETHER.**

Identify groups of people you tend to lump together and only consider as one big group. For example: liberal, conservative, men, women, immigrant, black, white, Asian, Latino, etc. What are some unhelpful assumptions you make about these categories?

Pay close attention to your environment, media intake, and relationships. Are the people you live near and interact with mostly the same as you or different than you?

We all have inherent biases and assumptions. Changing these assumptions must begin with prayer. Pray for God to show you the humanity in individuals of that group.

Pray for God to bring people into your life that are unlike you. Ask Him for an opportunity to recognize that person's humanity and learn from them. Write out your prayer in the space below.

Renewed Thinking

What Went Wrong?

When do you first remember becoming aware of the tensions around race and ethnicity? What about this episode stuck out to you?

On Sunday, September 15, 1963, in Birmingham, Alabama, in a church full of stained glass windows, teenagers were excited about the day's events. They were preparing to lead a congregation in worship for the annual "Youth Sunday."

Early that morning, four members of the Ku Klux Klan planted a box of dynamite under the steps of the 16th Street Baptist Church. They set a timer to go off at 10:22 a.m. The boys and girls gathered for Sunday School wearing freshly pressed shirts and dresses. In a matter of minutes, their clothes would be soiled with blood, ash, rubble, and tears.

Four little girls were killed in the blast.

Addie Mae Collins was fourteen.

Denise McNair was eleven.

Cynthia Wesley was fourteen.

Carole Robertson was fourteen.

They were murdered because their skin was black.

Every stained glass window in the church was blown out that day except one. The unshattered window is called, "The Good Shepherd," which depicts Jesus knocking at a door. The explosion blew out Jesus' face while leaving the rest of the picture intact. The stained-glass picture of the perfect image of God—now broken.

When we see terrible atrocities, we naturally want to ask, "What went wrong?" To figure that out, let's start at the beginning—literally, in Genesis 1.

A stained glass window bears testament to a bomb's damage; Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, September 15, 1963. Tom Self



Willing Workers

A. & C. Co.



Created to Image God

READ GENESIS 1:24–27

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? (vv. 26-27)

READ GENESIS 2:7

What distinguishes man from the rest of the created order?

What do the distinctions between man and the rest of creation teach us about what it means to bear God’s image?

Being made in the image of God means that human beings are like God in a way that the rest of the created order is not. When God created other living things—insects, fish, animals, and plants—He created them according to “their kinds” (v. 24). But God broke that pattern when He created humans. Only human beings are made in the image of God. He didn’t create a new “kind” or a new pattern—He used Himself as the pattern. He cut humans from His cloth. He created the rest of the world with a verbal command; He created mankind with the breath of His nostrils and shaped Adam with His hands (2:7). It was personal and intimate. All human beings were created through an intimate act initiated by a loving God and have been imbued with purpose and value by their Creator.

READ GENESIS 1:28–30.

What work did God give the man in the garden? What does that work teach us about what it means to image God?

God also gave us work—to “be fruitful and multiply” to “fill the earth” and “subdue it” to “rule” and “have dominion”—to assure that the rest of the earth is filled with image-bearers that bring honor and glory to God. We work as God works.

Now that we have established what the image of God is, what makes God different from creatures made in His image? How is God unlike us?

To be made in the image of God means that we are, by definition—not God. God is infinite; we are finite. He is all-knowing; we learn everything we know. We are dependent on God’s provision. We need God; He doesn’t need us. We are images of God— not God.

And yet, we are made in the image of God. That means we communicate God’s existence and His love to the world. We image God when we create. Like God, we think, have dominion, and execute justice and mercy. We are fruitful, and we multiply, filling the world with image-bearers who, like us, are different and better than the rest of creation. Yet, inside of all of us lurks a dangerous deception—a voice that tells us we are more than the image of God. The voice tells us we are gods. We first heard this voice back in the garden.

The Image Assaulted

READ GENESIS 3:1-6

What lie did Satan tell the man and woman? How did following the lie actually make the man and woman less like God?

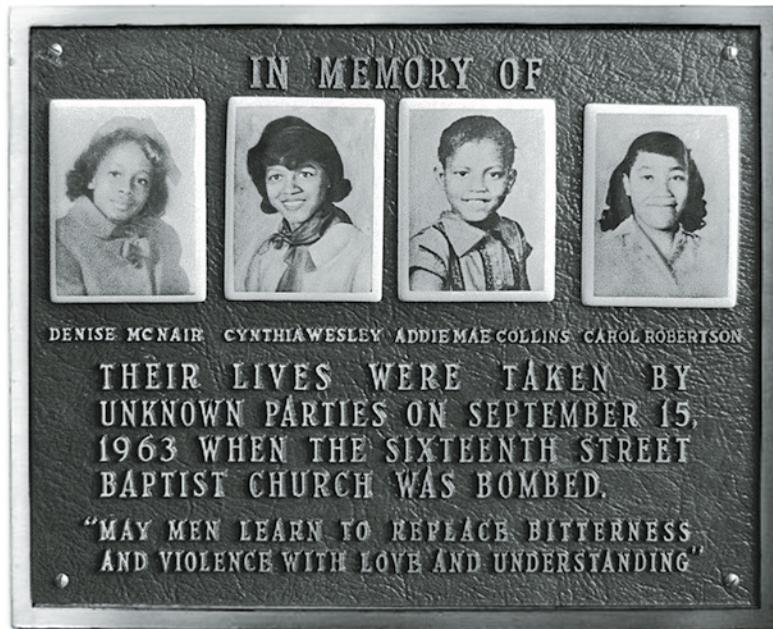
Though human beings were created to image God, the serpent pitched an alternative idea. He said humans shouldn't be dependent on God and rule creation. Rather, humans should be dependent on creation and rule God.

This lie takes many forms: "Eat the fruit. Let your instincts and desires guide you. Do what you feel! Be your authentic self! Take and eat! Decide for yourself what is good and evil. Let the tree make you wise. Become strong and compete. Don't image God—be God." But our attempt to become more like God only results in physical and spiritual death.

Where do you see this same lie at work in our culture today? What are the effects?

What happened next? Very simply, the curse of separation and death began. Man and woman hid from each other and God, blamed one another, and were cast out of the garden. Their fellowship with God was broken. In the next chapter, one of Adam and Eve's sons murdered his brother, three chapters later, sin has so engulfed the earth, and the image of God is so assaulted that God brings a flood and starts over.

How is the strife and discord we experience today related to that day in the garden?



Four Little Girls, Four Broken Men, and the Good Shepherd

Let's go back to 16th Street Baptist Church in 1963 Birmingham to connect these biblical dots to the faces of those children and that Good Shepherd.

What makes racism sinful?

What must one deny about another person made in the image of God to embrace racial superiority?

The men that set that bomb were separated from God. They wanted to keep humans, particularly black humans, separate from them. In order to do that, they denied their full humanity on the basis of skin color. They refused to believe the image of God, the dignity and beauty of our Creator, was present in men, women, boys, and girls meeting at 16th Street Baptist Church. They didn't see their humanity.

The sin of racism is a denial of the image of God. Racism puts human beings in the place of God and seeks to have dominion over them. It seeks to consume, instead of cultivating. It listens to the voice of the serpent and hides from God. Racism, in every form, is evil. It's comforting to tell ourselves racism is a thing of the past that we're not involved in today. It's comforting—but misleading.

Unfortunately, racism is alive and well. If our first thought is, "I don't see it," then this Bible study was written for you. Our aim is to approach the Word of God, even if it unsettles us and causes us to repent and mourn over our sin so we can be sanctified. Then the gospel will leave us hopeful, changed, and ready for action.

Ultimately, this Bible study is for all of us—to see the glory of God's design, the amazing grace bestowed upon all who believe, and the blood-bought unity Jesus brings to all people regardless of who we are, what color our skin is, or what culture we came from.

READ EPHESIANS 2:14.

How has Jesus broken down the walls of hostility between you and people who are different from you, racially or otherwise?

Take time and pray, asking God to search your heart and reveal to you hidden biases and prejudices. Invite Him to expose your heart and pray that you would be willing to accept His affliction and corrections.

Gospel Application

An Ancient Problem

READ GENESIS 3:15–20

When the first man and woman distrusted God and trampled His image, things got ugly. Their sin resulted in a curse, separation, and death. Still, in the middle of all that darkness, there was a light shining. Adam resumed his God-given role as a “namer,” and he called his wife, “Eve—the mother of the living,” which seems strange. Because just before God delivered the curse, Adam blamed his wife, and now he’s praising her.

Adam was separated from Eve with a fig leaf. Now, he is drawing closer and becoming one again (4:1). The Scripture raises a curious question—why does the man bless the woman with this name? Why not curse her? Why not call her “mother of death” or “tool of the serpent?” (Not that Adam doesn’t bear as much or more responsibility than Eve for his role in this original sin, but remember, he’s already been blaming).

The answer is in Genesis 3:15.

What did God promise to do through Eve?

God acts graciously towards us despite our open rebellion.

What does this teach us about the character of God?

Genesis 3:15 has been called the “protoevangelion.” It means “first gospel.” God made a promise to crush the head of the serpent—the source of the great lie that humans could be gods and should act like beasts. But it would come at a price. The seed of the woman, this child who would end the serpent’s lie, would suffer. His heel would be bruised.

Adam named Eve “mother of the living” because of God’s promise to deliver salvation from the curse through Eve’s offspring—a son of man who would suffer to heal the hurts of humanity. The image of God marred by sin would be restored in a perfect Son. Of course, this promise is realized in God’s true son, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. Jesus would become the offspring of the woman who would crush the heel of the serpent to heal those to whom the serpent lied.

READ ROMANS 5:15–18

How do Jesus’ death and resurrection heal the effects of Adam’s sin?

We read Romans 5 in light of Genesis 3:15. The promise God gave to Adam and Eve was fulfilled in Jesus. At the cross, the curse of sin was broken and reversed. The grace of Jesus canceled the trespass in the garden. The gospel radically transforms from the inside out and impacts every aspect of our lives. The cross restores image-bearers to their image-bearing work.

A Gospel Solution

In the early church, grace brought Jews and Gentiles together in one community. Issues abounded as they knit these two separate communities together into one family of God. Let’s take a look at how this gospel applies to the way we look at different races, cultures, and ethnicities.

READ EPHESIANS 2:8–20 AND GALATIANS 2:11–20

**How did Paul apply the gospel to racial divides
(Jew and Gentile) in the first century?**

Why would Paul make an appeal through the gospel instead of saying something more straightforward, such as, “Racism is wrong. You shouldn’t do it!”?

All people, regardless of their genetic or ethnic makeup, were at one time outside of the family of God. We were “foreigners to the covenants of promise” (Eph. 2:12). But we, who were once foreigners, have been brought near to God and made part of His family. What’s more, God’s family is comprised of people from every ethnicity and language (Matt. 24:14; 28:18–20; Rev. 5:9–10). Paul rooted his call to racial unity in the gospel because racism is a sin issue, and the gospel is the only message in the world that can fully deal with sin. Where sin divides and pits image-bearers against each other, the gospel brings us together.

How should the gospel shape the way you deal with racism in the world around you?

Consider how you think about and treat people of different ethnicities. How might your heart be out of line with the gospel?

Historical Heart Check

Now, let's think historically. Unfortunately, history is littered with example of racial sin and injustice—the 1960s American South, Nazi Germany in the 1940s, Japanese internment camps, South African apartheid, the Middle Passage in the 18th century, Rwanda in 1994, the first-century Jews and Gentiles, and the slaughter of Native Americans in 17th century—to name only a few examples. For these atrocities to have occurred, people had to turn a blind eye towards the sin of racism. Even more, unfortunately, many Bible-believing churchgoers were complicit in these historical episodes, both in their participation and their silence.

As Galatians 2 shows us, there's no room for God's people to remain dispassionate or uninvolved when sin is in our midst. We must be people of compassion and justice.

Why must we not see these as events in the distant past with no lesson for the church today?

What steps can you take to uphold the inherent value and worth of all people?

Write down four ways that “the image of God” should affect the way we see people of different ethnicities.

Close your time by praying for God to continue to reveal areas where you have considered yourself superior to others based on your race or ethnicity. Ask God to allow you to see all people as He does, as made in His image and of inestimable worth and value.

Faith in Action

Hear from God and One Another

The book of James is full of proverbial wisdom that takes many of the ideas we find in the New Testament and provides practical wisdom so it can be applied to our lives. So as we are seeking to put our faith in action, there's no better place to look. This short book has much to teach us about what it means to value people made in the image of God

READ JAMES 1:19–25; 2:14–20

When we don't see the value in other people, we stop listening to what they have to say. Much of the heartache around issues of race could be abated if we would stop and take the time to listen to one another. Doing this allows us to hear both from God and one another.

Furthermore, our faith should extend beyond simply hearing into the realm of doing. Action proves that our faith is genuine. It shows that we have been changed by God. Taken together, our words and our deeds outwardly demonstrate our internal faith.

**How have I used my words to dehumanize people
of other races, ethnicities, or cultures?**

How have I neglected to defend and care for people of other races?

We must recognize that our ill-timed and insensitive words are a source of great pain and hardship for others. James continues to give wisdom about our words.

Tame Your Tongue

READ JAMES 3:7–18; 4:1–10

In chapter three, James gives us Genesis 1–3 language. He says that mankind has tamed every kind of animal (part of the command in Genesis 1–2), but we can't tame the tongue. Our words are full of deadly poison—like a serpent.

And what do we do with those poisonous words? We curse humans made in God's image. Just like the venomous lie from the serpent led to a curse of God's image-bearers, so the way we talk about other humans is either life-giving or demonic (3:15,17).

Chapter four starts with the sort of hostility that we found in the curse—hostility toward God and fellow humanity. The kind of hostility that manifested itself in Genesis 4 onward.

So, how should we respond? Humble ourselves, and God will provide grace (Jas. 4:6). Weep for sin. Mourn for the dehumanization of God's image-bearers. Set yourself apart by admitting the ways you have seen sin hurt others, and for the times you have participated in it. Don't defend yourself. Humble yourself under God, and you will be exalted. Not as God, but as the image of God.

So let's spend the rest of this session considering how God is calling us to obey His Word.

What's your first reaction to an act of violence against a person of a different race than your own? What can you glean from that?

How can you place yourself in proximity to other ethnicities so you can learn from them and see the image of God in them?

The gospel pulls us toward God and each other. What are a few simple ways you can change daily or weekly habits to put yourself in proximity to and have conversations with other image-bearers of a different ethnicity?

Are your friendships as diverse as your community? If not, why not?

What is one simple step you can take this week to expand your friendships (reach out to a neighbor, strike up a conversation at a kid's ballgame, at the store, etc)?

With whom can you share about what you learned during this week's study?