

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

EPHESIANS 2:14-16



CHAPTER 39

The Remedy for Racism

Every culture and government throughout history has faced the issue of racism and unjust resentments toward others who are different. Racism is evidence of the sinful nature of humanity. All segments of fallen humankind build barriers and ostracize others. This stems from pride—fallen humanity’s predilection to believe we are superior to others in some way. In this regard, *racism* parades around with his ugly brother who goes by the name *arrogance*. It is at its core a heart issue, a dilemma with no solution apart from the heart-regenerative work of Christ in one’s life.

In fact, the Bible’s test for genuine faith is the absence of racism. John 13:35 says, “*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” Jesus’ command here goes beyond loving only one’s own kind.

Racism is defined as a feeling of superiority based on race. The Oxford Dictionary defines *racism* this way: “The belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.”

In the first chapters of the book of Ephesians the apostle Paul addresses what is known in seminary circles as the Biblical doctrine of soteriology—that is, what the Bible has to say about salvation. When the reader arrives at Ephesians 2:11–13, Paul is in the middle of a discussion about salvation:

Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Notice the word *therefore* that begins this Scripture. That word tells us that what Paul is about to say is based upon what he has just said. And what he has just said is that salvation is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Prior to the above passage Paul conveys the idea that salvation is in no way based upon human merit. If salvation is a gift from God then none can say they earned it and therefore imagine that they are superior to another who has not earned it! Since salvation is not based on personal merit or ethnicity, and is available to all of humankind, we who are saved have no grounds to believe we are superior to others.

The fact that according to the OT the Jews were God’s original *chosen people* (Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2), and the Gentiles were not, gave many Jews a superiority complex even into the NT era—a racist attitude—toward the Gentiles. The Ephesian believers to whom this epistle is addressed were Gentiles. They had been, historically speaking, racially segregated from and in some ways diminished by the Jews. Even though that was the Jewish sentiment of the time, God never intended for the Jews to remain God’s only chosen people. God always had in mind that all peoples of the world would be eligible to receive His ultimate blessing of salvation through Christ Jesus.

God set the Jews apart in the old covenant to be His representatives to all the nations, showing forth His holiness through His laws given to Israel and their obedience to them. Israel’s example in living according to God’s holy law was supposed to be a witness to all the Gentile nations. This is evidenced by the following Old Testament passages. In Isaiah 60:3 we learn more about God’s plan for a special, representative-of-Him people who would be a *light*:

“Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.”

Isaiah 44:23 echoes, *“For the LORD has redeemed Jacob And in Israel He shows forth His glory.”*

God’s plan for Israel culminates in chapter 62:1–2 of Isaiah, *“Until [Israel’s] righteousness goes forth like brightness, And her salvation like a torch that is burning. The nations will see your righteousness, And all kings your glory.”*

God has the view in sight that all peoples of the world will eventually be blessed through the Messiah that will come through the Jews. In Genesis 12:3 God pronounces His fundamental edict upon Abraham, the Jewish patriarch saying, *“And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”* The meaning and breadth of the word *all* certainly encompasses more than just the Abrahamic offspring to follow. These passages serve to illustrate that Israel has no basis for feeling culturally superior.

Israel is called to be a conduit for God’s blessings to the Gentiles, not to exercise superiority over them

Racism Illustrated: Ancient Israel

When we look at racism among the Jews, it is important to realize that their sinful lapses, rebellion, and racism are not unique among the human family. Jews, no more or no less than any other people group of the Bible era or today, are heirs to the sin of Adam. Their transgressions are perhaps the most visible because of the historical record we have in the Bible. However, they symbolize the sinful condition of all of humanity apart from the saving grace of Christ.

The Jews, it seems, wanted the divine blessing of God’s decree, but were not always willing to execute the mission of God’s decree. While there are many ways in which Israel lived up to its mandate of showing forth God’s glory to the nations (1 Kings 8:41–43), such as through its treatment of foreigners within their midst (e.g., Leviticus 23:22; Job 31:32), they also fell short in other ways. God’s chosen people ended up developing an attitude of superiority toward the Gentiles. In the book of Jonah, for example, Jonah is called to preach repentance to Nineveh. He knows that God will bless them if they repent, but because of their history of brutality toward his people (Nahum 3:1ff.), Jonah hates them and flees from his God-given assignment to preach to them. Take note of this in Jonah 4:2:

“I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.”

As a Hebrew, Jonah would rather see the Gentiles of Nineveh judged than forgiven, so he tries to jump ship, but even that doesn't work!

In the NT book of Acts (10:28, 34–35), we witness the same attitude in the young apostle Peter, until God gets hold of him and begins to work in his heart. Peter has his eyes opened to a righteousness stemming not from citizenship in the nation of Israel, but from God's grace:

“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.... I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.”

God set the Israelites apart with laws intended to demonstrate His holiness. However, they lost track of their calling to be a witness of God's holiness to the world, and fell prey to pride. And it cost them dearly! After much patience, God pronounces His judgment on Israel through the prophet Isaiah:

“Why, when I expected [you] to produce good grapes did [you] produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: ... I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground.”
(Isaiah 5:4–5)

The courtyard on the temple grounds affords another illustration of Israel's gross contortion of her calling. God designed a courtyard as part of the temple, for the purpose of accommodating and proselytizing Gentile worshipers, so that His magnificent glory would be a witness to them. However, by NT times, the Jewish leaders were allowing use of the courtyard as a place to hold a sort of swap meet in order to make money on the sale of sacrificial animals! This explains why Jesus was so angry with them, driving them out and overturning tables. He said to them, *“Is it not written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS’? BUT YOU HAVE MADE IT A ROBBERS’ DEN.”*

There is no doubt that the Jewish leaders over the centuries had developed strong racist attitudes toward the Gentiles. And as we are about to see, it is only through the cross of Christ that the division is healed between any racially divided groups. The regenerative work of Christ in the heart of fallen humanity can heal more than just the racial divide between Jew and Gentile. God's power can heal any ethnic division. States Ephesians 2:14–16 in this regard:

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one ... that in Himself He might make the two into one new man ... and might reconcile them both.

While God may have chosen the Jews as His light to the nations at one time, His new covenant is made with the Church, a new Body of Believers composed of both Jew and Gentile as equals, called as one to be His “*light of the world.*” All believers must come to realize that ethnic labels are subordinate to our identity as one new man. We are all equal at the foot of the cross of Christ!

Racism Defined: The Sin of Partiality

The student of the Bible should note that the word *racism* does not appear in Scripture. Rather it is referred to repeatedly as the sin of “partiality” (*diakrino*). The word *krino* can mean “to pronounce judgment” or “to prefer.” By judging or showing preference, people are exalting themselves above another human being. One of the aspects of the fall is pride, and pride often manifests in subtle or not-so-subtle attitudes of superiority. Whenever we gossip, for example, we are in essence trumpeting our superiority to the listener. The more specific usage of *diakrino* came to refer to the elevation of one person over another for external reasons. It was common in Bible times as it is now to show favoritism based upon wealth, race, appearance, success, position, or social status. Let us now shift to James 2:1–7, which has as its subject the sin of partiality. Take note of this passage carefully:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? (NKJV)

James admonishes believers for favoring one person or socioeconomic group of people, in this case the upper class, over and above *the poor*. Sadly, here we see even the Church manifesting favoritism to those who actually *blasphemed Jesus’ name!*

Secular hypocrisy relative to racism is woven into our education system—kids grow up in public schools learning the theory of evolution as fact. But evolution is more than a biological presupposition; it is a poisonous ideology

that teaches that “only the fittest survive,” meaning that some things in the world have more value than others. What is so hypocritical is that once children are catechized in this ideology, they are told not to be racist as adults. Well, why not be racist, if evolution is true? Cannot the ubiquity of partiality today be explained by and large by our society’s presupposition of evolution? In fact, evolutionary theory is a seedbed of racism; it is a great conundrum in American secularism.

James is saying that this same kind of hypocrisy should not exist amongst believers. Why display partiality in the Church, especially when it involves elevating the wealthy?

In contrast to secular evolutionary theory, the Bible speaks of God creating man in His image. Accordingly, all of His creation—regardless of wealth, race, sex, handicap, age, position, status, or celebrity quotient—is inherently of equal value. In fact, the Almighty is impartial. Throughout His Word, He condemns partiality. He specifically warns in John 7:24, “*Do not judge according to appearance.*”

The parallel in the Capital might be to hold a gathering, inviting the most prominent people to sit at the head table and read from the Scriptures, pray, and give speeches, without regard for the fact that they blaspheme Christ by their lifestyles, voting records, words, and actions before and after the event. In these regular annual Capital gatherings, all spiritual qualifications are conveniently overlooked for the sake of the event’s success.

**May it never be that we give away that which is Biblically correct
to gain that which is politically correct. May it always be the
other way around: the way of Biblical impartiality.**

Note the following passages in regard to the seriousness of the sin of partiality:

Leviticus 19:15

“You shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great.”

Leviticus is a book of instruction for the Levites, the priests of the newly set-apart holy nation of Israel. Within the book of Leviticus is God’s specific instruction to the Levites as to how they are to lead the effective, God-honoring worship of the nation Israel. It is within this context that God sets forth this authoritative instruction on *partiality*.

Job 34:19

“Yet He is not partial to princes, Nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; For they are all the work of His hands.” (NKJV)

This section represents Elihu’s best wisdom as he tries to decipher Job’s mysterious plight. In so doing, Elihu fails in his prescriptive counsel, but nonetheless accurately reflects upon the character of God. God *is not partial* to position, be it a *prince* or *the poor*. He does not favor social stature. This is especially underscored by the following passage:

First Samuel 16:7

“For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Deuteronomy 10:17–18

“For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality.... He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.”

Throughout Scripture, we see the compassionate, *impartial* love that God has for all of His creation. Later, in verses 7 and 8 of chapter 15 of Deuteronomy God says:

“You shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.” (NKJV)

God has always held a special place in His heart for *the poor*.

God Is Partial toward the Humble

Our passage from James also reveals that while people may be sinfully partial toward wealth, celebrity, and prestige, God is not sinful in His favor toward the poor and humble. In 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 this idea is easily ascertainable:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are.

God does not use the worldly-wise and powerful; rather he uses the humble and *weak* to do His work. He favors them. Paul picks up on this idea of maximum usefulness to God when he pens 2 Corinthians 12:10:

When I am weak, then I am strong.

As much as we might think of the historical Paul as a *strong*, powerful leader of the first-century Church, it is interesting to review his perception of himself as expressed in 1 Corinthians 2:1–4:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.... I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration ... of power.

Such a self-view is indicative of a man who does not have a racist, partial heart toward others of any ilk.

Jesus' Lesson on Racism

In Leviticus 19:18, when God first commands the Jews to love their neighbors, those neighbors were members of their own and neighboring tribes of Jews. God takes great pains to keep the Jews from relations with their pagan neighbors, in order to prevent them from being drawn into idolatry. Jesus brings a new understanding to that OT commandment to love your neighbor with a parable about a good Samaritan. Who were the Samaritans? The Samaritans and the Jews had a long-standing hatred for one another, stemming from their history of hostilities. Samaritans were of mixed race, having intermarried with Jews during the period of the Assyrian exile of Israel. The Jews did not associate with the Samaritans, and we even see Jesus rejected by the inhabitants of a Samaritan village on His way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–53).

Jesus addresses prejudice toward the Samaritans in Luke 10:27–37 when He is asked by a lawyer how he may gain eternal life. Jesus asks the lawyer what is written in the law:

And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

In this passage Jesus tells the lawyer that he is correct and says, "DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." The lawyer further challenges Jesus asking, "*And who is my neighbor?*"

In response Jesus tells the lawyer the story of the Good Samaritan: A Jewish man is attacked, stripped, beaten, and left for dead by robbers on a treacherous road from Jerusalem to Jericho. A priest and a Levite, people who were highly regarded among the Jews, both pass over to the other side of the road to avoid the dying man. However, a passing Samaritan, considered by the Jews to be lower in the societal hierarchy than tax collectors and outcasts, goes to the man, not away from him. The Samaritan bandages the man's wounds and takes him to an inn where he pays the innkeeper to care for him.

Jesus asks the lawyer which one of the three who passed by was the good neighbor. The lawyer replies, “*The one who showed mercy.*” “*Go and do the same,*” Jesus tells him.

In telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus accomplishes many things. Jesus broadens the concept of *neighbor* for the Jews, He challenges the lawyer's personal prejudice, and He illustrates the need for a Savior because relying on his own merits, the lawyer could never live according to God's law.

The importance of the love-your-neighbor concept—a neighbor being someone who is not necessarily of your particular race—is further understood in Matthew 22:36–46 where Jesus is asked what is the greatest commandment of all:

And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

**We should strive to love people of other races
to the same degree that we love ourselves.**

Are there any people with whom you refuse to associate today?

Racism: Its Negative Results

When believers act out in ways that are racist or partial, the following deleterious results occur relative to the overall witness of the Body of Christ:

PARTIALITY POLITICIZES THE BELIEVER

Partiality sucks away the very lifeblood of spirituality. No longer is spirituality the most important consideration; status is. But remember this: who you are in American political life is far less important than who you are in Christ.

PARTIALITY POLLUTES THE BELIEVER

It is much better to be a spiritually hungry believer than a “who’s who” believer. Too many churches have become ineffective “Christian” country clubs. Their mandate for missions and their fervor to win souls for Christ are lost in their partiality! Christianity becomes a comfort zone where I only hang out with my friends of a similar socioeconomic status, and that is of far greater importance to me than the possible discomfort of cross-cultural missions.

PARTIALITY PRE-EMPTS THE BELIEVER

James 4:6 states that “*GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.*” As said previously, partiality stems from attitudes of superiority and superiority is based in pride. Don’t miss the severity of this passage: it indicates that God is actually working against those who have hearts of superiority. He only works through those who are dead to self and alive in Christ (cf. Galatians 2:20).

May God grant us increased discernment of the devastating, socially dividing, mission-stopping sin of partiality! Proverbs 24:23 states, “*It is not good to show partiality in judgment*” (NKJV). Here are three takeaway applications:

First, the remedy for racism starts with me, and a Biblically based theology relative to the sin of impartiality. As a believer do I have this understanding in my heart? Do I view other races as equal to mine? There is no worse witness than someone who names the Name of Christ, but yet is demeaning to another race of people. This reeks of hypocrisy when you understand the theology we have been examining.

Secondly, the remedy for racism has more to do with evangelism than public policy. Racism is a form of partiality that stems from humanity’s fallen nature. It is only through the power of the cross that the heart of a person can be changed from the inside out. Certainly laws pertaining to discrimination have their place and are necessary, but they will never eradicate the problem from society, so don’t think the answer is in more legislation. It is not. The wise Public Servant will therefore always work toward religious freedom and incentivizing the Church to best facilitate evangelism and change hearts.

Thirdly, we cannot expect the secular humanists, those who are steeped in an ideology of evolution, to get this right, or to model anything different from what their evolutionary theory has taught them. It is incumbent on believers to model cross-cultural acceptance and impartiality. For instance, I work hard at incorporating other ethnicities into Capitol Ministries* rather than having an all-white ministry. Partiality and racism have not been a major temptation or stumbling block for me because I grew up playing basketball and lived and competed with many great African American guys who are still friends. Putting off partiality and racism might not come as easy for you if you did not grow up exposed to people of other races. I understand that, but nonetheless impartiality is a matter of obedience to God. So then, what are you doing that is deliberately cross-cultural?

May God grant us great wisdom in this area, and a heartfelt love for others of different races. Amen.

Those 613 laws given by God to the nation Israel give us insight into His holy character, and from them we can glean His purposes for us, as they touch on every aspect of our personal and social lives, as we have already seen. Let us turn now to examine what God's law can tell us about capital punishment.