

CBC Teaching Series – Tough Topics

Race, Ethnicity, and the Gospel

Sunday, 21 May 2017

“...sin is the fundamental reason that humanity needs to be reconciled first to God and second to one another... Jesus’ sacrificial death for sin is the only provision for and solution to racial hostility...” Jarvis J. Williams, *One New Man*, p. 2

I. Toward a Biblical Understanding of Race and Ethnicity

A. Genesis 1:26-28

1. We all have a common ancestor in Adam and Eve, who were called to flourish.
2. Properly speaking, then, we are all part of the same race (regardless of color, nationality, etc.). There are not totally distinct, incompatible “races” of humans.
3. Here we must also reassert that each and every human shares in the imago dei. This is the basis of our identity, before “race” or ethnicity.
4. Human unity is part of the original creation design.
5. Before people are ethnically diverse, they are made in the image of God. Thus, our status as image bearers must take logical priority over our ethnic or cultural affiliation. This is not to deny ethnic diversity or the celebration thereof, but to root our ethnic diversity in our commonality as image bearers.

“...race itself is a construct, an interpretation of nature rather than an unambiguous marker of basic natural differences within humankind. Race is in the eye of the beholder; it does not enjoy a genuine claim to be regarded as a fact of nature.” Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, p. 3

“...geneticists have shown that there is more genetic variation within Africa than there is in the rest of the world put together... According to the eminent geneticist Kenneth Kidd, ‘no human population is genetically homogenous – high levels of genetic variation are ubiquitous, even in small, isolated populations’. Such findings demolish the notions of racial purity much insisted upon by generations of racists.” Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, p. 6

B. Genesis 4

1. Our unity and fellowship was destroyed by sin and the fall, which results in the first human-on-human violence.
2. The destruction of human relationships has its roots in the severing of our relationship with God. In Genesis 3, our relationship with God is broken. The immediate result is the breakdown of inter-human relationships, now filled with hostility.
3. From the fall, all humans are now born with the seed of sinful hostility. We should not then be surprised when we find that we have animosity toward those who are not like us. This is something that has been passed down from Adam. And we will see this animosity for the “other” played out in biblical and world history.

4. If our human relationships are to prosper, and there is to be peace among men and women, then we must address the underlying root cause, which is our broken relationship with God. Any solution that does not address our fundamental brokenness will never be a lasting solution.

C. Genesis 11:1-9

1. Up to the Tower of Babel, humanity was unified in language (i.e. ethnicity).
 - a. We all have a biological unity, as part of the same species.
 - b. Again, properly speaking, there is one human race, that will express itself in many ethnicities and cultures.
2. The unified people decide to make a tower and a “name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” Genesis 11:4
 - a. This in direct contradiction/rebellion to God’s command to fill the earth.
 - b. The action is also idolatry; a prideful glorification of humanity. Humanity was designed to bear God’s image, and spread the image of God throughout the earth. Now humanity seeks to lift up its own name in Babel.
3. Should the people succeed in their sinful unity, their collective idolatry would know no limits. Genesis 11:6
4. So, God brings disunity to the unified self-idolatry of humanity. Genesis 11:7-9
 - a. This is the origin of different languages, tribes, nations, and peoples.
 - b. It is also a gracious act of God, for the disunity of these ethnicities brings limitation to their collective rebellion against God.
 - c. Additionally, the disunity will be the means by which humanity fulfills its original calling of spreading God’s image across the earth.
 - d. Multi-ethnicity is the very means by which God will spread his one race of image bearing people across all of creation. Multiculturalism is a key component of God’s plan to fulfill the cultural mandate of Gen. 1:28.
5. Our ethnic disunity and disharmony is a byproduct of our rebellion against God. But God will use our rebellion and from it fulfill His eternal purposes of a beautifully diverse humanity, bearing His image across His creation, fully unified not in worship of humanity but in worship of the only one worthy of worship.

D. Israel and the Nations

1. The rest of the OT is a story of Israel’s troubled relationship with God and the nations.
2. Israel, through no inherent superiority of their own (Deut. 7:6-8), is God’s chosen people, who are to be a light for the world, God blessing the world through them (Gen. 12:1-3, Exod. 19:6, Psa. 96:3,10, Isa. 42:6-7, 49:6).
 - a. Many laws show that Israel was to show compassion, equity, and justice toward the ethnic ‘other’ in their midst, who had become a part of Israel (Deut. 27:19, Exod. 22:21, Lev. 19:33-34, Exod. 12:49, Deut. 26:12).
 - b. Deuteronomy 29:10-13 shows that ethnic others could become a part of Israel, and thus God’s very own people, in relationship with Him. Through Israel, there was to be racial reconciliation, to God and to one another.
 - c. Books like Jonah show that God has a shocking compassion for the nations, and that His will is to use His people Israel to bring global reconciliation to Him. See also Jer. 48:47, 49:6, 39. God will draw people from all nations.

3. God will judge Israel for their idolatry and lack of mercy, for failing to be a light to the world for Him.
4. God will judge the nations for their rejection of God, violence, and hatred toward Israel (Obadiah 1, Joel 3, Isaiah 66)
5. In the end, all peoples still need reconciliation with God and each other. The history of Israel shows that humans have no power to achieve this on their own.
 - a. Left to our own devices, we will inevitably war with one another, and battle those who are different or foreign to us. The fall has broken us in our relations with the 'other.'
 - b. We therefore should not be surprised, though we are saddened, when we see inter-ethnic conflict, and hatred toward the other.
 - c. Even a perfect set of principles (i.e. Law) will not enable us to live in harmony. Nothing short of supernatural heart transformation will fix us.

E. Sin and the Fall Have Enabled Systemic and Institutional Sin/Injustice

1. Isaiah 10:1-3. Injustice is enacted through evil legislation.
2. Amos 5:10-15. Societal injustice is strongly denounced by the Lord.
3. Ezekiel 16:49. The city of Sodom itself is seen as guilty of the sin of injustice. Whole groups and institutions can have systemic guilt.
4. This (and a whole host of OT texts; see Gen. 15:13-16) indicate that some cultures are better or worse than others. A whole culture can "go bad." This superiority or inferiority is not based upon superficial biological attributes, but on spiritual health and the morality of their actions and, specifically their treatment of the disempowered.
 - a. This may mean that the culture that we love or are comfortable within is actually a culture that has turned away from God, and in need of repentance and restoration. We need Gospel-centered eyes to see ourselves rightly.
5. It is important to note that whole structures can be flawed. We may feel that we are not guilty of individual hatred or enmity toward another group of ethnicity. But that may not exclude the possibility that we live in, benefit from, suffer from, or take part in an overall societal structure that is sinful.
 - a. In fact, we recognize that the world we live in is a fallen, broken world, filled with fallen, broken systems.
 - b. The question is; "Can the church be a place where those broken structures are subverted by grace, truth, repentance, and love?"

F. Jesus Ministers to Jews and Gentiles Alike, Brings Salvation to All as the Savior of All

1. John 4:1-45. Jesus openly crosses polite cultural boundaries and ministers to a Samaritan woman.
 - a. This was a potentially racially/ethnically charged interaction, yet Jesus does not hesitate to initiate engagement.
 - b. Jesus seems to intentionally minister to Samaritans, the ethnic enemies of the Jews. It is as if he is intentionally teaching His disciples that these people can receive salvation too, though they are hated by many Jews.

2. Luke 10:25-37. Jesus intentionally stirs up the conversation of ethnicity by holding up a Samaritan as a model of virtue. Jesus does not skirt the issue of race/ethnicity, but leans directly into it.
 - a. If we are going to be followers of Christ, part of what that will necessitate is intentionally crossing comfortable boundaries in order to reach the other for the sake of Gospel reconciliation.
 - b. As we “lean into” these conversations, we will need lots of grace. Chances are we will have awkward conversations and relationships with people of other cultures. That’s fine, so long as we do it with love and grace. The point is to follow Jesus by seeking reconciliation of all cultures to Jesus and the Church, and thereby to each other.
3. Matthew 8:5-13. Jesus praises the faith of a Roman centurion.
 - a. In fact, Jesus goes further, saying that people will come from all nations and be part of the covenant people (reclining with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).
 - b. Meanwhile, some who are ethnically Jews will be cast out.
 - c. The point here is that all sorts of people will be united to Christ and God, and the defining factor is not ethnic identity but identification with Christ.

G. Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8

1. Jesus’ authority over all the earth means that his salvation will cross ethnic boundaries. Jesus is the only savior of all peoples.
2. The salvation Jesus has shall go to the ends of the earth, meaning that those who will be part of God’s family will be a people from every tribe and nation. This is a promise that lines of ethnicity will be crossed and unity will stretch across those lines.

H. Acts 2:5-12, 42-47

1. Acts 2 is the Gospel reversal of Babel, as Jews from various nations (Egypt, Asians, Libyans, Romans, Mesopotamians, etc.) come under the sound of the Gospel, hearing of the mighty works of God, and are united in the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ. People of different tongues are united as they are reconciled to God.
2. After they hear the Gospel message and believe, the church lives in an incredible selfless unity, where they break bread and pray together, and share their belongings together. (Act2 2:42-47)
3. The Spirit-empowered Church is God’s designated means of unifying proud, divided humanity into one multiethnic body submitted to Jesus. The church, with Jesus Christ as Lord, is God’s chosen avenue for racial reconciliation.

I. Acts 10-11

1. Peter is given a vision from God, indicating that salvation is not culturally or ethnically bound, but available to Gentiles as well.
2. Peter then immediately has a God-ordained encounter with Cornelius, a Gentile.
3. Peter preaches to the Gentiles, and they believe, and the Holy Spirit comes upon them.
4. In Acts 11, Peter is criticized by some Jews for eating (i.e. having fellowship) with Gentiles. Peter then recounts how God has given salvation to Gentiles as well.

5. The Gospel crosses ethnic boundaries and tears down walls. The rest of Acts will show the Gospel having sway with various cultures and ethnicities.
6. It seems that if the church is going to follow the mandate of Acts 1:8 and the New Testament narrative of Gospel expansion, then the church must reach across cultural and ethnic lines and strive toward multiethnic expressions of orthodox worship of and submission to Jesus.
 - a. Following Jesus demands that the church not live in an ethnic bubble.

J. Revelation 5:9-10, 7:9-10

1. The slain Lamb is worthy to open God's scroll, for the Lamb ransomed by His blood people for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation, and made them into one kingdom for God.
2. The cross of Christ has taken the divided nations and made *from* them one unified people under God. The ultimate and only hope for true racial and ethnic unity is found in Jesus and the Gospel.
3. In Rev. 7:9-10, the people from every nation and tongue worship God and Christ for salvation given, with a unified song of praise.
4. This additionally shows us that all ethnic identity is not eliminated in Heaven. In the New Creation, there will not be one monochromatic humanity, but a multiethnic expression of redeemed humanity.
 - a. The goal of Christian anthropology then is not to eliminate all cultural and ethnic distinctions, flattening them into one homogenous expression.
 - b. Rather, the Christian ideal is the full expression and celebration of cultural distinctions as they are all submitted to the Lordship of Jesus within a new, unified, overarching heavenly culture of Christ exaltation. The cultural distinctions exist in submission to the superior culture of Christ.
 - c. Any cultural or ethnic distinction that is itself contrary to this new heavenly community and the Lordship of Jesus must be eliminated in the church. For example, white or black superiority or militarism both are contrary to the Gospel and the new community of Christ, and are not welcome in the church.
 - d. The cross of Christ has created a new community; "one new man" (Eph. 2:15). This new, heavenly community is not uniform in ethnic expression, but uniform in worship of Jesus.

II. The Gospel and Racial Reconciliation

A. Romans 3:21-30

1. Paul has spent a few pages showing how all, Jew and Gentile alike, are guilty before God. There is no distinction in that regard. We are all sinners, and none of us can meet the demands of the law; whether that law be the written Torah, or the character of God revealed in nature, or the inner sense of morality that we all have due to being image bearers.
2. Now, Paul explains that just as all are sinners, all are saved only by the Gospel.
3. God is one. Therefore, He is the God of Jews and Gentiles. And His salvation is a gift to all, Jew and Gentile alike, to be received by faith.

4. There is no room for a sense of superiority in either. All are sinners, none are more worthy than the other, none can earn God's merit, and all must be saved by faith. We are united in our neediness, and no "race" is superior.

B. Romans 5:1-11 (also 2 Cor. 5:20-21)

1. Very simply, if we are to have peace with God, and reconciliation with Him, it must come through Jesus Christ who has provided the means of reconciliation.
2. Through Jesus, God has reconciled people to Him who were once His enemies in sin.
3. Jesus is God's chosen method for reconciling fallen humans. Without Jesus, there is simply no reconciliation to God, or true reconciliation to anyone else. For only Jesus has adequately dealt with our sins and offenses.

C. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

1. Many members are made into one body. There is diversity and unity.
2. Specifically, Jews and Greeks alike are made into one body.
 - a. Their ethnic distinctions remain.
 - b. But now, because of the Gospel, they have been made one people.
 - c. They are not defined chiefly by their ethnic background—whether Jew or Greek—that might divide them. Their greatest sense of identity is found in their unified and unifying adoption into the body of Christ.

D. Ephesians 2:11-22

1. The Gospel is at its core about reconciliation and unification of different ethnic groups.
 - a. This is not just about believers and non-believers, and non-believers being brought into the believing community.
 - b. The Gospel is about bringing various ethnic groups, Jews and Gentiles namely, into harmony and unity with one another under Christ.
2. Gentiles were formerly excluded outsiders, but were now brought into the family, because of the Gospel.
3. This unification happens only in the Gospel.
 - a. For various groups to be unified, they must be bound by a common core.
 - b. Ethnic unity and multiethnic harmony happens when we are unified in Christ.
 - c. Jesus Christ destroys the barrier, the separating wall.
4. Now, the formerly disparate groups of Jews and Gentiles are built into one house, wherein God dwells.
 - a. They can no longer be divided, for Christ is the one cornerstone of the one house, and the Holy Spirit dwells in the one house. They have no choice but to be united.
 - b. Jews and Gentiles are now also being created into a new thing, a new culture and nation of the Holy Spirit.
5. Unity in Jesus Christ destroys hostility.
 - a. When two different groups are assimilated into one, there can no longer be antagonism toward the other, because there is no longer the "other."
6. Thus, true divine reconciliation must inevitably lead to human reconciliation.
 - a. Without divine reconciliation, there is no basis and power for human reconciliation.

- b. If there is no human reconciliation, it shows there has not been divine reconciliation, for God in the Gospel creates one new family.
- c. This does not mean that human, ethnic reconciliation comes easy. This reconciliation, humanly speaking, will often come with hard conversations, confession, and repentance. We will have to work hard at hearing and listening to the other.
- d. Depending on the context, one group may have to “work harder” to move toward reconciliation. For example, ethnic Jews had to make a lot of changes in order to live in harmony, under Christ, with Gentiles in the new body of Christ.

E. Galatians 2:11-14

- 1. Paul actually opposes Peter for giving improper preferential treatment to ethnic Jews.
 - a. No culture or ethnicity should be given preferential treatment in Christ.
 - b. To give preferential treatment to one culture at the expense of another is an affront to the Gospel which makes us one.
- 2. For Paul (and for Peter when he is thinking rightly), the Gospel has racial/ethnic implications. And to disregard the ethnic implications of the Gospel is to attack the Gospel itself. It is not “in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14).
- 3. The Gospel impacts how we fellowship people who are not like us. The Gospel ought to create harmony and unity with the cultural or ethnic other, even when that is unpleasant, uncomfortable, or puts pressure upon us.

F. Galatians 3:26-29

- 1. In Christ Jesus all are sons of God (that is, sons or daughters) through faith. There is no ethnic qualifier or distinction here.
- 2. There is neither Jew nor Greek in Jesus Christ, but all are Abraham’s offspring.
 - a. This is not to say that all ethnic distinctions are eliminated (just as this verse is not saying that all gender distinctions are eliminated). We can still acknowledge and celebrate ethnic distinctions.
 - b. The point is that both Jew and Gentile come to God the same way, and have the same access. The rules are not different for each. Both come by faith in Christ, and therein are united and made one and alike.
- 3. Still, through the faith of the Gospel, our most fundamental identity is that of “in Christ.” This is more important to us than white, black, Hispanic, etc., or any other ethnic marker (not that these other matters are wholly insignificant). Ethnic markers are secondary.
 - a. We therefore ought to feel a great kinship with those who are also in Christ, regardless of “race” or ethnicity, for we have the deepest commonality with fellow brothers and sisters in Jesus.
 - b. This commonality goes deeper than any biological characteristic or ethnic identity marker.

G. Romans 10:9-13

1. All who confess Christ will be saved.
2. There is no ethnic distinction in this. It is true for Jew and Greek. Thus, the nations are unified in this salvation.

“Humanity’s relationship with God and with fellow humans is broken because of the sin introduced into God’s good creation through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. As a result of sin, every relationship needs to be restored to the original state in which God intended before sin entered the creation. All races—not just blacks and whites—scattered throughout the entire world need to be reconciled first to God and second to one another because of the universal impact of sin. This restoration is called reconciliation.” Jarvis J. Williams, *One New Man*, p. 3

“In John 17 Jesus repeatedly states that the unity of his people will be a convincing apologetic for Jesus and his gospel. Jesus prays that his followers will be brought "to complete unity" and states that when they are "the world will know that you [God the Father] sent me." The unity Jesus is speaking of must be both a visible unity and an abnormal unity. It has to be visible enough for non-Christians to see it and abnormal enough for non-Christians to need an explanation for it which only Jesus can satisfy. It can't be unity of a group of people who are already alike in every way. Such unity is normal in our world and would not stand as evidence that Jesus really is who he says he is. It must be unity of people who would never otherwise be together, apart from Jesus Christ. This includes unity across socio-economic, educational, generational, and cultural divides. It also includes unity across racial lines. In fact, in twenty-first century America, unity across racial lines may be the most powerful demonstration of unity that Christians can provide as evidence of Jesus' identity.” Cole Brown, “How Much Should a Gospel-Centered Christian Talk about Race?”, <http://www.humblebeast.com/follow-the-leader/2017/1/2/how-much-should-a-gospel-centered-christian-talk-about-race>

III. Question for Consideration

A. Knowing God’s plan for a unified yet intentionally multiethnic New Creation, how ought the Church Universal and the local church respond?

B. Should this impact our actions and evangelism at the local and global level?

C. How should this impact CBC?

D. How should this impact us in our personal relationships, and the way we see other cultures and ethnicities?

IV. Resources

A. Audio

1. Pass the Mic Podcast: <https://www.raanetwork.org/type/audio/>
2. “Bearing the Image: Identity, the Work of Christ, and the Church” by Thabiti Anyabwile: <http://t4g.org/media/2010/04/bearing-the-image-identity-the-work-of-christ-and-the-church-session-ii/>

3. “Racial Reconciliation” by Matt Chandler:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjLZLvzW45o&t=194s>
3. “A Candid Conversation on Race, Grace, and the Church” with Isaac Adams and Jonathan Leeman: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/candid-conversation-on-race-grace-the-church>
4. “Three Generations on Race Relations” with Robert Smith, Jr., Russell Moore, and Jason Cook: <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/three-generations-on-race-relations-en>
5. “What the Church Alone Offers the Community on Race” with Russell Moore, Ed Copeland, and Sandy Wilson: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-the-church-alone-offers-community-on-race>
6. “What About the Minority Experience in America Do Whites Often Miss?” with Trip Lee, Alex Medina, and Jemar Tisby:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-about-minority-experience-america-do-whites-often-miss>
7. “Understanding the Problem” with Propaganda:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3erYUuvqtk>
8. “20 Years” by Propaganda: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqAS2IPISa8&t=159s>
9. “13th” documentary on Netflix
10. “A Candid Conversation on Race, Grace, and the Church” with Isaac Adams and Jonathan Leeman: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/candid-conversation-on-race-grace-the-church>
11. “In His Image” by Matt Chandler: <http://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/in-his-image?nav=p-493443&clickpath=resources&wildcard=/detail/in-his-image/>
12. “Oneness Embraced: Racial Reconciliation, The Kingdom, and Justice: by Tony Evans: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-8RFZbkKsU>

B. Books

1. [One New Man](#) by Jarvis J. Williams
2. [From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race](#) by J. Daniel Hays
3. [Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America](#) by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith
4. [Letters to a Birmingham Jail](#) edited by Bryan Loritts
5. [Bloodlines](#) by John Piper
6. [Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention](#) edited by Kevin Jones and Jarvis J. Williams
7. [The Forging of Races](#) by Colin Kidd

C. Articles, Essays, and Blogs

1. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King, Jr.
http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/kingweb/popular_requests/frequentdocs/birmingham.pdf
2. “How Much Should a Gospel-Centered Christian Talk about Race?” by Cole Brown
<http://www.humblebeast.com/follow-the-leader/2017/1/2/how-much-should-a-gospel-centered-christian-talk-about-race>
3. “Redlining” Wikipedia article: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redlining>

4. "Red Lines, Black Lives" by Colin Gordon:
<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/redlining-black-lives-holc-mapping-inequality>
5. "What Shootings and Racial Justice Mean for the Body of Christ" by Russell Moore:
<http://www.russellmoore.com/2016/07/07/shootings-justice-body-of-christ/>
6. "How to Care for Victims of Racism" with Jerome Gay, Jr. and James Roberson
<http://www.careleader.org/care-victims-racism/>