

On Race and the Gospel

By: Kyle Worley and elders of Mosaic Church

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At Mosaic Church, we believe that it is crucial for the word of God to shape the way we view and engage the issues of our day. From time to time, the pastors of Mosaic engage in writing works of “practical theology.” We intend for these documents to be a pastorally sensitive, biblically rich, and theologically engaged treatment of issues that are on the hearts and minds of the people God has entrusted to our care.

As a note: These papers are not intended to be some kind of address to the church in America or all Christians everywhere. The pastors of Mosaic intend for them to be for the people whom God has entrusted to their care. We take seriously Peter’s admonition in 1 Peter 5 to “...shepherd the flock of God that is *among* you...” and ***we believe that serious matters require significant and proximate relationships.***

These papers are typically the result of a long season of study and reflection among our leaders. We spend months studying for them, crafting them, editing them, and getting feedback from elders, staff, deacons, and members of Mosaic. We test them with outside voices and subject matter experts as well, to measure their biblical fidelity, theological strength, and practical benefit.

Here is our hope: In a world in which it can feel as if there are so many people giving their opinions about matters of consequence, ***we hope that these papers, written by pastors who love you, care for you and pray for you, will be words of weight in an age of flimsiness.*** We hope you will consider them with sobriety and treat them with serious consideration as your views on the issues at hand come into focus. If nothing else, we hope that the paper demonstrates that the Christian exploration of issues of consequence will require more than memes, tweets, anecdotes and posts.

In the summer of 2021, we published [a paper “On Wisdom and School Options.”](#) The hope for that paper was that it would shape the way we talk about the sensitive subject of school options as a diverse church family united in the gospel. Now, we turn our attention to another subject that has been fraught with all manner of strife, confusion, and misunderstanding: The subject of race and the gospel.

Why would Mosaic Church take time to address this topic? Well there are five main reasons.

- We are already a church that is multiethnic, multicultural, and multiracial.
- We are a church that desires to be *increasingly* multiethnic, multicultural, and multiracial.
- There is widespread confusion (in both the church and the culture at large) about issues of race, justice, peacemaking, and diversity.
- We believe that the church bears a responsibility to address the issues that are present in the minds of its people and in the culture they live in.
- The Bible speaks to the core issues at play, and so should we.

The hope of this paper is not unlike that of previous work.

- We aim to provide a biblical perspective on the relevant issues.
- We aim to provide the “guardrails” for how we as a church will discuss this topic as a church family.
- We aim to provide a document that can be used by members of Mosaic Church to shape the way they discuss this topic with people outside of the church.

To accomplish this, we must begin with the witness of scripture and the theological engagement of the historic church on four relevant questions.

- What does the Bible say about all of humanity?
- What does the Bible say about race and racism?
- What does the Bible say about justice, peacemaking, and reconciliation?
- What does the Bible say about the composition of Christ’s church?

What does the Bible say about humanity?

From the beginning of the Christian story two fundamental realities about humanity have been clear. All people are created in the image of God, and sin disrupts our ability to engage with each other in helpful and holy ways.

We hear in Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” We often say that the *imago dei*, the doctrine that all people are created in the image of God and are worthy of unconditional dignity, is the most inconvenient doctrine. Why? Because it means that each person, regardless of how you feel about them or your preferences, should be treated with dignity, respect, and with the intent to “look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.” (Phil. 2:3)

But after sin enters the world in Genesis 3, we immediately see that humanity experiences separation from God, separation from true knowledge of self, and separation from each other in a way that did not exist prior to the fall. We are no longer able to treat each other as God has intended.

- In Genesis 3:7 — Humanity’s eyes opened to their nakedness and shame
- In Genesis 3:8 — Humanity hides from God
- In Genesis 3:11-12 — Adam blames Eve
- In Genesis 3:14-19 — We hear that one of the consequences of the fall will be strife between Adam and Eve

The first picture outside of Adam and Eve that we get concerning the impact of sin is in the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4 where Cain murders Abel out of envy, fear, and selfishness. In Genesis 11 we find out that God judged the arrogance of humanity after the flood by confusing and confounding the peoples at the Tower of Babel.

Before we even get out of the book of Genesis, it is clear that God has created humanity, with all of its diversity, in His image, but sin has so fractured humanity's relationship with God, with self, and with each other that what God has meant for good will now be marked by misunderstanding and confusion and will be subject to the impact of sin.

Beyond that, we find that the Bible is full of stories of human relationships gone horribly wrong: slavery, genocide, murder, idolatry, sexual abuse, slander, gossip, theft, systemic injustice, and yes, *racism*.

As the Christian story unfolds in scripture, we find out that not only are all humans image bearers who are broken by sin, but all humans stand in need of grace, righteousness, and salvation that can only be provided by God.

Romans 3 tells us that "no one is righteous...that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...". We discover in 2 Corinthians 5 that "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh...Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

But, despite what some might think, our salvation in Christ doesn't obliterate or destroy the ethnic and cultural differentiation present in humanity, but redeems it and reframes it within a new context. The divisions and separations of sin are repaired and now, once again, our ethnic and cultural differentiation is not a burden, it's a blessing.

This is what a healthy family of God's people will believe and practice.

What does the Bible say about "race"?

Any serious consideration of this question must begin with distinguishing between the ethnic difference(s) between peoples, cultural difference(s) between peoples, and socially created and reinforced racial hierarchies.

If by race we mean **ethnicity**, then the Bible has much to say about the history of ethnic differentiation and the way that ethnic differentiation is present in God's world and Christ's church.

If by race we mean **cultural differences**, then the Bible has much to say about the history of cultural differentiation and the way that cultural differentiation is liberated and showcased by unity in Christ and His people.

If by race we mean **socially created and reinforced hierarchies**, then the Bible has much to say about how to address the unique historical fallout and impact of these hierarchies in a given time, place, and people.

It's important to remember here that America's conversation on race has been and is often presently shaped by socially created and reinforced hierarchies (the third point on the list above)

to the detriment of people of color. But the Bible is able to paint a picture that properly showcases ethnic and cultural differentiation in God's world, kingdom, and church without falling prey to enforcing fictional differences to the detriment of one group.

Beginning with the first two foundational principles stated in the section above, we can move forward to see that **there is real ethnic and cultural differentiation in God's world**. After the flood in Genesis, we see that Noah's descendants begin to populate the world. Even as we reach the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, we are getting a glimpse that Noah's descendants are spreading over the world and multiplying. After Babel (Genesis 11), we are living in a world where image bearers are scattered throughout the world with various languages. The story of scripture paints a picture that as the world is populated by these scattered peoples, unique cultures begin to form among them.

Ethnic and cultural differentiation emerges as these scattered peoples, all image bearers of God, are shaped and formed by the land they inhabit, the languages they speak, the stories they tell, the cities and civilizations they build and the practices they engage in.

By the time Abraham shows up on the scene in Genesis 12, hundreds of years have passed and people groups have formed around the world from the descendants of Babel. Those people groups are identified throughout the Genesis narrative. In Abraham's story we encounter Canaanites, Egyptians, Perizzites, Ishmaelites, etc. Who are these people? They are the descendants of the scattered people of Babel, the descendants of Noah, the descendants of Adam and Eve.

Are they one race or many? **If by race you mean they are all, to use Genesis language, of the same "kind." Then yes, they are all one race.** They are all image bearers of God. They are all creatures endowed with the communicable properties of their creator. They are all tribes, all descendants of Adam and Eve. They are all human peoples.

But, **if by race you mean they are all of the same ethnic and cultural heritage, then the answer is no. They are ethnically and culturally differentiated.** They are of the same "kind," but they are not all the same in their ethnic and cultural histories, languages, appearances, experiences, and practices.

Like a tree that has many branches, all humans can trace their roots back to the same family line, but the many and varied branches that emerge off of the tree each have their unique shapes, sizes, and flowers. We are seeing this in the story of scripture from the earliest days of redemptive history.

These peoples are all the children of Adam and Eve, they are all the children of Noah, but they have begun to become increasingly different and differentiated as they spread over the earth after the flood and were scattered at Babel throughout the world and over hundreds of years and through a variety of languages. **They have been shaped by their location and language and they have shaped the world through location and language.**

Dr. J. Daniel Hays argues that we can really develop four categories of ethnicity in the Ancient Near East.

- The Asiatics or Semites: Israelites, Canaanites, Amorites, Arameans, etc.
- The Cushites: Black Africans, Nubians, Ethiopians.
- Egyptians: Blend of Asiatic, North African, and African elements.
- Indo-Europeans: Hittites and Philistines.

It is not until we get to Egypt that we begin to see that Israel exists as a unique people in the sight of the nations. As the biblical narrative progresses, we encounter more and more expressions of ethnic and cultural differentiation. We meet new people groups through Israel and we find out that Israel is called to be a light to the nations. Israel is differentiated throughout the Pentateuch as a people in contrast with the nations around them. But it doesn't take much to figure out that Israel as a nation was multiethnic and multicultural from the very beginning.

How do we know this?

- When Abraham's family arrives in Israel, they are already a group of ethnically and culturally differentiated peoples, and when Israel leaves Egypt it is noted that "a mixed multitude also went up with them..." (Exodus 12:38) Israel enters Egypt ethnically and culturally diverse and leaves the same way.
- Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was a Midianite. It is Jethro who advises Moses to appoint judges in Israel to help manage the workload of leading the people (Exodus 18).
- Moses, a child of Abraham and the post-Exodus leader of Israel, participates in the first inter-ethnic marriage in scripture when he marries a Black African (Cushite) woman in Numbers 12:1.
- Beyond that, the law that God gives to this multiethnic Israel has provisions in it for the welcome of sojourners and strangers; people that are ethnically and culturally different from Israel. Here are merely a couple of examples to demonstrate that Israel was to have an open door to the sojourner and stranger:
 - Deuteronomy 10:17-20 -- "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear."
 - Leviticus 19:33 -- "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

As we move into the Old Testament we find out a few more things that are helpful when we consider the question of *race* and *diversity* in scripture.

- Caleb, one of the heroes of the conquest period, was a Kenizzite (Numbers 32:12).

- Rahab is a Canaanite prostitute who helps rescue God's people (Joshua 2).
- Ruth is a Moabite widow who becomes a biological ancestor of Jesus Christ through inter-ethnic marriage with Boaz.
- All throughout the Psalms we hear that the nations will praise God, but one clear example is Psalm 45:17, which says, "I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations; therefore nations will praise you forever and ever."
- The same is true for the prophets, with notable examples in Isaiah 2, Isaiah 19, and Zechariah 8.

But, what about the New Testament? It has often been said that the Bible wants us to focus on our new identity in Christ and doesn't want us to see or acknowledge the ethnic or cultural differentiation present in our world. One might be tempted to turn to a passage like Galatians 3:28 which says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" and ask, *Doesn't this mean that our differences are done away with when we enter the new identity of "in Christ Jesus?"*

Well in short, no, that's not what it means. When we read this verse we don't say to ourselves: "Look, Paul is saying men and women don't exist any more because they are united in Christ!" Paul is not arguing that differences and distinction are obliterated in Christ, but that all difference and distinction is properly framed and expressed in union to Christ. We have been given a new identity, but that new identity doesn't destroy our distinctiveness, it frames it appropriately.

The same is true for ethnic and cultural differentiation. ***Entering into the new identity of life "in Christ Jesus" doesn't minimize ethnic and cultural differentiation, it magnifies the best of our unique ethnic and cultural heritages without making them the fundamental identity marker or bond between us as Christians.***

If the New Testament has nothing to say about race, then it certainly seems to spend a lot of time making sure we don't miss the ethnic and cultural differentiation of its cast of characters. We could point to so many explicit examples of the New Testament addressing the beauty and complexity of ethnic and cultural differentiation, but let's just list a handful.

- Jesus has an ethnically and culturally diverse biological ancestry. (Matthew 1:1-17)
- The wise men in the story of the Nativity are noted as coming "from the east." Almost all New Testament scholars and theologians agree that these are non-Israelites who most likely emerged from some descendant of the Persian empire.
- Jesus is redemptively engaged with Samaritans and Gentiles throughout his ministry, two ethnically and culturally differentiated groups from Israel who were the subjects of intense ridicule, insult, and injustice at the hands of Israel (John 4).
- We hear in Acts 2 that the Holy Spirit falls upon a "mixed multitude" (Parthians, Medes, Egyptians, Libyans, Arabians, etc.) at Pentecost.
- In Acts 8 we find out that an Ethiopian Eunuch, a member of the Ethiopian royal court, has been studying Isaiah, and Philip proclaims Jesus to him and he is baptized. It is generally agreed that the church in Ethiopia begins with this eunuch bringing the gospel back to Ethiopia.

- We hear in Acts 13:1-3 that the prophets and teachers at the church in Antioch included leaders from around the ancient world including “Simeon who was called Niger.” It is generally accepted that Simeon was a Black African leader in the church.
- In Revelation 7 we hear the promise that heaven will be marked by people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev. 7:9-10).

It becomes clear that if by “race” we mean the ethnic and cultural differentiation present within and among humans who bear the image of God, then the Bible has much to say about that. The Bible acknowledges ethnic and cultural differentiation, the Bible celebrates ethnic and cultural differentiation, and the people of God, from the very beginning were a “mixed multitude” that was ethnically and culturally diverse.

But more often than not, the conversation around race in America is not informed by what the Bible has to say about humanity, race and ethnic and cultural differentiation. Instead, the conversation around race in America is shaped by the unique history of America.

This history isn’t irrelevant, and it has become increasingly clear that many Christians are completely unfamiliar with the full scope of hundreds of years of oppression, enslavement, and injustice that has existed for people of color in the history of America. **For the Christian, it is important to take into account this history when we speak to the issue of race. Why? Because we believe that God is providentially in control of the world, because those who identified as God’s people were often at the ideological center of oppressive systems like chattel slavery[1] as well as liberating ideas like abolition, and because the histories of nations impact future generations within those nations.**

For example, by taking passages of scripture out of context and by ignoring what the whole Bible says, Christian teaching was often used in order to encourage and sustain chattel slavery in America. On the other side, the strongest abolitionist voices in Britain and America were voices operating out of the Christian worldview. This presents us with an interesting contrast in how the Christian story can be used by people to bless or to burden.

More often than not in our national conversation, “race” is used without reference to the account of it we find in scripture. Instead, “race” is used with reference to what amounts to a “social construct.” To what is referred to as “socially created and reinforced” hierarchies between image bearers.

In this view, race is a way of segmenting people in society rooted in false or fictional differences between people, usually but not always, based on their color or appearance. An example of this would be seeing a group of three Black men from Haiti, Nigeria, and England and reducing their background and experiences and cultures by grouping or segmenting them as only one category: “Black.” It is this view of race that is at the heart of racism, systemic injustice, and it is

this view of race that many men and women of color have challenged that stands at the core of the problem of race in America.

We live in a racialized society, one of many racialized societies in the history of civilization, but one with particular contours given our history and the people involved in that history. Just like the Jewish community of Jesus' day had a history with the Samaritans and Gentiles that created a racialized hierarchy with Jews on top and Samaritans and Gentiles on the bottom, the history of America is one of a racialized hierarchy with "white" peoples on top and "people of color" on the bottom.

Not only is it indisputable that America has had a partiality problem historically, favoring white peoples over people of color, it is true theologically that only God is perfect in not showing partiality (Rom. 2:11), which means that **whether we are aware of it or not, all people everywhere have a partiality problem**. The extent and impact of that partiality problem is typically textured by the interplay of power, wealth, historical and cultural practices, and population within a given nation.

What is partiality? When someone's difference from another person or group is held against them and their role/worth is judged on that basis.

There are many kinds of partiality, but in scripture I believe we see three dominant kinds of partiality:

- Economic partiality: Holding poverty against the poor.
- Moral partiality: Holding some kinds of sin as more "sinful" than other kinds of sin.
- Ethnic and cultural partiality: Holding someone's ethnic or cultural differentiation from you or your "group" against them or their "group."

While the Bible celebrates the ethnic and cultural differentiation we find in the world, and while this ethnic and cultural differentiation has always been present among God's people, the "socially created and reinforced" view of race is a reality that those who live in America must deal with in light of the principles of sin, salvation, peace, and justice that we find in scripture. The largest effect of this "socially created and reinforced" view of race is what we often call "racism," which is a kind of partiality.

What does the Bible say about "racism?"

Throughout scripture it is clear that God is concerned about the way that sin has impacted our ability to treat each other as image bearers. It appears that there are countless ways that the impact of sin can affect, impact and disrupt our ability to treat each other with the dignity that is owed.

Scripture deals with all kinds of ways in which image bearing is transgressed across history and culture.

- Murder: The unjust killing of an image bearer.
- Theft: Stealing from an image bearer.
- Lust: Objectifying an image bearer.

But these principles take on unique shape within various cultures and contexts. For example, Jesus' regular appeals and storytelling around Samaritans had a unique impact on an Israelite audience. Why? Because of the unjust way that Israel had historically dealt with Samaritans. Jesus steps into the unique historical circumstances of his audience to address their sin.

The Jewish people had a racism problem. They viewed the Samaritans as inferior because of their ethnic and cultural differentiation. They exaggerated the real differences between Samaritans, Gentiles and Jews into a kind of fictional differentiation that resulted in Israel viewing Samaritans and Gentiles as dirty, inferior and wicked by virtue of their origin, ethnicity and/or culture.

There are many examples of this in the Bible. Here are a few more.

- Jonah is a story where we find out that Jonah despised the Ninevites (a people ethnically and culturally different from him) so much that he was angry that God did not destroy them. The book ends with him being rebuked by Yahweh for his hardness of heart (Jonah 4:1-4).
- All throughout the New Testament, but in Acts and Galatians in particular, we see Paul correcting the Judaizers. The Judaizers practiced racism — ethnic and cultural partiality — against the Gentiles by taking a mark of their ethnic and cultural differentiation (circumcision) and demanding it of Gentile converts to Christianity (Galatians 2:14). Paul has to deal with Judaizers and Jewish Christians who engage in this kind of partiality throughout his ministry and letters.
- In Acts 10:28, God gives Peter a vision that makes clear to him: “And he said to them, ‘You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.’” This vision is counterintuitive for Peter because of his implicit bias, partiality, and racism towards Gentiles.[2]
- In Acts 10:34 (and Romans 2:11) we hear “God shows no partiality.” This is different from humans who have to strive to not show partiality: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality” (1 Tim. 5:21). We have to be told to not show partiality, but God does not.
- We find an extended treatment against the sin of partiality in James 2:1-9.

Based on these passages and encounters, what might a biblical definition of “racism” look like? We propose, in keeping with a variety of other Christian definitions, the following.

Racism is the direct/explicit or indirect/implicit belief or work of partiality that defaces, mocks, subjugates, marginalizes and/or oppresses image bearers by virtue of their

ethnic differentiation, cultural differentiation, or, more often, the outward appearances, accents, expressions, or distinctions of their ethnic or cultural differentiation.

We often think of sin in radically individualistic ways, meaning that sin is always and only one's exercising of will to do something wrong or to not do something right. But this isn't the only way that Scripture views sin. Sin isn't only an individual doing something wrong or not doing something right, sin includes the following.

- **Corporate/national sin:** The unrighteous and wicked histories of nations and peoples.
 - Example: The mistakes of the past impacting, affecting and infecting the present.
 - Scripture references: "Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities." (Lamentations 5:7)
- **Motivations:** The intentions of our heart.
 - Example: The unspoken, sometimes unnoticed, motivations of a heart broken by sin.
 - Scripture reference: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Gen. 6:5)
- **Sins of commission:** When we do something we ought not do.
 - Example: When we break God's law or disobey God's commands.
 - Scripture reference: "For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality." (Colossians 3:25)
- **Sins of omission:** When we don't do something we ought to do.
 - Example: When we don't obey God's commands.
 - Scripture reference: "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." (James 4:17)

In other words, we do not believe the term "racism" (or any sin against image bearers for that matter) is reserved only for instances of an individual hating someone or wishing evil on someone because of their appearance. Racism, like all sin, can take all kinds of devious shapes.

- **Personal partiality:** When we harbor beliefs, act on motivations or intentions or take action against someone(s) on the basis of our partiality or preference for or against them.
 - Example: The practice of slander or derogatory slurs is an expression of personal partiality. Another example would be harboring beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes or caricatures of people or people groups based on anecdotal experience, stories, or individual interactions with specific people.
- **Corporate or systemic partiality (i.e. systemic injustice):** When a system harbors beliefs, acts on motivations or intentions or takes action against someone(s) on the basis of its partiality or preference for or against them.
 - Example: The practice of "redlining" in America is an expression of systemic partiality. In this practice, services (typically financial) were denied to residents of certain areas based on their race or ethnicity.

- **Speech:** When derogatory words directed at or concerning image bearers that are ethnically or culturally differentiated are used or tolerated.
 - Example: Derogatory speech or words, slurs especially but also jokes, mocking speech, or slander that is rooted in diminishing an image bearers because of their ethnic or cultural differentiation is racist speech.
- **Actions:** When harmful action or inaction is directed at individuals, groups, or the property/institutions of ethnically or culturally differentiated groups.
 - Example: The practice of lynching throughout America's history is an example of racist action.

Ultimately, racism is a way of practicing unjust partiality or preference in our judgments of other image bearers. But because of the nature and impact of sin, racism isn't merely expressed by individual people, but also by the systems that people build.

But we aren't stuck there. Paul charges elders and church in 1 Timothy 5:21, "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality." James, in James 2, writes, "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."

So, let's be clear about the following three things.

- Only God sees the heart and is perfect in impartiality.
- We, who are not God, will practice partiality. The only questions are to or against whom, when and how?
- But it's clear from scripture, that for the Christian, like other sins, it is possible to confess and repent from partiality and learn to walk in obedience to God's will and way.

So, is racism personal or systemic?

In many ways, this question is at the core of much of the confusion around the topic of race and the gospel. But to answer it, we should begin by asking this question: **How has sin impacted the world?**

It is clear from the beginning that sin has fractured the following.

- Humanity's relationship with God
- Humanity's relationship with self
- Humanity's relationship with one another
- Humanity's relationship with the created order

Sin's impact is not just on individual people, but on everything they create and cultivate. How do we see this in the Bible?

- Pre-flood sinfulness: In Genesis 6 we find out that society has become so wicked that God must judge, not just a single person or family, but the whole world.

- The Tower of Babel: In Genesis 11 God scatters the people for a corporate work of idolatry and sin.
- Egypt: In the Exodus event, God judges the entire nation of Egypt for the sin and hardheartedness of Pharaoh.
- Corporate guilt in Israel: Regularly in the Old Testament God judges Israel for the sins of a few.
- Nineveh: God calls all of Nineveh, the entire nation, to repent.
- Wicked nations: Throughout the prophets, particularly the minor prophets, God challenges the wickedness of entire nations, including Israel.

It is clear from the story of scripture that sin doesn't just impact the individual who commits a specific sin, sin always has a corporate impact. Always. In addition, because systems are built by broken image bearers, we should expect that any system (business, organization, institution, government, society, etc.) will be a mixture of beauty and brokenness. All systems have been broken by sin, so it should be no surprise to find out that systemic injustice is at play in systems built by beautiful and broken image bearers of God.

But shouldn't we just move on, what good does it do to remember and dwell on all of this? Why should we take into account God's history in dealing with nations?

It's important to remember and dwell on the national/corporate/systemic impact of sin because of the following.

- God's word does.
- God often reminds his people of both their sinful past and his surprising grace.
- We live in a radically individualistic culture that is philosophically out of touch with the worldview of scripture.
- God loves the whole world and will one day make all things new in Christ Jesus.

Remembering corporate/national sin isn't to suggest that people bear personal responsibility for the sins of person(s) in the past, but it does mean that the sins of person(s) in the past affects life for everyone in the present. The impact of past sin in the life of people(s), nation(s), or person(s) is indisputable and can be seen in a clear arc over the course of scripture, beginning with Adam (the federal head of humanity) but continuing over the course of redemptive history. This continues to hold true throughout human history and should be reflected in our personal awareness of how personal and corporate sin in the past often shapes the way we live in the present.

So, if the problem of racism has impacted us as individuals and our societies, what is the solution?

What does the Bible say about how racism and systemic injustice should be addressed? (Peace, Justice, Reconciliation, and Love)

So if racism is a problem, and it's not just personal but has systemic expressions as well, how does the gospel of Christ Jesus address these problems?

In our study of Romans we have discovered that the good news of the gospel is: **God saves, God reigns**. This means that the nature of salvation in the Bible is not merely the story of individual lives saved from the consequences of sin, but that Jesus Christ is "going to make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). Jesus Christ is not only the covenant Lord of his people, saving them from the curse of sin and death, He is the cosmic Lord, who will restore the whole world to rights.

When we think about the problem of racism and systemic injustice, what is God's answer?

It is the gospel. The good news is that Jesus Christ has come to rescue us from living lives where we directly or indirectly practice the poison of partiality and racism, *and* He has come to restore the world to a place where the way that partiality and racism run amok in our lives and the systems we have built or inhabit is done away with, for good, forever.

There are four words that are often referenced to describe Christ and His people's work of salvation, repair, and restoration. **They are peace/peacemaking, reconciliation, love, and justice.**

Peace/peacemaking: We are to be peacemakers. Christians are people who have been forgiven of an insurmountable debt and we are called to extend radical forgiveness. Christians are people who have been given peace with God so that they can extend peace to one another and to the world.

In Proverbs 12:20 we hear that, "Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who plan peace have joy." In the Sermon on the Mount we hear Jesus say: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9). In Hebrews 12:14, we hear, "Strive for peace with everyone and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

Scripture is clear: *God intends for his people to receive peace with God in Jesus Christ and to practice peace and peacemaking in the world.* If we are going to be people who bring the story of Scripture to bear on the racialized problems of our world, we must be a peacemaking people.

Reconciliation: We have been reconciled to God and given the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is the process by which two or more hostile parties or people are brought into peaceful, restored fellowship with one another. But reconciliation will involve both love and justice.

In Romans 5 we hear that "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..." In addition, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, "All this is from God, who through Christ

reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”

Our world is caught up in the mire of division and partiality, but Christians are people who have been reconciled to God, even while they were God’s enemies. Therefore, they can be ministers of reconciliation in the midst of a broken and divided world and should be compelled to bring restoration into every area of life.

Love: The Bible speaks often of love, but the Scripture’s view of love is multifaceted, including many different words to express the full range of Christian love. In short, Christians are to practice worshipping love toward Jesus and self-sacrificial love toward their family in Christ and their neighbors in the world.

Some expressions of love for our fellow man in scripture include the following.

- Leviticus 19:17 — “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.”
- Leviticus 19:18 — “You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”
- Leviticus 19:34 — “The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as a native among you and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

Jesus calls the love of neighbor the second greatest commandment after love of God. And we don’t just love our friends, neighbors, and brothers/sisters in Christ, we are also called to love our enemy. It is overwhelmingly clear that love must be a chief virtue among all Christian parties when dealing with the issue of race and the scourge of racism.

Justice: In order for reconciliation to happen, there will need to be justice and repair.

You may find it interesting to discover that in the Bible’s language, justice and righteousness share an etymological root. They are both rooted in the same word. To speak of justice is to speak of righteousness and vice versa.

Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke, when looking at the concept of righteousness in the Old Testament in particular will go so far as to say, “The righteous *willingly disadvantage themselves* for the sake of God’s creation (Gen. 8:1), their neighbors (Ezekiel 18:5-9), and their heavenly King. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of righteousness.”

In addition, we hear in Micah 6:8, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

The Psalmist writes, “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute” (Psalm 82:3). Isaiah the prophet writes, “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, and plead the widow’s cause” (Isaiah 1:17).

In the Proverbs we hear the following.

- “Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is gracious to the needy honors God.” (14:31)
- “The righteous person is concerned for the rights of the poor, the wicked do not understand such concern.” (29:7)

One might say, *But that was the Old Testament. We aren't expected to fulfill those expectations today are we?* That would be shortsighted. Jesus' entire teaching ministry is a call to mercy, love, reconciliation, and justice. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus ...

- Says hate is equivalent to murder
- Calls us to love our enemies
- Tells us to not retaliate when wrong is done to us
- Gives us the golden rule

We get to see an invitation into the work of justice between the Apostle Paul and Philemon concerning the runaway slave Onesimus in his letter to Philemon.

“I appeal to you for...Onesimus...I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart...that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother..”

Paul will write in Romans 12:15-18, “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Christians are expected and invited to operate justly, to practice justice. That is a nonnegotiable virtue and practice for those seeking to follow Jesus.

There are many different perspectives on how justice, peacemaking, reconciliation and love should play out socially, culturally, economically and politically. **The elders of Mosaic are confident that our church will reflect a diversity of opinions on matters of application, but we believe there can be no question around the centrality of peacemaking, reconciliation, love and justice in the life and worldview of a Christian.**

We may disagree on unique cultural applications or approaches to seeing love, justice, peacemaking or reconciliation applied, but the Christian cannot deny that these virtues should govern our engagement on the topic of race.

Conclusion: What does this mean for us?

Mosaic Church is a multiethnic and multicultural church. And we aspire to be increasingly multiethnic and multicultural.

Not because it is culturally *en vogue* — those winds are subject to change at a moment's notice — but because God holds out a vision of a multicultural and multiethnic family of faith that will be firmly united in heaven. A people from every “tribe, tongue, and nation” (Rev. 7) united together fully, for good, forever in Jesus Christ. Why *wouldn't* we want a foretaste of that today?

Since we are (and aspire to be) a multicultural and multiethnic family of faith united in Christ Jesus, **we will need to cultivate a curiosity and a culture of honor and appreciation around the unique ethnic and cultural differentiation of our church family.**

This means we want to seriously consider how we can acknowledge, embody, celebrate, and praise Christ for the uniqueness of the people of Mosaic Church.

Since we are, and aspire to be, a multicultural and multiethnic family of faith united in Christ Jesus, **we will need to cultivate an awareness of how our unique cultural and ethnic background has formed each of us to practice partiality (including, but not limited to, racism).**

This means we have to do the interior work of considering how we have been affected, directly or indirectly, by preference, privilege and partiality. This should lead us to confession, self-awareness, repentance, obedience and freedom.

Since we are, and aspire to be, a multicultural and multiethnic family of faith united in Christ Jesus, **we will need to be sensitive and empathetic to those in our midst for whom living in a racialized society is a different experience from our own.**

This means that we will need to practice the way of Jesus by entering into the worlds of one another, including people who are ethnically and culturally differentiated from us, with a “gentle and lowly heart” that seeks to practice humble empathy as we seek and speak the truth in love. This should lead us to humility, curiosity, and tenderness as we take into account the experiences of others.

Since we are, and aspire to be, a multicultural and multiethnic family of faith united in Christ Jesus, **we will need to be watchful over how the dominant political, social, cultural, and economic narratives of our age will be used by those in power to divide us from one another.**

This means we will need to provide biblical and theological responses to political, social, and economic questions and issues. We will need to learn how to speak the story of scripture in response to the false stories of our age.

Since we are, and aspire to be, a multicultural and multiethnic family of faith united in Christ Jesus, **we must look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of our brothers and sisters in Christ who have not had the same privileges and powers we have had as a result of life in a racialized society.**

This means we must seek to practice corporate and individual generosity in a sacrificial way in all matters that reflects the impact of a racialized society on the people within it.

Affirmations and Denials

- We believe and affirm that all humans are created in the image of God and are worthy of dignity, honor, respect, and love.
- We deny that some humans are greater than others by virtue of their ethnic or cultural differentiation.
- We believe and affirm that God has created and ordained an ethnically and culturally differentiated world that is reflected in the composition of his church and that will exist forever as an ethnically and culturally differentiated family in Christ.
- We deny that ethnic and cultural differentiation are problems to be fixed or beauties to be ignored. We deny that living a life that ignores, diminishes or destroys ethnic and cultural differentiation is the way that the story of Scripture talks about our unity and redemption in Christ Jesus.
- We believe and affirm that the fundamental identity of the Christian is “in Christ Jesus” and that this becomes the core identity of any Christian.
- We deny that ethnic and cultural differentiation should be ignored, denied or dismissed for those who are in Christ Jesus. At the same time, we deny that ethnic and cultural differentiation should be considered the fundamental identity of a Christian’s life.
- We believe and affirm that America’s racialized culture, composed of created and reinforced racialized hierarchies and stereotypes has uniquely impacted the way race is viewed in America.
- We deny that America’s view of race is the biblical view of ethnic and cultural differentiation. We believe that accepting America’s view of this issue will result in providing shortsighted diagnoses and solutions.
- We believe and affirm that love, peacemaking, reconciliation and justice should be the virtues and practices that characterize the Christian approach to race, racism and systemic injustice.
- We deny that there is *only one* Christian approach to the application of justice, peacemaking, reconciliation and love as it relates to cultural, political and economic issues, or public expressions of these virtues and practices.

Appendix: “On Critical Race Theory”

(If you have rushed to the bottom of this paper to read this appendix, we strongly encourage you to read the full paper before reading this appendix.)

In the last few years, critical race theory has become a talking point in the national discourse around race, politics, justice, and for our purposes, religion. While critical race theory, as a discipline, is not new, it certainly has risen to a unique level of notoriety in conversations that *feel* new to many people who are grappling with issues of race.

Critical race theory emerged among a group of legal scholars in the 1970s, but its roots go much further back. While this history extends beyond the scope of this article, it's important to realize that critical race theory, like any "new idea," was not entirely new. It built off a tradition (or root) of critical theory that had many branches with one of the larger branches being the thoughts and writing of Karl Marx. To say that Karl Marx is the originator of critical theory would be to say too much, but to say that he left a huge impression on critical theory would be accurate.

There are many definitions of critical race theory, but if I may offer a generous definition that is broad in scope: **critical race theory is the idea that power dynamics are often at play in a racialized society in a way that disadvantages those who are without the social power or currency to effect change in that society.**

It is unquestionable that critical theory (and critical race theory, for that matter) has been articulated, used and applied in ways that are not congruent with the witness of scripture and Christian belief. Like all secular ideologies, there are things to learn from critical theory and critical race theory, but they cannot be accepted in their totality. **And as a worldview -- a controlling narrative or story that makes sense of the world -- critical race theory must be rejected as incompatible with the Christian story, Christian belief, and Christian formation.**

Some would suggest that because it is secular in origin it should have no bearing on how Christians think about the issues of race, justice, history, and peacemaking. But the Christian tradition has historically made use of ideas, tools and resources from outside of the Christian faith in order to articulate, address, and apply Christian truth. For example, in early Trinitarian theology the church fathers made active use of the work of Plato and Aristotle in order to communicate the logic and substance of who God was. This is not uncommon in the history of the church, but it should always be done with a critical eye toward authorities outside of scripture. Even the Apostle Paul himself makes use of pagan poetry and philosophy in his argumentation (Acts 17:28, 1 Cor. 15:33, Titus 1:12). The African church father Augustine called this "plundering the Egyptians." (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*)

There has been concern from Christians on whether critical race theory is helpful or harmful to conversations regarding race, justice, peacemaking, and reconciliation. Here is what we can say: **critical race theory, if considered as a tool and not a worldview, and if held in complete submission to the authority of scripture, could provide helpful insights into the issue of race in America, but critical race theory is in no way necessary for a vibrant Christian perspective and practice on race, justice, and peace, and if not held in proper relationship to the authority of scripture, it could be harmful.**

Critical race theory, or any secular ideology, can be a helpful tool that a Christian can explore, but every one of its insights (*strong or weak*) must be tested and held against the witness of Scripture. If it falls short, it must be properly re-positioned in one's thinking, **and at the end of the day all claims to truth, goodness, and beauty are subservient and submitted to the final authority of God's word.**

There are two strong concerns that should be weighed in assessing the value or helpfulness of critical theory (including critical race theory).

- Critical theory (including critical race theory) has strong ties to contemporary confusion over gender, sexuality and identity, and often contains many starkly unbiblical philosophies. For many proponents of critical theory or critical race theory, if you are unwilling to accept all of critical theory or critical race theory in its entirety, then you are not welcome to the discussion on issues of love, peacemaking, reconciliation, and justice.
- Critical theory (including critical race theory) has strong ties to polarizing political and economic philosophies, such as Marxism/Communism, that make it an unfriendly partner in Christian thought.

Unfortunately, critical race theory has become a phrase that is used to challenge any idea that some don't like. This means that if someone calls something "critical race theory," you should ask, "In what way is this thing, idea, book, organization or project motivated by, rooted in or attached to critical race theory?" And then, as a Christian, move past the buzzwords of our culture and into consideration of the thing, idea, book, organization or project in relation to the witness of scripture, the history of orthodox theology and the unique contours of the Christian experience.

Let's call things what they are and be hesitant to merely accept that something is bad because someone calls it a name that means "bad" to them. May we be an embodiment of Paul's challenge to the church in Philippi: "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone" (Phil. 4:7). Or as he challenges Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:7, "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths."

Recommended Resources

As you have seen in this paper, the fundamental resource for the Christian exploration of any issue is Scripture, which is God's holy word. So any Christian exploration will begin with a serious consideration of what God's word says. At the same time, we are blessed to have Christians who have done strong work on the topics that matter and have written meaningful books on these crucial topics.

These are some of the resources the elders of Mosaic Church have found to be beneficial in exploring the issue of the Gospel and Race from a biblical, theological, and historical perspective.

If you'd like to dig into this topic more we encourage you to begin with reading the relevant scripture references throughout the paper, then moving toward the recommended resources in the order they are listed under each heading.

*(It should be noted that we do not endorse any of these resources as representative of the **whole** position or practice at Mosaic, but as helpful resources in exploring this topic further.)*

Biblical

- *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* by J. Daniel Hays
- *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity* by Jarvis Williams

Theological

- *The Beautiful Community: Unity, Diversity, and the Church at its Best* by Irwyn Ince Jr.
- *Reading While Black* by Esau McCaulley

Historical

- *Free at Last?: The Gospel in African American Experience* by Carl Ellis Jr.

Pastoral

- *United* by Trillia Newbell
- *Oneness Embraced* by Tony Evans (A recent sermon of his [here](#).)

[1] Chattel slavery is a system of slavery where one person has total ownership over another. In chattel slavery, a person is treated as merely an object that another owns and can use at their whim for their benefit. While chattel slavery was the dominant form of enslavement in American history, it is philosophically and historically different from the bondsman slavery that we find in the New Testament.

[2] At first glance this may seem to contradict the argument of this paper: Is Peter saying that the law of God practiced partiality against people from other nations? But what is happening here is that Peter is learning that narrow applications of the law, applications that had been reified by Jewish legalism over centuries, had not been accurate approaches to the law and that they should be clarified as the gentile mission began in the early church.