

Statement on Racial Injustice and Reconciliation

Woodcreek Church



General Statement

With humility, love, and a desire for unity and God's glory to be seen, we would like to offer some Biblical guidance on how Christians should think about and discuss issues and questions of race, justice, and reconciliation. These brief thoughts do not cover all possible issues and questions, but we pray that what we share will be helpful while staying centered around the gospel and reconciling love of Jesus Christ.

We desire to obey the Word of God in demonstrating love across racial/ethnic boundaries. We will strive to be a congregation that better reflects the demographic make-up of our community by being a place where all people feel welcome and wanted. This will be a testimony to the world of Christ's love for all people and the transforming power of the Gospel to unite across racial/ethnic boundaries so that, ultimately, God will be glorified.

Racism, like all sin, will not be fully eliminated from the world until Jesus returns. However, we must still actively work to eradicate racism from our own lives, our church, and our communities. Do not give up, and do not grow weary of doing good to everyone (Galatians 6:9-10).

Detailed Explanation

The Bible speaks of only one race: the human race. The Bible speaks of tribes, nations (the Greek word *εθνος* from which we get ethnicity), and tongues, however, because the word "race" has been used so widely, we will use it in this document to generally mean different people groups based on skin color as well as tribes, nations, and tongues.

Racism means to adversely discriminate based on one's racial prejudice, bigotry, or bias. The Bible addresses racism as the sin of favoritism, also known as partiality. Favoritism (not to be confused with favor) is the practice of giving unfair preferential treatment to one person or group *at the expense of another*. Scripture is clear that it is wrong (sin) to show favoritism (James 2:1, 9, Rom 2:11, Acts 10:34, James 2:1-26, Lev. 19:15, 34).

The Universal Problem

To understand racism and racial injustice we must first understand sin and how our fallen state impacts our relationship with God and with the world. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, it broke our relationship with Him and with one another. We have been sinning against God and one another ever since. This sin problem runs deep in every human heart (individual and group). There is no difference in the human condition of sinners due to age, ethnicity, or sex, and as a result, all human relationships, nations, people groups, systems, and institutions have been negatively affected by sin.

The Historic Problem in America

It is important to recognize and admit that one of the ways this sin problem expressed itself early on in our country was through the practice of slavery. Some humans created in the image of God (who were white) treated other humans created in the image of God (who were black) as if they were not equally valuable image bearers of God. They were treated as property: owned, sold, mistreated, abused, separated from their families, and sometimes even killed. This continued for generations. Even after a civil war when slavery was legally abolished, racism continued in other forms through laws (ex: Jim Crow laws) that separated black people from white people in where they could live, eat, work, go to school and even go to

church. Those who attempted to defy these laws often faced arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence, and even death.

The Current Problem in America

Racism is a complex and multi-faceted issue that is not something easily addressed and removed. Although much progress has been made in our country, there is work left to be done. It continues to exist years after the Jim Crow laws were abolished by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Wherever examples of racism are found, it should be confronted, denounced, and eliminated.

Implications of Our Beliefs

The Good News

The good news of the gospel tells that Jesus Christ came to reconcile us to God and to entrust us with the message of reconciliation to others (2 Cor 5:18-21). Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has broken down the dividing wall that separates us and has established peace where there was once hostility (Eph 2:13-16). And one day Jesus will return to make all things new. All who are in Him will join an assembly that will include “every tribe, language, people, and nation,” and we will worship the Savior together. As members of the Body of Christ (the Church) we must now find our primary identity in Jesus Christ instead of our race or ethnicity or nationality. Until that day, God desires the Church of Jesus Christ to give the world a glimpse of His coming kingdom by how we love and treat each other (Eph 4:32, Rom 12:9-10).

Heaven

The biblical vision of heaven is an incredible picture of a multi-ethnic throng gathered in worship of our Triune God (Rev 7:9). God wants “His kingdom come, His will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven” (Matt 6:10), proclaiming and living out our diverse unity in Christ. True biblical unity testifies to the gospel’s power and is a compelling witness to the world of the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

The Church

Part of the role of the church in the world is to model and reflect this Gospel of reconciliation. To that end, we lament any personal and corporate sins of prejudice and partiality. We should also be diligent to model a loving, antiracist treatment of everyone while promoting biblical equality and justice in the church and in society. This is part of what it means to be “salt and light” in the world (Matt 5:13-16).

Grief

We grieve over the continued presence of racism in our country. It is our desire to stand firm against it and to show an unbelieving world what true, biblical reconciliation looks like. At its root, racism is not a social or political issue; it is a sin issue with social and political implications. Although social and political changes can and should be made, because the problem is sin, the ultimate solution is not found in our laws or systems but in our transformed hearts through the gospel of Jesus.

God's Desire for Reconciliation

It is God’s will for the world that all people be reconciled to Him in Christ (2 Peter 3:9). The mission of the Church is to make disciples of **all people** (Matt 28:16). This is difficult, to say the least, because we live in a sinful and broken world. But the mission is the same, nonetheless. And, that mission is and has always been racially and ethnically inclusive. Through the Holy Spirit and the Bible, God gives power to the church to create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture.

Our calling is confirmed in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19: *“Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ 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 He has committed the message of reconciliation to us.”* Therefore, racial reconciliation is possible since we have been reconciled to Christ.

Practical Guidelines for the Work of Reconciliation

- We begin by affirming there is no place for racial prejudice and ethnic favoritism in the church (Galatians 3:28; James 2:1).
- In Christ, God makes no distinction between people based on any ethnic or man-made category (Colossians 3:11; Romans 10:12), and neither should we.
- The notion of racial superiority is a denial of the image of God (*imago dei*, Gen. 1:27). Where prejudice or bigotry or intolerance based on skin color exists, it should be denounced and repented of (Eph. 2:14; 1 John 3:15).
- We should seek to understand. It is wise to listen to (Proverbs 18:13) and understand each other before forming an opinion (Proverbs 18:2). God's Word says we should be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger (James 1:19-20). We should actively work to avoid jumping to conclusions based on limited information from just one source (Proverbs 18:17). We must not have "itching ears" that only hear what we want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3-4).
- We should examine our own hearts. No one is fully without sin (1 John 1:8), and you may have faults that are hidden even to yourself (Psalm 19:12; Jeremiah 17:9). We should regularly pray for God's help in searching our hearts (Psalm 139:23-24) and examining our ways (Lamentations 3:40) so that we can repent of sinful attitudes and behaviors (Acts 17:30). It can help to openly discuss our perceptions, biases, and past sins with other trusted believers in community. We are not yet perfect (Philippians 3:12), but we should continually strive to become more Christlike (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:28-29).
- When we have sinned against someone, we should confess (Proverbs 28:13; James 5:16), repent (2 Chronicles 7:14; Romans 2:4) and seek to reconcile with them (Matthew 5:23-24). If someone has sinned against us, we should forgive them as Christ has forgiven us (Matthew 6:14-15 and 18:21-35; Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:31-32).
- We should defend and help those who are hurting. When someone has been hurt by racism, they should not grieve alone. We should mourn with them (Romans 12:15), meet their needs (1 John 3:16-18), and advocate for their rights (Proverbs 31:8-9). We need to take the time to listen to and understand (Proverbs 18:13), humbly seeking to serve the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4). We should be known by how we love each other (John 13:34-35); if we do not love each other, then how can we say that we love God (1 John 4:20-21)?
- As Members of one body, we must fight for unity. There is a very real and ever-present enemy that wants nothing more than to facilitate chaos, confusion, paralysis, and division (John 10:10; Eph 6:12), but God desires that all things be united together in Him through the redemption made available through Christ (Eph 1:7-9).
- The reality of racial division in our country means that Christian parents of all ethnic backgrounds must teach their children about the gospel, race, racism, and discrimination.
- Under no circumstances should we ever condone or downplay racism. It should also be noted that unfair accusations of racism are equally unacceptable. As Christians we must be especially careful in labeling others (individuals or groups) as racist. (See Exodus 20:16, Exodus 23:1 and 7, 1 Peter 2:1-3)
- The gospel must be the main thing that unites us (Eph 1:7-9; 2:1-22). We must share the gospel so that the lost become the converted and then take part in the solution. In fulfillment of our mission, we should be disciples who make disciples who make disciples, and those disciples should be from all people (Matt 28:16-18).

Prayer for Reconciliation

God, help us. We ask you to:

- Open our eyes and hearts to the hurts and concerns of people from all races and ethnicities.
- Grant us the compassion to weep with those who weep.

- Compel us to develop genuine friendships with people from other races and ethnicities.
- Give us humility, wisdom, and discernment as we talk with one another.
- Give us courage to confront sin when we see it in ourselves and in others and advocate for change.
- Strengthen us to strive for oneness, not sameness, and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

Tips for Conversation

- Set some ground rules (these tips might be part of them)
- Pray
- Listen
- Learn
- Ask questions
- Assume the best
- Be gracious
- Be humble
- Do not keep score
- Check in with how you and the others are feeling about the conversation
- Pray some more!

Conclusion

“History is a record of humans treating other humans in ungodly ways. Sometimes that sin expresses itself along racial lines or sexual lines or political lines, geographic lines, socio-economic class lines, and more. Any number of ways you can think about dividing humans, we find ways to sin against one another. That should not surprise us. And yet, just because it does not surprise us does not mean we should accept it or overlook it.

As the people of God, we should recognize it, name it, and then act in godly ways to move us towards justice and righteousness for all people.” - Scott Stonehouse

“There is no institution more equipped and capable of bringing transformation to the cause of reconciliation than the church. But we have some hard work to do.” - John Perkins

John Perkins is right, ...**“we have some hard work to do”**, but praise God, as believers we have His inspired word to inform us, His Holy Spirit indwelling us, direct access to the Father, Jesus leading the way to true reconciliation and interceding on our behalf, and fellow believers and advisors to sharpen us and hold us accountable along the way.

We are called to do this (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). We have all that we need to do this. It will be hard work but necessary work that is worthy of our calling and worthy of the Savior we worship and serve.

“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

Rom. 15:5-7

Biblical Foundations

HUMAN VALUE: We are all created in the image of God and come from the same parents (Gen. 1:27, 3:20, Psalm 8:4-5, Gal. 3:28, James 3:9, Acts 17:26) – therefore, everyone and every group has inherent, equal dignity and value.

SIN: We all have a sinful nature and that gets expressed in a variety of ways (Rom. 3:23, 5:12, Eph. 2:1-3) – therefore, we are all guilty and need to confess our sin, repent of it, and be forgiven.

FAVORITISM (also known as PARTIALITY): The practice of giving unfair preferential treatment to one person or group *at the expense of another*. Scripture is clear that it is wrong to show favoritism/partiality (James 2:1, 9, Romans 2:11, Acts 10:34, James 2:1-26, Lev. 19:15, 34) Favoritism should not be confused with FAVOR. God often shows favor (special concern) to the oppressed, fatherless, widows, and the poor who are otherwise overlooked and treated unfairly, unequally, and unjustly (Lev. 19:9-10, Matt. 25:31-46, Luke 16:19-25, Luke 14:12-14, James 5:1-6). Therefore, we will look for ways to show favor to these hurting groups while being careful not to show favoritism.

JUSTICE: God is just and cares about justice (Prov. 21:3, Isaiah 1:16-17, Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8). Justice is the equitable and impartial application of God’s moral laws in society – therefore, we should care about justice and work for it.

SALVATION: The good news of Jesus Christ is that His death and resurrection have paid the penalty for our sin. It is the solution to our sin. We can be forgiven, given His righteousness, and adopted as children of God (John 1:12, Eph. 2:8-10, Rom. 3:23, 6:23, 10:9) by putting our trust in Jesus. We can do this by confessing with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believing in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead. Salvation is an act of God’s grace and not a result of our works. – therefore, we are new creations and should, in gratitude, love God and love others.

RECONCILIATION: Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection reconciled us to God and to one another, breaking down the wall of hostility between Jew & Gentile. This is a fact, whether we consistently live it out well or not (Gal. 3:26-28, Col. 3:11, Acts 10:28, 34, 15:9, Eph. 2:11-22, 1 Cor. 12:13, Matt. 28:19-20) – therefore, we should strive to reflect this in our individual and corporate lives as ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:16-21).

SANCTIFICATION: The life-long process by which God makes us more holy, enabling us to love God and love others more like Jesus. This includes both the growth of Godly character traits (fruit of the Spirit) and the removal of sinful thoughts and actions (works of the flesh) (Romans 6:11, 8:28-30, Philippians 1:6, Galatians 5:16-26). - Therefore, we will be patient with ourselves and others as we all press into the process.

IDENTITY IN CHRIST: Those who put their faith in Christ are made new. Through faith we are adopted into a new family from many tribes, tongues, and peoples under the headship of Christ (2 Cor. 5:15-16, 2 Cor. 5:15-16, ^{8c}(10-7:9 .Rev ,16-2:14 .Eph. Therefore, as we recognize our racial/ethnic differences, we will submit ourselves to Christ and His leading as members of His family.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE: Ultimately, our struggle is a spiritual one (Eph. 6:12). There is a benefit to our enemy for us to be divided and for the Church to not look like what it will one day look like in heaven. – therefore, we should pray against the devil and his schemes and not see one another as enemies.

LOVE: We are commanded to intentionally love one another and our neighbor as our self (Matt. 7:12, 22:39) – therefore, we should be good neighbors. This includes being good neighbors to people of different races/ethnicities, of different beliefs and opinions, and being ambassadors of reconciliation, as previously mentioned. This includes intentionally developing relationships with people who are different from us.

UNITY: Our love for one another as Christians, our oneness, will be evidence to those around us that God sent Jesus (John 17:13-23) – therefore, we should be diligent to preserve unity and peace (Eph. 4:3-4). Unity does not mean uniformity, but a spirit of oneness. The basis of this unity is our reconciliation in Christ. This is most clearly visible when we strive for unity across racial/ethnic boundaries within the body of Christ.

HUMILITY: We are to be humble toward one another (Phil. 2:1-5, James 1:19) – therefore, let us be humble and consider the needs of others as more significant than our own.

DESTINY OF DIVERSITY: The new heavens and new earth will be populated by a people for God from every tribe, nation (ethnic group), and tongue (Rev. 7:9-12). We can experience and value that diversity now, which gives us a greater experience of God and helps us to become more like Him. – Therefore, let us strive to reflect and value diversity in our church and lives.

FORGIVENESS: Forgiveness of our sin and reconciliation with God is made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is received by grace through faith. Confession and repentance of sin are aspects of this faith. Although all of our sin is forgiven at the point of salvation, ongoing confession and repentance are a part of the Christian life to maintain fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness is also something that happens between people and groups. We have a need to seek forgiveness for sins we commit against others, as well as give forgiveness to those who sin against us. Jesus commands us to forgive others because we have been forgiven. Therefore, let us seek forgiveness from the Lord and from others for our sin and, because we have been forgiven, let us give forgiveness to those who have sinned against us. (Eph. 4:32, Col. 3:13, John 20:23, Matt. 18:21-22)

CONFESSION: An aspect of our faith in Jesus is admitting we are sinners (because of what we have done and what we are, our sin nature, inherited from Adam). Because we can sin both personally and corporately, we can confess both personally and corporately.

Corporate confession is not commanded in the Bible, but it is modeled as an appropriate means of communal repentance and humility before God. See examples in Ezra 9-10, Jonah 3:5-9, 2 Chronicles 7:14. Corporate confession emphasizes the principle of mercy over a community who lives in humility before Him.

Although forgiveness can be offered without confession, confession is a critical step in the process of forgiveness & reconciliation and is something we are commanded to do with God and one another (Mark 1:5, Acts 19:18, Romans 10:9-10, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9, 1 Cor. 15:21-22, Luke 11:45-51, Neh. 1:6-7). – Therefore, we should confess our personal and corporate sins to God.

REPENTANCE: In its fullest sense, repentance is more than an expression of regret and remorse over an attitude or action of wrongdoing, but also a change or turning away from that attitude or action. (Ez. 18:30, Matt. 4:17, Luke 13:3, 17:3, Acts 3:19-21, Rev. 2:5) Therefore, in our racial conflicts let us prove our repentance by turning away from our incorrect thoughts or hurtful actions.

LAMENT: As the people of God suffer trial, hardship, sin or the consequences of sin, lament is a way to express sorrow, mourn, or complain to God, as well as appeal for His help or deliverance. We can do this as individuals (ex. Job 3, Psalm 5, 7, 38, Lam. 3) or as groups (Psalm 44, 74, 79, Lam. 5). Sometimes we do not lament for ourselves but with others because we are also told to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). -- Therefore, let us lament with one another the sins we have committed and the harm that has been done, while asking God for His help in healing us.

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