

TWO BIBLICAL TRUTHS DESTROYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF RACISM

Sunday, July 5th, 2020 - 6:30 p.m. - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON
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There are three things that make this message difficult for me. And the difficulties don't arise from any lack of conviction of the two foundational truths from the Word I'm going to deal with. I have many failures and weaknesses as a preacher, but I have never once doubted either the reliability of the truth of God's Word nor its effectiveness in terms of accomplishing what nothing else on earth can accomplish. God's Word is **always true**. By that I mean it is true even if nobody on earth agrees with it. And God's Word is always **functionally powerful**. By that I mean it is more than a textbook of information about God. It is **living** truth and it is **active** truth.

Here are the three things that make this teaching a challenge:

First, I have rarely experienced racism from the receiving end. I didn't say **never**. I said **rarely**. This doesn't prevent me from seeing the **evil** of racism (I've never had an abortion yet see the wickedness of it) but it makes it harder for me to relate to the **pain** of racism from the receiving end.

Second, from the title of this message some might conclude that these two truths from God's word will destroy the foundations of racism automatically. These truths, I fear, may fall on our ears and minds lightly. **Agreeing** with truths from God's Word - **any** truths - changes almost nothing. These two truths need to be breathed in and digested and constantly regurgitated and applied. We all need to daily **behold ourselves** in the mirror provided by these truths.

Third, shamefully, it is easy for many of us to feel we would apply these truths to our lives if they applied to us, but fortunately we're not a racist church. This may be the hardest hurdle of all to cross in our collective understanding and I need to come back to this important misconception. While all sin is wicked, some sins hide better than others.

So here I am - approaching these texts with more than my usual share of trepidation and inadequacy. The Holy Spirit must come. The two Biblical truths able to destroy the foundations of racism are, **first, the common root of original sin that resides in every human heart.** And, **second, the common unity in Christ that has become the actual, physical identity of every member of the church.**

The trick, of course, is for people like me to hear these truths like I've never heard them before. **Re-hearing** is always a more demanding form of discipleship than **hearing**.

1) **EVERY HUMAN BEING GATHERING IN CEDARVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH IS A FALLEN HUMAN BEING WHO WALKS IN THE RESIDUE OF THE SINFUL NATURE INHERITED FROM THE FALL OF ADAM**

Theologians call this **"original sin."** And it's real. Anyone who has waded with a broken heart through Romans chapter seven will have his or her eyes opened to see that, even as we follow Christ, we have another side that doesn't die easily.

For all who doubt my words let me remind you we are clearly told God's timetable for the final removal of all that inclines my heart to sin in this world - 1 John 3:2-3 - **"Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. [3] And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself just as he is pure."**

Verse three follows verse two. In other words, the **way** we purify ourselves begins with the awareness that we carry more of our fallen nature around than we usually think about. And that's incredibly relevant when we're considering the sin of racism in a nice church like Cedarview. The Spirit begins His deepest work as our awareness of **un-examined sins** deepens. In other words, **not** seeing this as a big issue isn't a good sign.

So here's my ground zero text for this first point about our common identity as carriers of original sin - Romans 3:22-23 - **"The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, since there is no distinction. [23] For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...."**

This is an incredibly humbling text for someone like me. When I read those well known words here's how I'm supposed to process them - **"Apart from the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ Don Horban falls as far short of God's glory as any person who has ever drawn breath on planet earth. In terms of my own merit I'm no naturally closer to God than the worst human being who has ever lived."**

This means there is a different starting point for God's grace in my heart than I might carelessly imagine. It's not just my **surface deeds** that grace needs to reach. It's the inner recesses of my own heart that haven't yet been expressed - perhaps not even examined. It's the frequently ignored concept that I only love God as much as the person I dislike the most.

In short, I am closer to Christ when I **overestimate** my potential for sin than when I **underestimate** it. This applies to **all** Christians and **all** sins, of course. But it's especially relevant to people like me and the sin of racism.

There may well be people at this point who would say to me, "Pastor Don, I agree with what you're saying at every point. I have honestly and prayerfully searched my heart. I don't believe I'm racist in any way."

To which I would say, "Wonderful. That's good news. God's transforming grace is deep and powerful indeed. But your work still isn't done. Help others grow in the same way. You certainly aren't called to be anyone's judge. But let your life and your words and your actions point others in the right direction."

There's one closing thing to say under this first point. And it pains me to have to say it. For all who feel the pain of racism from the **receiving** side this first point has a painful touch point for you as well. Unfortunately this first point means that in the body of Christ you may be called upon to go the second mile with some in the church.

There are people who are racist-ugly by **intention**. But there are also some who are racist by **blindness**. We all have to show patience with original sin-carriers. And I wish I could tell you it was different with racism. But you may be called to continue with the patience of Christ while the church continues to grow in His image.

2) **THE DEEPEST SOURCE OF IDENTITY FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN IN CEDARVIEW COMMUNITY CHURCH IS PERMANENTLY CHANGED FROM WHAT IT USED TO BE**

By that I mean I am no longer defined primarily by my relationship as husband to Reni. That precious part of my identify is temporary and will one day end. This is equally true of my identity as father to my two daughters.

But I was given a new identify when I came to Christ that will define who I am **forever**. It will outlast every other physical trait marking my earthly life. It isn't **less** real than my other physical identities. It is **more** real. This identity transcends everything that is temporarily marked by race or gender. It is bigger and more defining than either of those.

Here's what the Bible says - **Ephesians 2:13-19** - **"But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, [15] he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. [16] He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. [17] He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. [19] So, then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household..."**

There's way too much here for one study. But the unifying theme is the deeply entrenched division between Jew and Gentile has been erased in Christ Jesus. I don't suppose there's anything here we don't all already know. Christ has taken down this cherished, long-standing wall of division.

So what is Paul getting at? It has a lot to do with today's church. Paul's point is there aren't two separate tracks to God - one for Jews and one for Gentiles. His point is there is only **one track** to God. And there is only **one family of God** on that one track.

And here's something easily missed. Notice carefully the wording of **verse 13** - **"But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."**

Don't miss Paul's point. That being **"brought near"** isn't just being brought near **to God**. It **includes** that but is bigger. It means these people who were far apart **from each other** have been brought near **to each other**.

In other words, there is no **getting near to God without being brought near to each other**. A new identify is created that isn't **religious** or **figurative** or **symbolic**. It is as real as Jesus' resurrected body is real. It is as real as your toes and eyes and ears are real.

Notice Paul says we both **"have access in one spirit to the Father"(18)**. Paul's describing our spiritual genetics.

We have one access in one Spirit because we all have the **same Father**. And we all are, **“fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household....”(19)**.

Some truths require constant, deep spiritual awareness. **Knowing** truth is fairly easy. And it is a necessary first step to change. But **hearing** these truths is a matter of transformative prayer - “Lord, it may take time. It will certainly take patience and much humility. It will take the work of a vivid spiritual imagination. But may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

And all of God’s beloved children said.....