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Sermon Notes

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## **Christ and Culture: Facing the Hardest Issues of Our Day**

### **BFL Class #5: Racial Divisions Healed by the Gospel**

#### I. The Reversal of the Great Explosion

A. Key Concept: All things will be reunited under Christ

*Ephesians 1:9-10 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.*

The unification of all things under the headship of Christ... drawing all things that were divided, flying apart, to make them one in Christ

B. Sin Has Been Like a Fragmentation Grenade... Blowing the Universe Apart

1. First and most importantly... the fellowship between God and man ruptured

*Colossians 1:21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*

2. Next, the fellowship between humans has been ruptured

*Titus 3:3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

3. The harmony of the physical universe has been ruptured

*Romans 8:21 creation [is in] ... bondage to decay*

*Romans 8:22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

C. In Christ, All the Fragmentation is Reversed... Everything is Brought Together and Made One Under the Throne of God (Ephesians 1:9-10)

D. Most Importantly: Human Beings are Reconciled to God

***2 Corinthians 5:18-19 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.***

E. Secondly, Human Beings Will Be Reconciled to Each Other

***Ephesians 2:14-18 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. <sup>17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.***

1. Though “the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” in this passage refers to Jew/Gentile division... yet there are human to human divisions all over the world
2. Racial divisions and hatred are endemic all over the world

We think about anything in human experience that causes two groups of people to have lasting, settled hatred for each other

Just go to the hotspots over the last century... take the Balkans, for example... the long history of racial and religious conflicts between Serbs and Croats that have bubbled again and again into war; when that happens, revenge creeps in, and a STEEL CURTAIN of hostility comes across people’s hearts

Or think about recent events, like the invasion of the Ukraine by Russian troops under the command of President Vladimir Putin... the scars of national hostility and hatred that such actions leave

In 1994 in Rwanda, there was a terrible genocide of the Tutsi people by the dominant Hutu majority... a 100-day period in which 800,000 people were slaughtered; today, the survivors live side by side with those who killed their families, but the hostility and hatred seethes just below the surface

Many in Korea and China retain intense hatred for the Japanese, for the atrocities committed by the Japanese troops during WWII, as well as ongoing historical revision in Japanese textbooks in which past events are not dealt with honestly; in Nanjing, there is a Massacre Memorial dedicated to the memory of 300,000 Chinese people wantonly slaughtered by occupying Japanese troops; many Chinese people feel a national obligation to hate the Japanese forever; every year on December 13 in Nanjing, the date the

massacre began, alarms are rung all over the city so people will never forget

I could go on and on

We live in a deeply FRAGMENTED WORLD... fractured by sin and hatred... and very long memories of what "those people" did to "our people" ... "dividing walls of hostility" all around us...

#### F. Heavenly Unity in Our Future

1. Jesus' prayer for unity... WILL BE ANSWERED!

***John 17:20-24 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. <sup>24</sup> "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.***

Note: the heavenly unity of believers will be perfectly patterned after the unity of the Trinity

***Philippians 2:2 like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.***

2. John's Vision of Heavenly Unity

***Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."***

3. In heaven, all racial divisions and seething resentments will be swallowed up in the grace of God and the atoning work of Christ, and all barriers and dividing walls of hostility will be completely eradicated, and all the redeemed—still identifiable as originating from various cultural and tribal and linguistic backgrounds (amoral diversity)—will be perfectly one in Christ

4. This is the only answer to racial, national, and socioeconomic divisions that rip apart relationships on earth

#### G. The Power of Unity Here on Earth

***John 17:23 May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.***

1. As the visible church on earth is more and more progressively united in the pattern of heaven, it has overwhelming power for evangelism
2. When people see former enemies now loving each other as brothers and sisters, it puts the gospel on display

## II. Our Cultural Context

A. The Greatest Racial Division in American History: Black vs White

B. America's "Original Sin": Race-Based Chattel Slavery

How it started (here)... 400 years ago last month

In August of 1619, an English privateer ship named the "White Lion" carrying between 20-30 Africans in chains landed at Port Comfort in Virginia. The crew exchanged this human cargo to colonists from nearby Jamestown for food. This was the first documented instance of enslaved people setting foot in the colonies that later became the United States of America. It should be noted that African slavery was firmly established in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Mexico, Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean Islands, where black slaves had been working the sugar plantations since the early 1500s. As a matter of fact, the slaves that landed in Virginia had been plundered by the White Lion from a Portuguese slave ship, the "San Juan Bautista", which had gotten the people from the West African coast (modern-day Angola).

The Africans began in Virginia as indentured servants, working alongside almost one thousand white indentured servants who had sold themselves to pay for their passage to the New World. However, within decades, race-based slavery was well established; the white indentured servants were able to gain their freedom, but with a generation all blacks born into servitude were permanently slaves.

C. Slavery Spread... Because it Made the Masters Rich

***James 5:1-5 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. <sup>2</sup> Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. <sup>4</sup> Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. <sup>5</sup> You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.***

#### D. The Civil War and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment

1. Ended Chattel Slavery in the United States
2. A deep sense of national guilt is readily seen in Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, months before the war finally ended

"If God wills that [the Civil War] continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said '*the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.*'"

#### E. Years of Race-based Injustice Followed the Civil War

1. Share-cropping
2. KKK
3. Lynchings
4. Legal injustices (like in "To Kill a Mockingbird")
5. Segregation
6. The Jim Crow laws

#### F. The Civil Rights Movement

1. 1954: Brown vs Board of Education, ending segregation
2. Massive unrest in implementing integration in government schools in the South
3. Martin Luther King Jr. and his non-violent protests

#### G. White (Evangelical) Protestants and a Track Record of Sin

1. The abolitionist movement in the North was soon tied to liberal theology; Northern Baptists went for the social gospel by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Southern Baptists held to a biblical view of salvation, but an unbiblical exercise of slavery (before the war) and of race relations (after it)

Walter Rauschenbusch (*Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 1907): religion's chief purpose was to create the highest quality of life for all people

2. The "social gospel" was a Protestant movement that zeroed in on society's moral problems—poverty, alcoholism, crime, racial tensions, slums, child

labor, prisons, poor schools, etc. The Social Gospelers sought to bring Christ's Kingdom to earth by rectifying these social ills; there usually was a blurring of other theological issues, denial of the need for spiritual salvation—  
“Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man”

### 3. 1845: the origin of the Southern Baptist Convention

- a. Triennial convention of Baptists met every three years from 1814 (to support Adoniram and Ann Judson) through the 1840s
- b. By then, the American Baptist Convention had spread all over the US
- c. In 1845, Southern Baptist missionaries demanded the right to take their slaves with them on the mission field; when the convention refused (split along geographical lines), the Southern Baptists formed their own denomination

### 4. Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY

- a. Founded as a strong, Calvinistic institution, 1859, in Greenville, SC
- b. The founders of SBTS defended the righteousness of slaveholding and white supremacy
- c. Key leaders of SBTS throughout the era of Reconstruction and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century clearly espoused white supremacy and the “Lost Cause,” a desire to reestablish slavery in the South
- d. All the while the Seminary taught accurately on salvation by faith in Christ

### 5. First Baptist Church, Durham, NC

- a. Similar to SBTS, this church was clearly on the wrong side of the Civil Rights issue
- b. In the 1960s, deacons locked arms to keep black people (who they believed to be NAACP protesters... and they may have been) from attending public worship
- c. 1976, Pastor Dick Henderson began a very successful prison ministry and saw some African-American men come to faith; but when he tried to bring them to FBC to baptize them, church leaders refused to allow them in; the church had an official statement in its by-laws that FBC was a white church; Dick Henderson said concerning such a policy, “Either we have to get rid of that policy, or cease being called a Christian church.” He was forced out of his position by deacon leaders

### 6. Martin Luther King Jr.

- a. Leader of the Civil Rights movement; was an ordained Baptist minister
- b. Used the principles of non-violent protest employed by Mohandas Gandhi in India (which he got from Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount) to oppose segregation and Jim Crow laws
- c. MLK's own personal lifestyle and doctrine are as worthy of investigation as that of the founders of SBTS and the behavior of the deacons at FBC; however, some African-Americans are very sensitive about any critiques of MLK given what he risked and did for the black community
- d. Because of his moderate (at best) theology (especially on the bodily resurrection of Christ), and some significant personal moral issues, it is difficult to know for sure where MLK was spiritually
- e. On April 16, 1963, MLK wrote "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in which he called out white clergymen who agreed that social injustices existed but argued that the battle against racial segregation should be fought solely in the courts, not in the streets; he said their slow gradualism was wrong. MLK said that white churches needed to take a principled stand or risk being "dismissed as an irrelevant social club." He also spoke against people in the black who were afraid to do anything: "We must not follow the do-nothingism of the complacent, nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist." King closed his letter by praising the courage of the non-violent demonstrators in Birmingham "for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer, and their amazing discipline in the midst of great provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes."
- f. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis.

#### H. Recent Issues in Our Culture Simply Listed

- 1. 2008: Barack Obama election as first African-American President
- 2. A series of police issues in which black men were killed or beaten by law enforcement officers, enflaming many in the black community
- 3. Colin Kaepernick (then QB of the San Francisco 49ers) began a kneeling protest in reference to these issues
- 4. Baltimore riots
- 5. 2016: Donald Trump election
- 6. Alt-Right, KKK, white supremacist movements
- 7. Black Lives Matter

## 8. Confederate Statues

### III. Some Varying Concerns Which Seem to Divide People

#### A. Controversial terms and concepts

##### 1. Black Liberation Theology: James Cone, oppressor/oppressed

“The right questions [for theologians] are always related to the basic question: What has the gospel to do with the oppressed of the land and their struggle for liberation? Any theologians who fails to place that question at the center of his or her work has ignored the essence of the gospel.”

“It is impossible to interpret the Scripture correctly and thus understand Jesus aright unless the interpretation is done in the light of the consciousness of the oppressed in their struggle for liberation.”

For James Cone, “liberation” is not spiritual liberation and salvation is not eternity in heaven... it is completely tied to this world:

“The principle for an exegesis of the Scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the Liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the gospel but *is* the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

##### 2. The importance of understanding systemic and not merely individual evil

- a. Race-based chattel slavery was a system in the United States... bigger than any individual acts of kindness or even the emancipation of specific slaves by one owner that came to repudiate slavery
- b. Similar case: the CEO of a sugar manufacturer that becomes convinced that his company has been exploiting workers; if he comes to Christ and then tries to right the wrongs, he may be ousted from his position... the “system” will eat him alive

##### 3. Critical race theory:

###### a. Basic concepts:

Premise 1: “Our individual identity, who we are as individuals, is inseparable from our group identity.”

Premise 2: “Oppressor groups subjugate oppressed groups through the exercise of hegemonic power.”

Premise 3: “Our fundamental moral duty is freeing groups from oppression.”

Premise 4: “‘Lived experience’ is more important than objective evidence in understanding oppression.”

Premise 5: “Oppressor groups hide their oppression under the guise of objectivity.”

Premise 6: “Individuals at the intersection of different oppressed groups experience oppression in a unique way.”

See the helpful summary and evaluation by Neil Shenvi

<https://shenviapoletics.com/critical-theory-and-christianity-part-1/>

#### b. One application of the theory

Here is an evangelical author with 20k+ Twitter followers responding to Pastor Tim Keller’s recent op-ed in the NYTimes:

“Tim Keller has NO AUTHORITY to teach on justice – NONE... How INCREDULOUSLY PRIVILEGED for Keller – a RICH WHITE MAN WHOSE MINISTRY TARGETS RICH PEOPLE – to fashion himself as the judge of whether or not injustice rises to the level of OPPRESSION!!! No!!!! The only ones with divine authority to define the bounds of oppression are the oppressed themselves! Oppressed and colonized people wrote every single word of The Bible. The Jewish people were colonized people. Jesus, himself, was a brown, indigenous, colonized man. Not one person who the scripture was written by or originally written for sat in the social location of Tim Keller... No!!!! Keller has NO authority to speak or teach on justice. His silence when called on to speak helped pave America’s path to White Nationalism.”

4. Redefinition of racism: not merely a sense of superiority based on race, but also power structures behind it. With this redefinition, it is impossible for a black person, for example, to be racist; he/she could be prejudiced, but since they lack power, they can never be racist
5. Woke = awareness of social issues significant especially to the African-American community
6. Intersectionality: began as a form of feminism, asserting that women of color have a harder experience than white women, although women in general have a harder experience than men; expanded to racial relations, it looks at all aspects of power/disadvantage and sees where these overlap—gender, race, age, sexuality, disability, national origin, language etc.—to form “triple oppression” or worse; this has led to identity politics. One of the aspects of

intersectionality is it can be a muzzle for those in more advantaged positions... based on the “nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen” ideal; the more disadvantaged, the more moral credibility

7. Identity politics, in which candidates seek to connect on the basis of these kinds of
8. White Privilege: the concept that white people have a basic advantage over non-white in American society, resulting in educational, employment, and economic superiority that is not essentially merit-based
9. Institutional Racism: systems of injustice that are larger than how any one person treats another person... in which people of a certain ethnic background have an inherent disadvantage or advantage over others
10. Socialism/wealth redistribution
11. Reparations: payment of money to African-Americans, the descendants of slaves, for their ancestors’ unrequited toil; also to Native Americans for the taking of their land [Elizabeth Warren and Kamala Harris have advocated this]

#### B. Recent Efforts at Racial Reconciliation in the Evangelical World

1. John Piper, *Bloodlines*, efforts at Bethlehem Baptist Church
2. SBC resolutions repudiating the racist aspects of the past listed above...

[Here is a partial statement from the 1995 resolution:

Therefore, be it RESOLVED, That we, the messengers to the Sesquicentennial meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, assembled in Atlanta, Georgia, June 20-22, 1995, unwaveringly denounce racism, in all its forms, as deplorable sin...

3. SBTS study completed in 2017 openly acknowledging the racist past of its founders and key leaders since 1859 in word and attitude
4. TGC public efforts and private discussions; MLK 50
5. Efforts at hiring black professors, using black speakers at conferences, writing articles
6. More efforts than I can list here

#### C. But... Controversy as Well

1. Twitter (YUCK!!!)

2. White evangelicalism and the Trump Presidency
3. Russell Moore, ERLC, Trump Presidency, Confederate Flag issue
4. MLK 50
5. Black Evangelicals pulling away from White Evangelicals and repudiating the name evangelical (e.g. Lecrae); ongoing sense of frustration as people seem to be talking past each other and not hearing each other
6. Close friends become estranged
7. Tom Ascol, Statement on Social Justice (together with Philip Johnson—John MacArthur’s right hand man)... generally good statements on the supremacy of the gospel and racism, but still issues with what wasn’t said as much as what was... see issue #9 below
8. Ongoing concerns about the theology taught at the seminaries

#### D. What About Abortion?

1. How can white Christians understand black Christians’ willingness to vote Democratic, when the official policy of that party is pro-abortion?
2. On the other hand, how can black Christians understand the passion white Christians show for abortion, and the lack of interest in all other social issues that directly affect the black community?

#### E. What About Cultural Issues in the Black Community?

1. Carl Ellis, Jr., Black Scholar, Tweeted this recently:

“Racism still exists, but if racism could be eliminated today, 99% of our problems in the African American community would still remain. The reason for this is because today we are not facing a racism crisis, but a cultural crisis.”

2. America is clearly far less racist now than it was in 1960; yet there are consistent issues that continue the cycle of poverty... premarital sex, unwed pregnancies, violent crime (black on black), single-parent homes
3. Personal choices that individuals make continue to be the primary factor for cyclical poverty

#### F. What About Cultural Issues in the White Community?

1. What valid critiques should we listen to from our African-American brothers and sisters?

2. What is responsibility do we have to use our influence and any position of power to benefit the poor and needy?
3. How can we train our children to have a biblical view of ethnicity, and to delight in the unity that the Holy Spirit works in the gospel?
4. See the next topic:

G. What Biblical Responsibility do Wealthy People Have toward the Poor?

1. This is huge... it stands behind all of these issues
2. It is easy for wealthy comfortable people to live in a bubble and never face the sufferings of the poor and needy
3. Incarnational ministry... getting to know suffering people by living amongst them and feeling what they feel... is the costliest and most effective outreach

H. Big issue: how to address social issues biblically without compromising on the gospel or inerrancy

1. Should the church organize itself to address social issues of the day, or just stick to the gospel and leave societal transformation to individuals and the government?
2. How do we understand the consistent call of the Bible to address social issues?

***Isaiah 58:6-10 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? <sup>8</sup> Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, <sup>10</sup> and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.***

3. What are we to do with the regular historical pattern in which Christian movements who address societal ills seem inevitably to abandon biblical theology (inerrancy) within a generation or two?
4. The "battle for the Bible" was won in SBC seminaries; but some are concerned it will be forsaken by a turn toward James Cone and black liberation theology and other forms of theological liberalism

## IV. Some Rules of the Road for Proceeding

### A. Understand How Unbiblical Racism Is

1. There is one race and only one race... better to speak of various ethnicities

***Acts 17:26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.***

2. All human beings sinned in Adam and, if they live long enough, like Adam

***Romans 3:9-11 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. <sup>10</sup> As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.***

3. All sinners who repent and trust in Christ are made one in Him

***Colossians 3:11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.***

4. Heaven is unified, with people from every ethnicity all one in glory

***Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."***

### B. Understand Your Own Sinful Tendencies and that of "Your Group"... and Fight Them by the Spirit

1. In the struggle over social issues, the dividing lines have fallen in two main areas: personal responsibility vs. systemic sin
2. Those in advantageous positions tend to emphasize personal responsibility and to downplay systemic/institutional sins like racism
3. Those in disadvantageous positions tend to emphasize systemic/institutional sins like racism and downplay personal responsibility
4. Christians needs to embrace truth on both sides of that equation... and ask the Holy Spirit to show us our own blind spots

### C. Follow the Rules of the Road in Christian Life

1. Speaking with other Christians:

- a. Seek always to maintain unity in the Spirit

***Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.***

- b. Listen

***Proverbs 18:13 He who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame.***

- c. Don't argue

***2 Timothy 2:23-26 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. <sup>25</sup> Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup> and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.***

- d. Don't become angry

***James 1:19-21 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup> for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.***

- e. Try your best to understand their perspective; assume they have something to teach you

- f. Love

***1 Corinthians 13:4-6 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.***

#### D. Historical Sin

1. While all godly white Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century personally hate racism and slavery and all the nasty history, we still need to acknowledge that history and how painful it was for those who went through it
2. While it is unbiblical for us to confess sins we never committed, we need to grieve over the sin nature that led to those atrocities, and acknowledge that the reputation of institutions that we are a part of (e.g. the SBC, the seminaries, FBC Durham) is woven together with many grievous acts and attitudes in the past by leaders and members of those institutions

3. We need to learn from the past to prevent it happening again
  4. We need to listen sympathetically to people whose parents and grandparents suffered greatly in times of overt racism
- E. Institutional Racism is far less prevalent than it was 50 years ago... but there is still a journey to travel
1. We must acknowledge the remarkable progress the civil rights movement made in the United States, and that legalized racism is almost non-existent... and wherever it is exposed, many forces in the government and the judicial system are immediately mobilized to destroy it... mainstream media also is overwhelmingly zealous to destroy any and every form of racism it perceives
  2. Subtle, hidden racism is locked away in individual human hearts and is much harder to defeat; **ONLY THE GOSPEL CAN CONQUER IT**
  3. The redefinition of “racism” to include institutional power is unhelpful... it frees minorities from honest self-assessment and can make people approved by “intersectionality” analysis seem morally superior... the universality of sin—the essential sameness of the human condition all over the world—needs to be continually taught by church leaders. Every single person on earth is capable of every sin, given the circumstances: “There but for the grace of God go I”
  4. The “leveling of the playing field” economically, socially, and in many other areas (education, jobs, housing, etc.) is a vastly complex question, and involves a great deal of political theory—big government vs small government, socialism, wealth redistribution, affirmative action, etc. Christians have been deeply divided over these, each side claiming strong biblical themes to support their perspective

F. Mercy Ministry: The Problem of the Poor and Needy Will Always Be With Us

***Mark 14:7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want.***

1. Our church must not make either error of forsaking the centrality of the gospel and the inerrancy of scripture on the one hand or of forsaking any organized efforts at addressing temporal needs that surround us on the other hand
2. We need to follow the example of Christ, who continually addressed felt needs, while giving clear primacy to the greater spiritual needs of the people

***John 6:26-27 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. 27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.***

3. Slogan from a conference on mercy ministry that I spoke at:

“We care about all suffering, but especially eternal suffering.”

4. Though we could alleviate all earthly forms of pain and bring in a utopian society, the people’s greatest needs would still be forgiveness of sins and escape from hell

***Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?***

5. Therefore, the gospel must always be taught accurately based on the inerrant Word of God and presented as the top priority

***1 Corinthians 2:2 I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.***