

Sermon Outline & Bible Study Guide
Racial Reconciliation
February 2005

Sermon Outline
(Click 1) Living in Harmony
Emphasis Passage: Romans 12:16

Context

Paul began Romans 12 by saying that believers must present themselves to God as living sacrifices. We must not be conformed to the world in which we live, but seek to have our minds transformed by God's grace. This transformed mind leads a person to a host of practical applications in life: thinking of one's self properly, practicing sincere love, hating what is evil, clinging to what is good, and more. In the midst of these practical applications, we find the admonition to "live in harmony with one another."

Introduction

A popular song a few years ago asked the question: "Why can't we all be colorblind?" At first glance, that seems like a very good question. It would seem to be reasonable and sensible that, if we were all colorblind, the problem of racial discrimination and prejudice could be eliminated. It all sounds so simple.

But is colorblindness toward the races what we really need? After due consideration, the answer seems more appropriately to be, "No!" Colorblindness would rob a person of their cultural identity. That is not something people should be forced to deny, no matter what color, for the sake of "racial reconciliation." While some may not be proud of their heritage, most people are—and rightly so.

John Cheng, a historian and assistant professor at George Mason University, says on the Public Broadcasting System Web site, "I hope we're never ready for a 'colorblind' society. I don't like the expression because it sets the wrong terms for discussion when it comes to issues of race, equality, and social justice. To me, 'blind' means not being able to see things, and wanting to be 'blind' to color or race seems to mean wanting to ignore race or pretend its social and historical effects don't exist . . . These various shades of 'color' must all be kept in perspective, none at the expense of the other, if we want to address seriously the question of how to be an equitable society today. There may not be a solution, but if there is one, it will almost certainly be difficult, and it will require effort, awareness, and responsibility. We can not afford to be 'colorblind.' We need to develop our ability to see 'color' for what is, has been, and will be, so we're prepared to deal with its consequences" (www.pbs.org/race).

What can be done to promote more harmonious relationships among all races?

I. Racial reconciliation requires the acknowledgment that differences do exist.
(Clicks 2-3)

- A. Reconciliation must be based on reality—a reality that does not bury its head in the sand in an attempt to ignore the differences. (Clicks 4-5)
- B. Each racial group has its own culture and identity that must be recognized and accepted. (Click 6)
- C. Paul often addressed the friction that was caused by differences in the early church: (Clicks 7-8)
 - 1. 1 Cor. 1:10-17 (Click 9)
 - 2. 1 Cor. 6:1-8 (Click 10)
 - 3. Eph. 4:1-6 (Click 11)
 - 4. Phil. 4:1-3 (Click 12)
- D. First Corinthians 13 was written by Paul as a corrective for the strife within the church at Corinth. (Clicks 13-14)
- E. The principles in 1 Corinthians 13 apply to racial reconciliation. (Click 15)

II. Racial reconciliation requires unity—not union. (Clicks 16-17)

- A. Union refers to “something formed by uniting two or more things; combination . . . a number of persons, states, etc., joined or associated together for some common purpose” (www.infoplease.com online dictionary). (Clicks 18-19)
- B. Unity refers to “the state of being one; oneness; a whole or totality as combining all its parts into one; oneness of mind, feeling, etc., as among a number of persons; concord, harmony, or agreement” (www.infoplease.com online dictionary) (WS1 and WS2). (Click 20)
- C. Union may be achieved by man’s efforts. (Clicks 21-22)
- D. Unity is achieved by God’s grace (WS3, WS4 and OS5). (Click 23)

III. Racial reconciliation requires effort. (Clicks 24-25)

- A. There is no verb in the original language, but the context (v. 9-16) shows activity (hate, cling, honor, share, bless, etc.). (Clicks 26-27)
- B. The context also shows that those activities are based on a state-of-being [be devoted, be joyful, (be) patient, (be) faithful, never be lacking]. (Click 28)
- C. Reconciliation must begin with a work of God in a person’s life (OS3). (Clicks 29-30)
- D. Once begun, reconciliation must be maintained by us (OS5). (Click 31)
- E. Reconciliation is not maintained by words, but by actions (OS1 and OS2). (Click 32)
- F. In Ephesians 4:3, Paul addressed the idea of unity and called for action. (Click 33)

IV. Reconciliation requires a changed heart. (Clicks 34-35)

- A. When the heart is changed, people are changed (WS6 and WS7). (Clicks 36-37)
- B. When people are changed, relationships are changed (CC1, CC2, CC3, CC4, OS3, and OS4). (Click 38)
- C. When relationships are changed, the body of Christ thrives (OS6). (Click 39)
- D. Change is not without risk (OS1, paragraph 4 and OS2). (Click 40)

Conclusion

Racial reconciliation will never be achieved by asking anyone, including ourselves, to become blind to our heritage. We must not expect another person to become a carbon copy of us in order to gain acceptance. Not only would that be impossible, it would be foolish since none of us is perfect in any capacity. Outward appearances fail to convey the most important part of people—the heart. Yet, when God looks upon us, He sees directly into the core of our being, in spite of our physical features and ethnic backgrounds (1 Sam. 16:7). True, biblical acceptance means that we take the other person for who and what they are and build a relationship that respects our differences.

Those best able to do that are Christians who have “the love of God . . . shed abroad in our hearts” (Rom. 5:5, KJV). God, who reconciled us to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18, KJV), is the author of reconciliation. We must extend that reconciliation to others by being reconciled to them (Matt. 5:24). The only real hope of racial reconciliation is Christians taking seriously the work of God in our hearts and allowing Him to bring us together in an attitude of love and acceptance.

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

1. If you work with people of another ethnic group, ask them to share some of the main things about their culture with you. Seek to gain an understanding of their culture. Then share some things about your culture with them so they can learn to appreciate your culture.
2. Arrange for a pulpit exchange with a church of another ethnic group.
3. Invite people from other ethnic groups to your home for fellowship. Seek to develop relationships with them.
4. Ask your church to participate in a joint worship service with a church of another ethnic group in your community. Explore ways fellowships of different races and ethnicities can work together to serve others in Christ’s name.