

The Body of Christ

A Racial Reconciliation Curriculum



A Biblically Based Curriculum by the
Racial Reconciliation Ministry Team



COOPERATIVE BAPTIST
fellowship
OF NORTH CAROLINA

Introduction to the curriculum

Who the Racial Reconciliation Team is

In 2007, CBF NC developed a team to explore diversifying the predominantly white body constituting the fellowship. The team soon discerned a vision of the fellowship eventually manifesting the diversity of the universal church in its gatherings, therefore racial reconciliation became a priority in CBF life. The purpose of the Racial Reconciliation Ministry Team became building community among congregations of various ethnicities. As the Racial Reconciliation Ministry Team sought ways to foster reconciliation ministries in the local churches by providing the necessary support and education, it was clear that an education component in the local church was necessary.

How the curriculum was developed

No curriculum designed to promote racial reconciliation should be written by one person or even a homogenous group of writers. Therefore, the Racial Reconciliation Ministry Team compiled a team of writers who are diverse in their ethnicity but united in their vision for community. They have backgrounds in theology, an understanding of race in America, and pastoral experience within the local church. These ministers of the Gospel invested their time in researching, praying, and writing lessons that would enable readers to review their Biblical interpretations, explore their own tendencies, address their feelings, and expand their worldview.

Intention of the study

This study is designed to encourage people to confront their struggles with the concept of race. The lessons are rich with meaningful Bible study. It invites readers to explore the history of “Biblically Supported Segregation” but ultimately guides readers through the passages paramount in subverting racism. Each lesson has review and discussion questions that allow participants to deeply consider the personal implications of reconciliation as well as the implications within the local church.

How to use the study

It is important that you read through the whole study - and use the references. If something appears to be a challenge to your group, do not skip that, but prayerfully plan how to present the material with understanding. This study is designed to challenge everyone. It will force you to recognize your struggle with race, even those of which you are unaware. Secondly, please follow the lessons in the order in which they are presented. There is a progression in thought and Biblical support. Lastly, use the exercises and reflection questions as a way to connect with your group and have them explore their feelings and grapple with the subject. If you have questions, connect with other people leading or who have lead the curriculum on the discussion forum, <http://reconciliationstudy.freeforums.net>.

Introductory Lesson by Dr. Rodney Sadler

The American church has a problem with race! This is a statement I can make noting few local exceptions to an undeniable general rule. As an institution, it lags far behind the rest of society in addressing the issue of race, ethnicity, and difference. Just think about it; our schools, our jobs, our (lunch-counters) restaurants, our hotels, our malls, our supermarkets, our gyms, and in most cases even our neighborhoods are more integrated than are our churches. For most of us the most segregated space we will enter over the course of a week will be our homes and our churches, and with the rising numbers of interracial relationships in our families and extended families, the church is even losing ground there. Let's face it, the church has fallen behind the world in terms of its commitment to transform the racial dynamics that have split our nation for the last 400 years.

This may seem on the surface not a significant cause for concern. After all, our churches are bastions of our cultural expressions. They are the places we go to celebrate God in our own ways, often passing down the traditions of familial/r worship practices from generation to generation. In Philadelphia where I was born I noted this tendency when you could walk through a neighborhood and see multiple churches, each with signage written in a different language. The Polish church, the Italian church, the Russian church, the Slovenian church, the Greek church, could all be found within a few blocks of each other; many of them were from the same basic tradition, Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, etc.; but still the cultural dynamics of each made them the place where these distinctive communities could come together to perpetuate their distinctive cultural practices.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

**Think about your own community. How are churches divided?
Are their divisions by race, class, language, or ethnicity?**

As the neighborhoods changed over the years we could add to that mix Black Baptist and Pentecostal churches, Korean Presbyterian and Baptist churches, and countless other subvariations of Caribbean, African, etc. churches, each whether intentionally or not serving as the cultural center for distinctive peoples striving to maintain their distinctiveness in the amalgam that is America. So perhaps we should not be surprised to see that churches are still divided along racial lines, as race itself inevitably conveys cultural content related to distinctive ways of being.

Yet if we look at the history of the church, we will note that a divided church runs contrary to the message of Jesus. Early Christians struggled to find a way to have a single church comprised of members from various backgrounds worshipping together, worshipping as one. Early church fights were about coming together across differences and finding a new identity that transcended the old identities that separated people into different races, classes, and privilege groups, promising instead new arrangements in Christ. Christ was seen as the chief reconciling agent of humanity, bringing people not only back together with God, but of necessity also to each other, for, as the author of 1 John 4:20 notes "Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen."

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What do you think are the core values of Christianity?

Have we lost these core Christian values? Have we instead become the "polite social clubs" that Dr. King feared churches were becoming, not only afraid to lead the nation in cultural change, but even afraid to follow as the world's tendency toward greater racial inclusion? Or worse, in light of the changes taking place in larger society, is the church the principal agency perpetuating an outdated status quo?

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Think about the markers of a country club: most members are generally the same race and class, and the reason for getting together is solely fellowship with friends. How does your church differ from this model?

Perhaps the reason why the church lags behind society is that society had incentive to change. Political pressure, economic pressure, legal pressure, social pressure all converged on our government, our businesses, our schools, and our other public institutions and compelled them to see that change in overtly racist practices was necessary for their very survival. But such pressure has not been exerted on the church, and perhaps this has produced the resistance to change that we have seen there. If we mine the core of our faith traditions I am convinced that we can find the incentive to change not from external pressure, but from the internal impetus of the Spirit and a divine commitment to forging from the vast array of tongues and tones that comprise the human species a single people, a single body, the Body of Christ.

The matter of race: The concept of race is a concern that most contemporary anthropologists, geneticists, sociologists, philosophers, and theologians have soundly rejected. In part their rejection stems from the fact that it is clear that what was once labeled the “science” of race has been found to be “unfounded.” People do not exist in discreet color delimited groups with people of similar color with whom they naturally have an affinity. No, instead of distinct groups, we exist along a common spectrum of humanity with all of our colors blending the closer those of differing groups get to each other. Human beings have not evolved in such a way that subspecies variation exists among us; we are not different at our core in ways that reflect differences in intelligence, criminality, sexuality, creativity, athletic ability. Human beings, regardless of their physical appearance are endowed by our Creator with every variety of innate genius and, given the right environment, are able to manifest all manner of instilled genius. More simply stated we are all the same people; we are all the same race.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What do you think are the most genetically different people groups in the world?

In my talks on race, one example I like to give revolves around the question, who are the most genetically divergent population groups on the planet? In response to this question, most people will say blacks and whites or blacks and Asians and somehow another configure their response along classical racial lines. Our tendency is to assume that what we look like on the outside is an accurate predictor of who we are on the inside, thus the more different we are in appearance the more different we must be on a genetic level.

The actual answer to this question, however, is that the most genetically divergent population groups on the planet are continental Africans and aboriginal Australians. In essence two peoples who look almost identical are the most genetically divergent groups on the planet. Genetically, it is practically impossible to determine one’s genotype through phenotype; clarifying, that would mean what we look like on the outside says very little about who we are on the inside. Further, those peoples who look very much different are often very closely related. Population groups from continental African and Europe are often genetically quite similar despite the way that their difference in external appearance has been evaluated in our racialized society. Thus, our society, which has perpetuated an appearance based system of presumed difference, is completely out of sync with what science has said about human difference; again, simply stated, race is not real!

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How would you interpret the statement “race is not real”?

The bigger issue with race is that this category continues to have power over us. In fact I would say though it does not really describe who we are on a biological or genetic level, it does have considerable power in our world. It has power to give some people privilege and reduce others to “underprivilege.” It has power to impact relationships and educational and economic outcomes. It has power to shape our lives determining where we live, what we do, how much we make, and even how we worship God. In essence race has power because *we give it power*. So a category that is biologically and genetically untenable has been given power by our prejudices.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What kind of prejudice have you seen, experienced, or been a part of?

Our prejudices, which have been informed by four centuries of racial thinking, are self-perpetuating. We do not believe in race because race is real, we believe in race because we have been *taught* that it’s real. Some of us have been taught by our parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters that difference in appearance is the source of fear; we cannot be friends with “them” because they are different and therefore dangerous. Others of us have been taught by our friends and our colleagues that differences in appearances should lead to differences in privilege and social status; it is right for “them” to have less because they are different and deserve less. Still, worse, others of us have been taught in our churches and our Sunday school classes that differences in appearance suggest difference in our relationship with God; God loves “them” less because of their difference. You see, we Christians have utilized our Scripture and theological traditions to try to justify the concept of race and racial division. We have implicated God, and often even ascribed to God our racial prejudices; we tried to make God an accomplice in our racial division of humanity.

How do we change? Perhaps the only way forward for the church is that the ideological and theological issues that supported a racist system have to be exorcized. Those traditions based upon mis-readings of Genesis 9:18-27, Genesis 10, and Ephesians 6:5-9 that employed Scripture to theologically justify the system of race-based slavery and segregation need to be cast out once and for all. Examining what race looks like from the perspective of the church is crucial, for no matter how integrated the world looks outside the church’s doors, as long as we still think that God has created, supported, and sustained race and racial thought, the racial differences that still attend in society, the racial inequalities that persist along racial lines, and the core beliefs of our people around this issue will perpetuate a fundamentally racist world.

Further, if the world continues to believe that the church maintains an antiquated racialized system of belief with its racially divided worship and its silence on issues of racial injustice, then the church itself, Christianity itself is in danger of being viewed as a relic of the past, irrelevant in an increasingly secular and diverse world. If we fail to witness for the true message of Christ for human reconciliation, we are dooming our faith and failing to bear witness to Christ. It is imperative that we as the church address this concern and begin to find a way forward, laying bare our history of racialized readings of the Bible, and attempting to lay a foundation for a new interpretive stance (perhaps more authentic to the original stance). That is what this project hopes to begin.

LESSON 1:

Image of God

by Rev. Laura Barclay

OPENING PRAYER: Creator God, we thank you for the world and all that is in it and for entrusting it to your children to care for it. We thank you for creating each of us in your image. Diverse and fruitful, we have multiplied across the earth in a beautiful array of traditions and histories. Continue to sustain us and remind us of the goodness of your creation. Be with us as we enter into the study of Your word, as we give thanks for our time here together. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT:
Each of us are created in the image of God: equal and beloved.

SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 1:26-31 - Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 5:1-3 – This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “Humankind” when they were created. When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.

Genesis 9:6-7 – Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind. And you, be fruitful and multiply, about on the earth and multiply in it.

NOTES ON SCRIPTURE:

Men and women are created in the image of God. God sees this is good and entrusts creation to humankind. This denotes that being made in God's image is an inherent part of humankind, yet there is a responsibility to care for all of creation and live into this role.

If each human is created in God's image, that means all are beloved and equal before God, each endowed with the goodness of creation as well as the responsibility to care for God's creation.

Regarding the Genesis 9 passage, it can be tempting to get into a debate on capital punishment with this passage, but the focus is the sacredness of God's creation, not its destruction. Because every human is made in God's image, the emphasis is on the protection and importance of human life.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do you think it means to be created in the image of God?
- 2) Adam's descendants were created in his image, and he was created in the image of God. This shows that the "image" continues through the human line. How do you feel about being made in the image of God?
- 3) What comfort is there in being made in the image of God? What responsibility?
- 4) How do you read this passage in light of the racialized world we live in?
- 5) If we are all made in God's image, this denotes that we are all equal and beloved before God. How have we lived into this? How have we fallen short? What man-made obstacles are there to God's vision?

ACTIVITY:

Break into groups and discuss the following questions: Has there ever been a time when you were made to feel less than the image of God? How were you treated? How did you feel? Have you ever seen others treated as less than the image of God?

ADDITIONAL EXERCISE:

In 2009, Newsweek ran a story entitled, "See Baby Discriminate (www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/09/04/see-baby-discriminate.html)," which shared findings from the Children's Research Lab from the University of Texas. They found the following:

- 1) When white children were asked if their parents liked black people, 14% of children answered, "No." Thirty-eight percent didn't know. White children also responded that almost no white people were mean, but that "some" or "a lot" of black people were mean.
- 2) Persons of color are three times as likely to discuss race with their children than whites, whereas three-fourths of whites rarely, if ever, talk about race with their children.
- 3) Children at age three were showed photos of kids and asked which ones they preferred as friends. Eighty-six percent of white children chose pictures of white kids. At ages five and six, they were asked to sort pictures of children and 68% sorted them by race.
- 4) When researchers asked parents to talk openly about friendship across racial lines with children, racial attitudes improved drastically in just one week.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do you think about these findings?
- 2) How did your parents discuss race with you?
- 3) How was race discussed in your school?
- 4) If you have children, have you discussed race with them? What was their response?
- 5) Given this information, how would you discuss race with your children, keeping in mind that all are created in the image of God?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Creator, we thank you for your provision and for endowing us with your image. Help us to live into the responsibility of being stewards of your good earth and one another. Help us to view our society through your lens and to yearn for truth and justice. We confess it is uncomfortable to think about issues of race, but know that you are not an easy God to follow. Help us to pick up your cross and carry it faithfully, wherever it may lead. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

LESSON 2:

A History of Stigmatizing Race in Scripture

by Dr. Derek Hicks

OPENING PRAYER

God, Sustainer of Life, who looks beyond our faults and recognizes the good in us, continue to walk with us as we struggle to see the good in others. Teach us to recognize our differences as strengths, and only in collaboration and unity in Your name can we bring about Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT:

The purpose for the mark of God is to sustain, not to curse.

SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 9:20-27 - Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said,

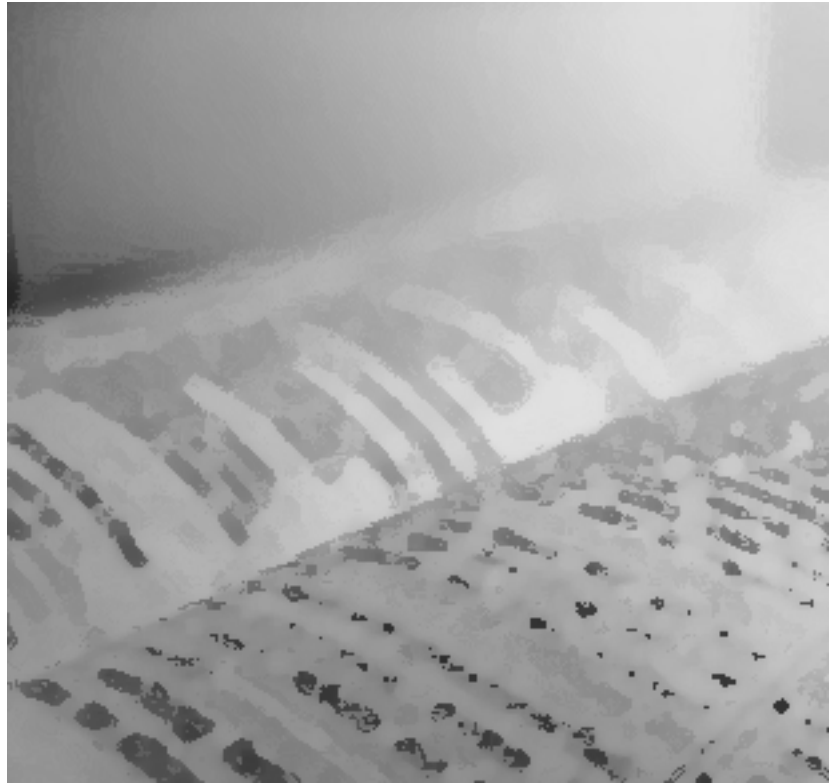
*“Cursed be Canaan;
lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”
He also said,
“Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.
May God make space for Japheth,
and let him live in the tents of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.”*

Genesis 4: 14-15 - Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.” Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

NOTES ON SCRIPTURE

These two scriptures sit at a pivotal moment in this country's dealings with race relations. Both were used to justify the maltreatment of people of African descent generally, and as part of a larger narrative of a biblical justification for enslavement in particular. The texts themselves highlight responses to inappropriate or deplorable behavior. What the use of these texts mark, in part, is America's tendency of applying stories from the post-flood chapters of Genesis to the problem of race relations in the United States. Primary among these examples are the stories of Noah, Cain, as well as Nimrod and the tower of Babel.

According to this misinterpretation of Scripture, Ham exhibited the most egregiously dishonorable and disorderly behavior in looking upon his father's nakedness. As the later generations of Ham's lineage were either black or dark



colored peoples, his despicable acts were carried through to them forevermore. The stain of his inferiority marked them for all time. As a result, dark skin bears the condition of degradation. Thus, as was Ham to his brothers, blacks are cursed to servitude because they are a part of Ham's lineage and susceptible to degradable behavior.

If we shelve for a moment the challenges posed by racially interpreting this passage, we must still deal with the fact that it was Canaan, not Ham, who was cursed. The answer is connected to the way the name *Ham* itself was interpreted, which is understood as being related to literal "black" or "brown" color in the Hebrew language. After all, in addition to Canaan, he is the father of three dark skinned African peoples: Misrayim (Egypt), Put, and Kush. Associating Ham with dark hue, while challenged by some Hebrew scholars, made the name readily available to connect to people of African descent. The end result: Ham, the one cursed to eternal slavery for despicable acts, is the father of the African nation.

Cain's act of cold-blooded murder further stained people of African decent. But why? What did Cain's act of murder have to do with African Americans? How was it connected to skin pigment? The Cain and Abel story was used to portray blacks as having violent and homicidal tendencies that needed to be controlled, partially through the slave system. The issue of pigment is connected to an interpretation of Cain's "curse"—the mark black skin. The passage makes clear that God indeed placed a mark on Cain. But the mark was one intended to extend God's grace in the form of unmerited preservation. God used the mark to sustain, not curse. However, antebellum period theologians read the mark as a curse, principally the curse of black skin. Connected to the murderous act itself, people of African descent were linked to Cain as a lineage of murderers.

The larger racial implication of the interpretations of these passages would endure the years of slavery and after. Especially with respect to the Curse of Ham, blacks in this country would ever be stigmatized as social deviant, perpetually moved to engage in miscreant behavior.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. In what ways did these interpretations of these biblical texts contribute to the racial hierarchy of early United States?
2. How did these biblical justifications contribute to the growth of the North American slave system?
3. If we are all made in God's image, how do we reconcile passages like these, which were effectively used to render African Americans as inherently different in problematic ways?

ACTIVITY:

Break into groups and discuss the following questions: How do these negative biblical interpretations contribute to the racialized contemporary world we live in? How can we counter the stain of these types of problematic interpretations?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, Sustainer of the Universe, who guides us through Scripture and experience, we confess that we come to the table with our own prejudices. Help us to read the text through the lens of love, for we recognize that You are love and You have called us to be Your presence to others. Continue to walk with us as we live out this calling. In the name of the One who is love, Jesus Christ. Amen.

ADDITIONAL READING:

Goldenberg, David M. *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Haynes, Stephen R. *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Johnson, Sylvester. *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathens, and the People of God*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.



LESSON 3:

No Longer “Black” nor “White”: New Identity in Christ

by Dr. Rodney Sadler

OPENING PRAYER:

Holy One, it is once again that we come before you with thanksgiving in our hearts. We are thankful today that you have brought us together to discuss your word in Galatians 3:22-29 and what it means for our identities as Christians. As we come together, we ask for a fresh gifting of your Holy Spirit. May your Spirit grant us open minds that we may see familiar Scripture with new eyes. May your Spirit grant us hearts that we may understand the pain that racial thought has caused and appreciate your desire that we be reconciled across color lines. May your Spirit grant us boldness that we may live into our new identities in Christ. It is in the name of your Son and our Savior that we pray. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT

**Christ has torn down the barriers that have separated us from each other.
We are one body, one people, one in Christ!**

SCRIPTURE:

Galatians 3:22-29 - But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

NOTES ON SCRIPTURE:

Galatians 3:22-29 demonstrates the invalidity of race as a brand of human differentiation and presents the ideal of reconciliation in the Christian community. Verse 28’s promise of transformed humanity is a vision of the fruition of our faith, and shows a world where neither “race,” nor social status, nor gender are determinants of our potential, for all of us are one in Christ. This notion of oneness suggests that all instances of privilege, power-over, and prominence are trumped by a new identity, one that makes us all part of the body of Christ.

It is in this context that we can understand Paul’s emphasis on reorienting the Christian community from law to grace. One of the most significant reasons that Paul engages in the dialogue about no longer being subject to the law (5:18) was that it was the law that separated the Jew from the non-Jew. Paul was convinced that in order for Jews and Gentiles to come together at a common table, the matter of the law needed to be resolved once and for all.

From Paul's perspective, the law enforced the code of difference that kept these two groups apart; it provided a system of ethnic boundary markers that separated "clean" from "unclean" human types. Like "racism," the law established Jews as a people fundamentally distinct from others because of their covenantal relationship with God, their descent from Abraham, and their sense of chosen-ness. To posit the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile was no less implausible than positing the union of polar "racial" opposites— "black" and "white" in our context. In order for these two groups to come together, either Gentiles had to convert—meaning adult male circumcision and the adoption of an entirely alien system of beliefs (i.e. adopt the law), or Jews had to put aside the system of beliefs that makes others "unclean" (i.e. transcending the law). Paul understood one of the principal reasons for the law to be to determine who was acceptable in the Jewish community; but now, he says, this aspect of the law is no longer in effect. That which separated Christian from Jew, that which bifurcated presumed different types of humanity, had been overcome by the work of Jesus on the cross.

GROUP ACTIVITY:

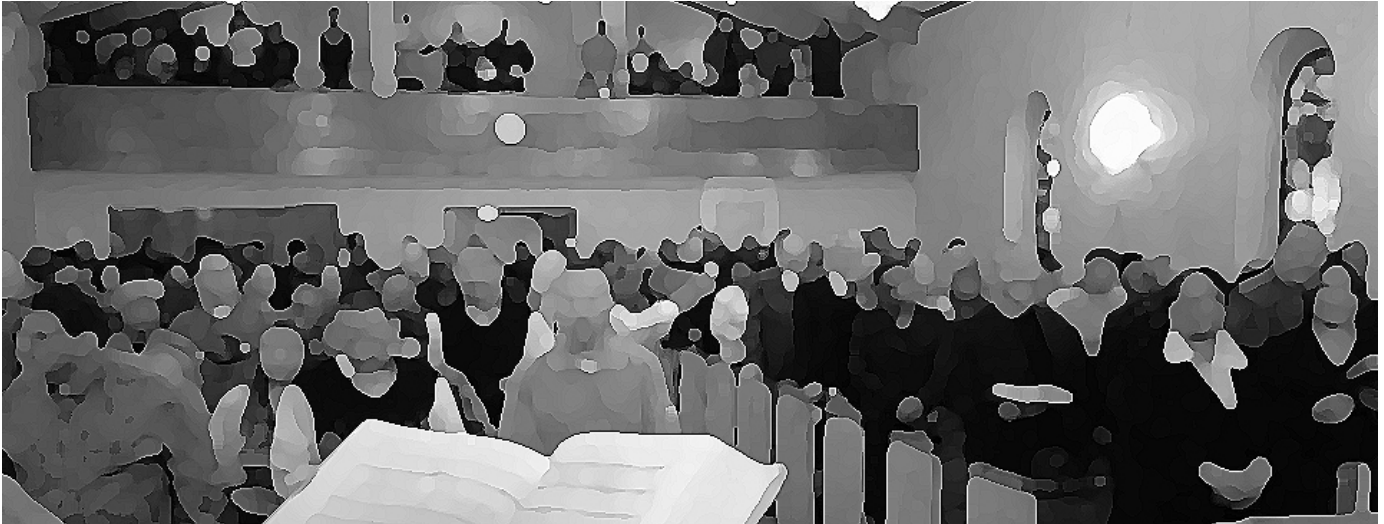
Break into pairs and begin to address the first three questions below. Once you have wrestled with those questions, come back together to share the various pairs' answers and address the final two questions as a group. Brainstorm together and have someone write the various responses on a board. End by finding one or two suggestions from the responses to question 5 to put into practice as a group.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the role of Law in establishing difference between Jews and Gentiles in this passage?
- 2) According to Paul, Christ's death has radically altered the nature of our identities. What in your estimation does it mean that we are all children of Abraham to Paul?
- 3) When people from all backgrounds are hired for the same jobs, women, African Americans and members of various immigrant groups are consistently under-compensated in relation to their white male counterparts. In light of our interests and our identities are intertwined through our common membership in the family of Abraham, how are we to respond?
- 4) But do "race," class, and gender really disappear in-Christ? If not, how are they to be re-oriented?
- 5) This passage is empowering, showing us that in Christ we have been liberated from the oppressive power of categories of human identity. How does "in-Christ-ness" impact the way that we conceive of our own identities?
- 6) Race is something we made; but in-Christ it is something we are empowered to "unmake." God has given us the power in-Christ to overcome this human fashioned monster. What are some concrete steps that we can take to live into our new identities in Christ in ways that engage those whose appearance differs from ours?

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, Holy Redeemer who tears down barriers and restores humanity back to God, we thank you that through Jesus Christ we are a unified body. Forgive us for allowing our differences to divide the body that you have called us to be. Grant us boldness to stand for unity in the midst of a society that divides. In the name of the One You send to redeem, Jesus Christ, Amen.



LESSON 4:

The Great Multitude by Rev. Rich Goodier

OPENING PRAYER:

Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and unto the Lamb. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations and tribes and peoples and languages will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. We join this unending song today as we pray: Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen.

FOCUS STATEMENT:

We discover the fullness of worship in the fullness of humanity's diversity.

SCRIPTURE:

Revelation 7:9-17 - After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

NOTES ON SCRIPTURE:

Revelation 21:9 uses four words to describe the extent of this great multitude. These words are translated in various ways.

ἔθνος (pronounced eth'-nos) – nation, people group, race, ethnicity

φυλή (pronounced foo-lee') – tribe, race, nation, people

λαός (pronounced lah-os') – crowd, people, tribe, nation

γλῶσσα (pronounced glos'-sah) – tongue, language, dialect

The meanings of these four words, as seen in the English, overlap. Listed in succession, they paint a picture of this great multitude as complete, all-inclusive, thorough, across-the-board, with every bit of humanity represented, no exceptions. This rhetorical device is used in other contexts, both ancient (Romans 8:38-39) and modern.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Section: God of the Nations

- 1) If you were asked to paint a mural of the Great Multitude, how would you communicate the presence of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language? How do you think John perceived the Great Multitude as being from every nation, tribe, people, and language?
- 2) What does the presence of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language tell us about the kind of God we worship? Who is this God who both judges the nations and draws all nations in worship (cf. Psalm 47)?
- 3) It is significant that John perceives that the Great Multitude is from every nation, tribe, people, and language. Could this challenge our understanding of what is fundamental to our understanding of identity? In other words, do you think God gave you a certain ethnicity or race that will persist into eternity?
- 4) When you hear someone say that they are 'colorblind' with respect to race, what do you think they mean? Do you think this is a good way to describe God's understanding of the races? If not, how would you describe it?

Section: Solos and Choirs

- 5) A soloist on Sunday morning can bring us God's Word in beautiful song. Revelation is full of songs, but they are usually sung by a choir. What musical advantages do choirs have over a soloist? Are there other advantages? Why do you think we usually see choirs praising God in Revelation?
- 6) When you read people from every language praising God together, what do you imagine? Cacophony? Unison? Harmony? Dissonance? Concordance? Call and response?

ACTIVITY:

Discussions about our church

- 1) One way America describes diversity is through race. Many churches today are not racially diverse. What advantages/disadvantages do you see in this?
- 2) How is our praise to God different in a church that is racially monolithic? racially diverse?
- 3) Revelation 7 is a scene of worship, of all peoples worshipping together. When we worship together, we enjoy a foretaste of eternity, we proclaim the Kingdom in a true and faithful way. If you had to describe your church in light of the Great Multitude, how close are you approximating it? How passionately are you striving for such a vision? Do the ways you do church make this vision even practical?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Spend some time together prayer for what you discussed today. Perhaps you can pray, that

... we see the Lord God as One who draws the nations together in worship.

... our church can more faithfully proclaim the God of the Nations.

... God gives us insight into who we are as people with ethnicity and race.

What now? – Options for Next Steps:

- 1) Look at the next section entitled recommended resources. Choose a book or resource for additional study.
- 2) Reach out to a church whose members are of a different ethnicity than yours and approach them about a possible joint community project, dinner fellowships, missions work, and/or seasonal combined worship services.
- 3) Contact CBFNC about regional fellowship opportunities and the possibility about partnering on cross-cultural community gatherings and projects.
- 4) Contact someone on the Racial Reconciliation Ministry Team of CBFNC for further guidance.
James Allen: jallen137@gmail.com
Chris Dawson: thedawsons6008@carolina.rr.com
Rich Goodier: pastorrichgoodier@gmail.com
Linda Jones: ljones@cbfnc.org
Randy Palmer: rprestore@aol.com
Scot McCosh: mtpisgahbc@embarqmail.com
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Paul Anderson: pastor@thefountainofraleigh.org
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Todd Higginson: thigginson1977@gmail.com
Jaime Molina: jaisan405@hotmail.com
Nathan Parrish: nparrish@triad.rr.com
Randy McKinney: longviewpastor@hotmail.com
Olivia Wakefield: owake@earthlink.net
- 5) Reach out to CBFNC Partner, the Institute for Dismantling Racism to teach this curriculum, help you further discuss this in your church, or lead a workshop in your community. Rev. Willard Bass is the executive director and you can contact him at revwillard.bass@gmail.com or at (336) 722-8379 (x105). The Institute for Dismantling Racism, 639 South Green St., Winston-Salem, NC 27101.
- 6) Screen one or both documentaries produced by EthicsDaily.com and used by CBFNC in your church, *Gospel Without Borders* and *Beneath the Skin: Baptists and Racism*. These resources can be found at www.ethicsdaily.com and come with free online discussion guides and Sunday School curriculums.



Racial Reconciliation Resource List

RACIAL RECONCILIATION AND THE CHURCH - PRINTED RESOURCES

1. **United by Faith: the Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race** by Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim. As America grows ever more ethnically diverse, Christian churches remain racially homogeneous. This state of affairs must end, argues these sociology professors; indeed, church integration is central both to the Christian mission and to racial equality at large.
2. **Free to Be Bound: Church Beyond the Color Line** by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. Free to Be Bound chronicles Jonathan's experience as he crosses color lines that fragment the church--lines that should make us question why they exist at all. With an honest heart and passionate voice, Jonathan delivers a call for true unity within the church that will inspire every believer.
3. **Let Justice Roll Down**, by John Perkins. His brother died in his arms, John was beaten and tortured by the sheriff and state police, but through it all he returned good for evil. Perkins story is a gripping portrayal of what happens when faith thrusts a person into struggle against racism, oppression and injustice. It is about the cost of discipleship, and transforming work of faith that allowed John to respond to such overwhelming indignities with compassion, vision and hope. Perkins is a prolific writer and speaker on issues of race and the church.
4. **A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church** by Gerardo Mardi. Mosaic in Southern California is one of the largest multiethnic congregations in America, and also one of the most innovative. This book takes us inside this unusual church. Based on interviews and participation with the congregation, the book presents a rich portrait of an emerging religious community.
5. **Grace Matters: A Memoir of Faith, Friendship, and Hope in the Heart of the South** by Chris Rice. While a student at Middlebury College in Vermont, Rice decides to volunteer for six months at Voice of Calvary, a multi-racial inner city community in Jackson, Mississippi. Rice's 6 month visit became a 17 year stay, and transformational experience.

6. **Multi Cultural Ministry, Finding Your Church's Unique Rhythm** by David Anderson. Anderson writes about multicultural leadership not from the perspective of an ivory tower intellectual, but as a hands-on practitioner who loves and believes in the body of Christ. If you believe there is no solution to the race problem, reconsider and learn from someone who is on the frontlines of making multicultural ministry a reality in the church today.
7. **The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation**, by Michael Battle & Tony Campolo. Two of the most vocal activists on racial issues in the church seek nothing less than a conversion of American Christianity. They directly challenge the churches to resume leadership in overcoming and redressing America's legacy of racial segregation.
8. **Blood Done Sign My Name**, by Timothy Tyson. In this personal story, Tyson, a professor of African-American studies who's white, unflinchingly examines the civil rights struggle in the South. The book focuses on the murder of a young black man, Henry Marrow, in 1970, a tragedy that dramatically widened the racial gap in the author's hometown of Oxford, N.C.
9. **God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time**, by Desmond Tutu. Nobel Prize winner Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has long been admired throughout the world for the heroism and grace he presented while encouraging countless South Africans in their struggle for human rights. In his most soul-searching book, he shares the spiritual message that guided him through those troubled times.
10. **Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America** by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith. "[E]vangelicals desire to end racial division, but likely do more to perpetuate the racial divide than tear it down." The evangelical emphasis of individualism leads to the idea that most racial problems can be solved if individuals will only repent of their sins. Therefore, many well-meaning strategies for healing racial divisions carry within them the seeds of their own defeat. *Divided by Faith* also includes a brilliant history of evangelical thought about race from colonial times to the civil rights movement.
11. **One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multi-Racial Churches**, by George Yancey. As society diversifies, local churches find themselves interacting with people from every tribe and tongue. But not every church is equipped to handle the realities of ethnic and racial diversity in their congregational life. Sociologist George Yancey's pioneering research on multiracial churches offers key principles for church leaders wanting to minister to people from a variety of racial and cultural backgrounds.
12. **Race: A Theological Account**, by J. Kameron Carter. Carter, a professor at Duke Divinity, meditates on the multiple legacies found in a racialized world. These are the legacies of colonialism and empire, political theories of the state, anthropological theories of the human, and philosophy itself, from the eighteenth-century to the present. Carter's claim is that Christian theology, and the transformation it underwent, is at the heart of these legacies. As a result, Christianity became the cultural property of the West, and the religious ground of white supremacy.
13. **The Black Church in the African-American Experience**, by C. Eric Lincoln & Lawrence H. Mamiya. This is a comprehensive resource book developed from a ten-year field study that investigated the black church as it relates to the history of African Americans and to contemporary black culture. The information listed is a powerful and extremely useful tool in giving researchers an in-depth look into the church's relationships to politics, economics, women, youth, music, civil rights, and trends for the next century.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION - GENERAL RESOURCES

1. **Race Matters**, by Cornel West
2. **Racism Without Racists**, by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva
3. **White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son**, by Tim Wise
4. **The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks**, by Randall Robinson
5. **Understanding and Dismantling Racism**, by Joseph Barndt
6. **The First Emancipator: Slavery, Religion, and the Quiet Revolution of Robert Carter**, by Andrew Levy.
7. **The Covenant with Black America**, ed. by Tavis Smiley
8. **The Color of Love: A Mother's Choice in the Jim Crow South**, by Gene Cheek
9. **A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present**, by Howard Zinn

10. **Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America**, by Elliot Jaspin
11. **Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism**, by James Loewen
12. **Lies my Teacher Told Me: Everything Your High School History Textbook Got Wrong**, by James Loewen
13. **Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism**, by Derrick Bell
14. **Enter the River: Healing Steps from White Privilege Toward Racial Reconciliation**, by Jody Shearer

RACIAL RECONCILIATION AND THE CHURCH - ONLINE AND MEDIA RESOURCES

1. www.timwise.org
2. www.pbs.org/race/
3. www.tracesofthetrade.org/
4. www.withoutsanctuary.org/
5. www.crossroadsantiracism.org/
6. www.pisab.org/
7. www.strongerkinship.com/
8. “Mirrors of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible” (DVD) available online at www.world-trust.org/videos/
9. “Beneath the Skin: Baptists and Racism” (DVD) by the Baptist Center for Ethics

MULTI-RACIAL/MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCHES IN THE US

1. Grace Bible Fellowship, Cary, NC www.gbfc-nc.org
2. Hope Chapel, Apex, NC www.hopenc.org
3. Church of All Nations, Minneapolis, MN www.cando.org
4. Mosaic, Los Angeles, CA www.mosaic.org
5. McLean Bible Church, Reston, VA www.mcleanbible.org
6. Meadows Baptist Church, Plano, TX www.meadowsbaptist.org
7. Website lists 150 multi-racial churches, <http://djchang.com/directory/multi-racial>

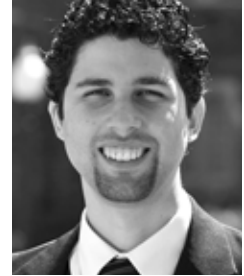
SMALL GROUP STUDIES

1. “Crossing the Racial Divide” from the editors of Sojourners in Washington DC. Includes 25 articles with discussion questions. These articles are divided into four sessions and the study includes lesson plans for each session. 1-800-714-7474.
2. David Anderson’s book, **Multi Cultural Ministry, Finding Your Church’s Unique Rhythm** includes a survey for small group members (Appendix 1) and a six session small group curriculum (Appendix 2). This book can be purchased on amazon.com.
3. “God’s Grace from Place to Place,” by Abingdom Press focuses on how God’s Spirit gave momentum to the Civil Rights Movement. Materials for all ages are available. www.abingdonpress.com.



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Note: All Biblical references are from Oremus Bible Browser NRSV, <http://bible.oremus.org>.

Statement of Perspective: This curriculum is comprised of multiple authors with different perspectives from a variety of backgrounds. It is designed to free us to have a discussion about racism and Christianity. You may have a different experience than the authors. We affirm your experience as long as you are open to loving your neighbor in the example of Christ.

Each of the words in our name,
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina,
is important to our identity. But perhaps Fellowship holds
the greatest insight into who we are as an organization.

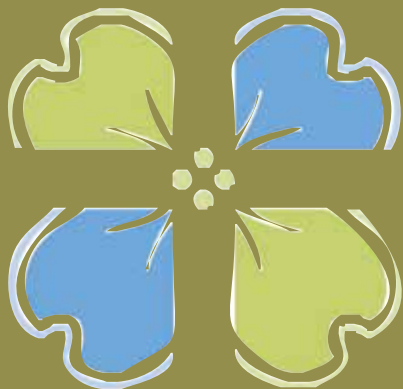
We are a fellowship of churches and individuals who
voluntarily cooperate to do together what we could
never accomplish alone, for the Kingdom of God.

We bring together people of shared interests,
activities, beliefs and experience.

We provide companionship along our shared journey
to be the presence of Christ in the world.

We serve each other as equals.

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