

Centerpoint Church Position Paper: Racism

Racism as a word is not specifically used in the Scriptures, yet what current culture would define as racism is obviously apparent within them. Definitions matter, and since the word “racism” is such a highly charged term today, it is important that it be clearly defined. Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines racism as “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.”¹

In essence, this definition of racism states that people are limited by their race and that some races are superior to others. As one ponders this idea, it is quickly apparent that it is contrary to Scripture. In 1 Samuel 16, the prophet, Samuel, is told by God to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the new king over Israel. Samuel obeyed and was evidently impressed with Jesse’s firstborn son, based on his appearance, as noted in verse 6, “When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.’”² Verse 7, however, provides great insight. “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’”³

It is a foundational understanding that God, when making judgments about people, does not consider their outward appearance or traits over which they have no control. Centerpoint Church commits to live within God’s standard of acceptance of individuals without judgment based on race.

People have a tendency to judge others by outward appearance, but God doesn’t. There are surprisingly few individuals described in the Scriptures by their physical appearance. Sometimes obvious beauty is mentioned (Rebekah in Genesis 24:16, Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:3, Absalom in 2 Samuel 14:25), or great size (Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:4), yet, for the most part, Scripture focuses on the character and behavior of individuals, even in passages where beauty or stature are mentioned.

It is a great and freeing truth to understand that God looks past our outward appearance when considering us, and our potential. It is important to recognize, however, that He does consider our behavior and character irrespective of race. We agree with Scripture that people have control of behavior and attitudes and are accountable to God for them. So while God does not look at race as a limiter, God also does not see race or any given trait as an excuse for attitudes or behaviors that are displeasing to Him.

There is no question that in many societies, including ours, there have been great transgressions committed against those of various races. The belief that those of certain races or traits are superior has led to tremendous injustices, calamity, and even genocide. In the past,

¹ Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary. (Eleventh ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

² The New International Version. (2011). (1 Sa 16:6). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ The New International Version. (2011). (1 Sa 16:7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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even parts of the Church have endorsed this philosophy of racial superiority; a stance that we believe has grieved the very heart of God and may have resulted in temporal judgments.

It is our firm belief that Christ is the ultimate healer in regards to all past transgressions, whether personal or societal. Only in Christ can we truly see other people who are different from ourselves as having equal value. As stated in Galatians 3:26-28, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁴

Centerpoint Church commits to working toward racial reconciliation; holding out the hope of Christ to bring about the ability to view others the way God views them. We commit to looking past race in regard to each individual's potential and to treat each one with impartiality.

⁴ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ga 3:26–28). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.