

**Sermon Series: “The Bible and Some Election Issues”  
“Racism”**

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We live in a world that makes distinctions amongst people. E.g., I recently read about one of those distinctions— a group of distinct women— in the newspaper. These women are singled out by the fact that they are “self-assured, SUV-driving, sunglass-wearing, suburban White” women who are “often aggrieved about life’s inconveniences and imperfections” (*The Times-Picayune New Orleans Advocate*, “Meet the Krewe of Karens” by Doug MacCash, October 4, 2020, 1D-2D). One person in the article described these women as someone known “for her repeated attempts to demand to see the manager of an establishment. . . more often than not issuing a complaint that we might refer to as a ‘first-world problem’” And she should also be wielding a Starbucks cup of coffee and wearing a reverse-bob hairstyle. What are such women called? Karens! This is the new pop-culture designation of a distinct group of women. In fact, this Karen phenomenon has made such an impact on our culture that in New Orleans we now have a Krewe of Karens! And men are allowed to get in the act if they dress as women. There is a funny picture of men dressed as Karens complete with reverse-bob wigs and brandishing the sign that is seen as the motto for Karens: “What do we want? MANAGERS! When do we want them? NOW!” Some may be tempted to take offense to this, especially if your name is Karen! But it is all done tongue-in-cheek, and really allows people to laugh at themselves, which we all need to do from time to time, right? It invites us to see ourselves through others’ eyes and get a more accurate view of who we are. I would suggest that our culture today is having a very difficult time doing this, especially on the issue of racism. This issue of racism has gripped our nation, and in a certain sense it even seems at times to be threatening to tear our nation apart.

What I want to do this morning is to take first a “lay of the land” over the last four years. Then take a brief look at slavery in the New Testament. Finally, would like to take a look at two foundational Scriptures which lay a foundation for us going forward on the issue of racism.

Let’s look at “Three aspects of the issue of racism which we have changed today in the U.S. since the 2016 presidential election”. The first which comes to mind is the issue of taking down statues of people associated with American slavery. This first started with statues of Confederate soldiers, like in New Orleans of P.G.T. Beauregard and Robert E. Lee, where the New Orleans city council voted to take them down. Such removals of statues have happened a lot around the nation. I certainly can see the wisdom in this— we don’t want to celebrate people who went to war to defend slavery. But I wonder where we are to draw the line in taking down statues, because no one is perfect, we are all blemished in some way. E.g., in June of this year protestors in Portland tore down, without permission, a statue of George Washington, spray painted graffiti on it, and set fire to its head, because Washington owned slaves (“Protestors Tore Down a George Washington Statue and Set a Fire on Its Head” CNN online, June 19, 2020). The mob that did this ran off and the police have not been able to arrest them.

The second aspect of racism that has come into our nation’s consciousness is the tragic death of the African-American George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, MN on Memorial Day, May 25, 2020. One could add to this the tragic death of also the African-American Breonna Taylor on March 13, 2020 in Louisville, KY, and the recent decision of this court case. The death of George Floyd seemed at first to unite our nation on the outrage over his death and the dire need for police reform. Protests formed around not only the nation over Floyd’s death, but even around the world. But unfortunately agitators influenced many of these protests to become mob violence, where buildings were set on fire, cars

burned, businesses were looted and destroyed, and even a historic church set on fire in Washington D.C. E.g., Norwood and I went to Duncan Plaza in front of City Hall where the New Orleans protest marches started and wanted to march with them, but when we got there the protestors were not there, and later we found out they were in the French Quarter around Jackson Square, and found out from someone in the military that Jackson Square was locked up for concern that the protestors would tear down the Andrew Jackson statue, and that indeed the protestors had ropes and chains with them to do just that.

The third aspect of racism in the last four years concerns racism of other races and groups. In a February 1, 2020 article in *The Washington Post* (online, “As Anti-Semitic Incidents Rise in U.S., Group Launches New Online Tracking Tool”) states that on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp “multiple incidents of anti-Semitic vandalism, harassment and assaults were reported in the United States”. For example, swastikas were painted on City Hall in Pendleton, OR and a home in Boulder City, NV. In 2017 anti-Semitic incidents in the U.S. increased 57%, and in 2018 the incidents went down a little but were still at historic levels. And we recall the horrific October, 2018 incident when a gunman opened fire during a worship service at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA and killed 11 people. Also, there is apparently racism against Hispanics at some places. This past weekend in Franklin, TN a member of the Latin country rock band The Mavericks and his friend were assaulted, they said, for speaking Spanish, and his friend was beaten up badly. And I will include a group of people who are actually comprised of different races who have also as of late become endangered— the police, who are here to protect us and to serve us. Many law enforcement and police in Portland, OR this summer have been injured by some of the protestors/mob, and two Los Angeles police officers— a man and a woman— were sitting in their squad car and were both shot in the head, but by God’s grace have survived. What is even perhaps

more disturbing is that video of this shooting reportedly shows that none of the several bystanders “show the slightest inclination to help the officers” and one man can be heard narrating what has just happened with “joy and excitement” (“L.A. Shooting of Officers Should Jolt U.S. Liberal Elite”, by Rich Lowry, in *The Times-Picayune New Orleans Advocate*, September 20, 2020 6B).

So, what does the Bible have to say about racism? Let’s first look briefly at the troubling issue of slavery in the New Testament. “Is the Bible pro or con slavery? Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:21-24; Ephesians 6:5-9; Philemon 8-22.” READ 1 Corinthians 7:21-24 (p. 170). There is some question on the translation of v 21 when it says in the NRSV, our pew Bibles, “. . . Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present situation more than ever”, the last phrase is better translated as seen in the RSV (and footnote in the NRSV), “avail yourself of the opportunity” because the verb for “avail” (χρησασαι) is in the aorist tense, which more naturally suggests a one-time event, not a continuing event as the present tense would suggest. Also, in the ancient world a slave did not have the choice whether to be freed, but rather it was the master’s choice (from G. Fee, *I Corinthians*, pp. 317-318; S.S. Bartchy, “Slavery: New Testament”, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, p. 71). So Paul’s point is that if a slave can get freedom, take it, but wherever a person is in his or her station in life, there serve Christ. READ Ephesians 6:5-9 (p. 195). We see that Paul emphasizes that slaves be respectful and obedient to their masters, and masters be fair with their slaves, for God will hold them accountable. Finally, READ Philemon 8-11 (p. 216). Here Paul strives to see a runaway slave freed. Now we certainly wish that the New Testament would have said something like, “Thou shalt not have slaves”. This would have helped Christians, like Charles Hodge, former principal of Princeton Theological Seminary who lived in the 1800s, who supported slavery in the abstract, took kind of a moderate position on slavery (cf. R. Baukaum, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*, p. 18), but was open to the abolition

of slavery as well. But we will see in a moment that the groundwork was laid for this in the New Testament to abolish slavery. So, is the Bible pro or con slavery? It is more con than pro for sure, but also we notice there is no commandment against slavery, like, “Thou shalt not commit slavery”. But ultimately we see in Paul that the main issue is not slavery but one’s salvation. Why? Probably for at least two reasons. First, Paul knew that even if slavery went away, that does not necessarily mean that that brings salvation. The situation is similar to today, where we could get all our social justice laws passed and police reform, but still lose people’s souls to hell. Second, slavery in the ancient world had some significant differences from our American slavery. For example, the ancient slavery was not race-based (slaves came by selling themselves into slavery, debt bondage, born into slavery, etc.) and not necessarily for life (urban slaves could be expected to be freed by age 30), and a slave could get a very good education, own land, even own slaves, earn money, and often could expect to receive Roman citizenship upon freedom (Bartchy, *ibid.*, p. 66). One can see why Paul could see if both slave and master were Christians, then such a living arrangement in an extremely limited economy where food and shelter were not provided by government entitlements could be a relatively good situation.

“Two key texts that guide us in race relations as Christians: Luke 10:25-37 and Galicians 3:28.” Much as our Declaration of Independence contains the lines, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” and thus laid the foundation for the abolition of slavery, so do these key texts lay the foundation for the abolition of slavery as well as how we should treat others of other races. READ Luke 10:25-37. There are two things to notice from this text. First, this famous parable of the Good Samaritan is in response to the command to love your neighbor as yourself. We are to care for others. Have you ever been cared for? E.g., I recall once I was

in line at the Dollar Tree with like a couple of things in my hands, and the person in front of me had a shopping car of stuff, and when she saw me she insisted that I go before her—which was a great blessing to me! The second thing to notice here is that the hero of this parable is *not* the Jew, but the Samaritan who was traveling in Jewish territory (from Jerusalem to Jericho). E.g., I recall going through a hard time when someone on the other side from me theologically, the theological left, texted me support and prayers for about two to three weeks every day—a true hero and friend to me. He was a great example to me of loving your neighbor as yourself in a way described by the parable of the good Samaritan. The other text is Galatians 3:28; READ. What Paul does here is to strike down the social barriers that people create-- we are all one in Christ Jesus. E.g., what is to our shame is that in the 1900s Christians supported the idea of separate but equal, which was *never* equal, and separated places to sit on the bus, water fountains, bathrooms, schools, etc. E.g., it is significant that the slave trade in England in the early 1800s was stopped due to the efforts of the Christian William Wilberforce. He says something similar in Colossians 3:11. These two texts are to guide us as Christians in interaction with others of different races.

“So, how should Christians approach the issue of racism?” The thought often expressed today is that the U.S. is largely a systemically racist country, as I read in an online article from USA Today from this summer (“What Is Systemic Racism? Here’s What It Means and How You can Help Dismantle It” by N’dea Yancey-Bragg, June 16, 2020). I personally think the evidence is against such a view. After all, we have elected an African-American president not only to one term but two. Also, if we look at the New Orleans City Council and Police, we see diversity there, as we do in very many large cities in the U.S. Also, I have noticed on the local news in the morning and national news that there is diversity. So while I don’t think we are a nation that is largely systemically racist, I do know there are certainly pockets of systemic racism. So I have a “homework

assignment” for us. I would suggest two things. First, find a person of another race and ask him or her to tell you what it has been like for him or her to grow up in the U.S. Perhaps invite them to lunch or coffee/tea. Do not argue with the person; just listen and learn. And then repeat back to them what you have heard to see if what you heard is correct. Then let them know if the person would like to hear what it has been like for you to grow up in the U.S. If the person says no, then just leave it— and know that you have ministered to that person just by listening. But if the person says yes, then you can have a productive conversation on race that can actually change hearts and minds. Second, let us pray for those who have been shown injustice to know justice and God’s healing. And let us pray for the police and for our justice system to know our appreciation for the hard jobs they have to do, to know God’s protection, and to be instruments of justice and fairness. And also, on a more humorous note, if we happen to run into a “Karen” who is demanding to see the manager, let us be patient and kind to them too!