

**The Daily Dilemmas**  
**Is There a Solution to Racism?**

**Acts 10**

<sup>34</sup>Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism <sup>35</sup>but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

Experience with me just a moment your initial perceptions of the following images.

This is how God sees. Who's heart is this? It could be the heart of this man. This is how we see. Who is he? Louis Farrakhan, Honorable Minister & Leader of the Nation of Islam.

This is how God sees. Who's brain is this? It could be the brain of this man. Who is he?

The Rev. Al Sharpton, 2004 presidential candidate in the Democratic primaries.

Coincidentally, I think he had some of the best ideas and presentations of any Democratic candidates. He was at least the most entertaining. Who's knee x-ray is this? It could be the knee x-ray of this man. You know him...it's Bill Cosby.

What did you feel in those images? I know you got warm and fuzzy feelings when Bill Cosby's image appeared. I would guess you didn't respond internally to Louis Farrakhan or Al Sharpton on the same way. The heart, brain and x-ray probably elicited no emotional feeling at all. What makes the difference?

The sermon title asks the question, "Is there a Solution to Racism" there is an equally important question "Can we be color-blind?" The answer is "No, we can not." We cannot be any more color-blind than we can escape the feelings that are elicited by the images of men and/or women that we dislike, distrust and love. Michael Eric Dyson, Professor in the

Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania, an African American, writes in his book entitled "Race Matters" that race does matter. It always has and probably always will. Americans are still distracted by and polarized "zones of ethnic difference." We are different and we quite naturally recognize difference but we do not have to be racist or discriminatory because of our difference.

Much has changed in our lifetimes in regard to race. In the fall of 1971 white and black students alike in my high school had to go to the restrooms in groups so that you were not beat up by angry fellow students polarized over the issue of forced busing to achieve integration of public schools. There is no outward segregation in terms of lunch counters, motels or water fountains. There still exists a defacto segregation system, look around you, as one sociologist said, "The most segregated day of the week is Sunday, white and black." I will never forget the question posed by a young student when I was substitute teaching several years ago, he asked, "Rev. Stratton, why do all the blacks sit together in the cafeteria." My response, "Well tell me why all the white students sit together in the cafeteria?" His response was, "Oh, I get it." It wasn't about "them" it is a common trait we share, we want to be with others like ourselves and we are not color-blind. As Dyson said, "We are polarized by zones of ethnic difference."

We have come a long way. There are some that say that forty years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that little has changed for blacks in America, but the basic facts speak against that claim. John McWhorter, associate professor of linguistics at the University of California Berkley states the following facts in his book entitled, "*Losing the Race: Self Sabotage in Black America*" that in 1960, 55 percent of the black population lived in

poverty, that is “every other black person and then some.” There were four black congressmen. Just 5.4% of blacks from the age of twenty-five to twenty-nine had a college degree. 3.8% of all black men and 1.8% of black women were managers or proprietors. Today, less than 25% live in poverty and that is exacerbated by the high percentage of single African-American mothers with children living in poverty. There are no fewer than forty-one black persons in congress and 15.4% of African-Americans have college degrees. If that number sounds small consider that less than 24% of whites do. In 1996 about one in ten of all female managers are black and about one in five blacks was a manager or professional. More than half of African-Americans are listed as middle-class and that number has increased by 10% since 1970, while the white middle class has increased by only 5%. The social landscape of America shows incontrovertibly that something significant has been afoot since 1964. The signs of progress are stark, relentless and certainly cause for celebration. But racism still exists. We are surprised by whites walking in some neighborhoods in Indianapolis, just as we are surprised by blacks walking in other neighborhoods in Indianapolis. There remains a divide of thought, a divide of defensiveness and a divide of understanding between the races. There remains an ugly divide of color that keeps us from seeing how God sees, calling how God calls and loving the way God loves. If Sunday is the most segregated day of the week and the church, white and black, is the most segregated institution in America is that indicative of a divide among us? And, if so, how do we work to close that divide?

Two generations after the end of legal discrimination, race still ignites political debates — over Civil War flags, for example, or police profiling. But the wider public discussion

of race relations seems muted by a full-employment economy and by a sense, particularly among many whites, that the time of large social remedies is past. Race relations are being defined less by political action than by daily experience, in schools, in sports arenas, in pop culture and at worship, and especially in the workplace. I am convinced that in our visions of color and our feelings about race and race relations there is a divide. We have become pretty adept at purging our speech of slurs and stereotypical references but we still know what the N-word is and I hear it all too frequently in hushed statements and quiet attempts at humor. And, the slurs toward whites from members of the black community are just as pervasive and contemptible.

Well, where does this all come from? You may remember a great play and a great movie "South Pacific." It had tremendous music by Rogers and Hammerstein. There's a song that always haunts me. It is entitled, "You've got to be Carefully Taught." Remember that song? It has two stanzas to it.

*You've got to be taught to hate and fear,  
You've got to be taught from year to year.  
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear,  
You've got to be carefully taught,  
You've got to be carefully taught.*

*You've got to be taught to be afraid,  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,  
And people whose skin is a different shade.  
You've got to be carefully taught.  
You've got to be carefully taught.*

*You've got to be taught before it's too late  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate.*

*You've got to be carefully taught,  
You've got to be carefully taught.*

That's the source of racism in our county and everywhere else: as little children are growing up and see their parents' behavior, and what their parents teach them directly and indirectly. It is passed on from one generation to another.

There are some people who are foolish enough to say that the Bible teaches us to be racist? I believe, that we could spend the next two hours looking at scriptures that condemn racism. We could start at Numbers 12. We find there that Moses had married a black woman from Ethiopia or the ancient country of Cush. A Jew with a black woman. The sister of Moses, Miriam, went berserk! She rebelled, she said it was awful, she objected strongly to that marriage and do you remember what God did to Miriam? Struck her with leprosy! Moses intervened on behalf of his sister Miriam, and because of what Moses said, God just gave her leprosy for one week. But it's obvious that God was very upset with the attitude that Miriam had. We could speak from Romans, Ephesians, Corinthians but perhaps the verse that best speaks to racism, sexism or any ism you care to discuss would be Matthew 7:12. If everyone on earth followed it, this one verse would eliminate racism right at this moment and we'd never hear of it again. "Whatever you want others to do for you, do so for them." If you remember, Matthew 7:12 is called the Golden Rule. The golden rule would stamp out racism.

It seems ironic that the worst differences between races are exaggerated when brown and pink people are labeled "black and white." Those very terms themselves begin to polarize our thinking between two extremes, rather than emphasizing the closeness of the

two. They emphasize the differences in people, rather than the similarities. We call those perceived differences, stereotypes. **Stereotypes Lead To Prejudice.** Stereotyping is a lazy way of lumping together all of those who come from a certain class, or a certain occupation, or a certain race, and attributing to each individual the same characteristics of the group. Although something may generally be true of a group, it is not specifically true of each person in that group.

Such stereotypes as “Blondes are all dizzy,” “Teenagers are all rebellious,” “All preachers are lazy,” “All men are pigs,” or “All women are temperamental” do not demonstrate our careful, calculated observations. Rather they show our laziness of judgment, and our blind acceptance of some generalization as being the rule. The Bible says that those who judge according to outward appearance are foolish—that we do not see people the way God sees them, “For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7).

**Stereotyping always leads to prejudice.** Prejudice Is Ugly. It divides, isolates, and ostracizes people. Prejudice is the mark of an ignorant mind that perceives itself to be enlightened. Prejudice thinks it understands persons or actions before acquiring any actual first-hand knowledge, or before consulting with all the facts. Prejudice has its root in ignorance, and leads to further ignorance.

Prejudice Is A Perception Problem. It is defined as “unfavorable judgment due to partiality.” Likewise, prejudice is never neutral. It reacts strongly either for or against someone or something without knowing the facts. Sometimes it is confused with conviction, but there is nothing that noble about prejudice.

You can be prejudiced about lots of persons or groups. Many of us grew up during the Civil Rights demonstrations of the 1950's and the 1960's. There was feeling of optimism then, where many people thought that things were going to get better. I think they did get better for a while, and yet, things now seem to be deteriorating when it comes to racism. Here is a startling statistic, “since 1990, the number of white supremacist groups in this country has been growing by about 25% per year.” (Time magazine, March 2003.)

There's a book you ought to read; I read it when it was first published. It is written from a Christian point of view, it is entitled The Coming Race Wars. It is a very frightening book. As the author points out on page after page in the book, the racial problem in the United States is getting worse. And if you extend it logically out into the future, then it may be that the time will come, not too far down the road, when this country will disintegrate into race war. There are some things we need to understand about Racism.

**A) Racism Is Not New.** It was a problem in Biblical times (John 1:46; 4:9; 8:48; Acts 22:21-23).

**B) Racism Uses Crude Descriptions Of People.** They are offensive and demeaning. Such ugly slurs should never cross the lips of men and women who are bought by the blood of Christ, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” (Ephesians 4:29).

**C) Racism Is A Small Minded Man’s Way Of Elevating Himself.** Such affronts are the attempts of some people to elevate themselves, by putting down and stepping on others (Philippians 2:3-4).

**D) Racism Is Arrogant And Foolhardy.** One race cannot be better than another because all of us have sprung from the same ancestors. We are all of one blood, “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.” (Acts 17:26).

**E) Racism Is A Sin Of Pride.** One considers himself to be better than someone else because of nothing more than a genetic combination of chromosomes, “For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” (Galatians 6:3).

God must consider racism an important sin to overcome, because He performed a notable miracle to dispel the Jewish prejudice against the Gentiles. Peter’s first hint came with his vision of the animals descending from heaven upon a great sheet. The conclusion of all of those events (Acts 10:1-23) was unmistakable, “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean... In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.” (Acts 10:28,34-35).

What can we do about Racism? I think it is very simple. Three words lay out a course of action. The first is **CONFESS**. There are some confessions we have to make. Now by the term confess I do not mean repent. We get those two words confused. Repent means to turn away from, to feel sorry for something done. Confession is really a positive statement of the way things are or a statement of belief. Confession is all about acknowledgment. Here are some of the acknowledgments I’ve been working through:

- Acknowledge your negative thoughts, feeling, attitudes and experiences to change (fear, anxieties, worries, anger, denial, guilt, etc.)
- Acknowledge your thoughts, feelings, attitudes and actions towards those who have different skin color than you.
- Acknowledge that there is a spiritual realm behind the physical and that there is a spirit of racism that we have allowed to rule. This spirit of racism not only influences individuals, but corporations, organizations and institutions, like the church, government, hospitals, schools.
- Acknowledge that white people are people of privilege. Having privilege doesn't make you a sinner nor does it condemn you.
- Acknowledge that you are pleased to be a person of white privilege because life is easier that way.
- Acknowledge that God's heart is grieved when we allow anything to come into our lives that separates us from one another.

The second word is **ENGAGE**. There is a stage of spiritual development that must take place if we ever want to truly be released from certain lines of thinking and action in our lives. This stage of spiritual development is also a necessary step if you ever want to change your actions in life. Racism is very real and racism separates human beings from each other and from God. And clearly we're not getting any better as humans dealing with it. Therefore, like any other darkness we must overcome in our lives – addictions, past sins, We must overcome racism. We must infuse the power of God into the situation and

into our lives. It's about turning away from trying to solve it by myself and saying – "God teach me – build into me the wisdom and power and courage I need to really love other people like You do." Now, to some of you this sounds hokey. Some preacher making light of a heavy situation. People I believe with all my heart that if we really went to God with this one – and with our entire life – and by faith asked for His power and love and grace and peace to be lived out in our lives, "What actions would come out of God being actively given reign in our hearts and lives?" Jesus said – love God and then love other people. That's what the Christian life is about. Well, if we are infused with His power. what would He ask us to do?

The third word is this, **ACTION**. Here are a few actions we can all consider.

1. Practice the discipline of service in areas where non-whites come together. But ensure that your service is directed by the Holy Spirit and by God's grace and calling on your life. To serve with humility and love without God is impossible. Do not serve out of guilt, curiosity or some human principle, value or interest.
2. Ask God what action is needed. Ask God for a pure heart. Ask Him to give you the mind and heart of Christ. Ask for the Christ-like desire to love those whom we have previously discarded, ignored and rejected. Ask Him to change your heart, to take away hatred, anger and fear deep within and to fill your heart with joy, peace and love. Ask Him to remove all aspects of indifference and callousness towards other people of color.
3. Learn from others. Learn from those whom you feel understand racism in all its forms.
4. Begin a dialogue about white privilege in your sphere of influence. What does it mean to be a person of privilege? What would Jesus have me do as a person of white privilege?
5. Pray for racial healing in our city. God will hear our prayers and answer them.

6. Begin developing relationships with people of color.

Is this a God-given opportunity for us to be challenged and to grow into the people God wants us to become?

Here's what I know to be true. Overcoming racism in our society will not be easy or simple or quick – there is no easy fix -- But I do believe that we – the church – the people of God – must not ignore the realities of how people of one color treat people of other colors. We must move to not only acknowledge with our heads that this must change – but with our hearts our hands and our feet.