



A Biblical View of Ethnicity, Racism, and Justice

Section 6: Understanding Racism (Seeing Racism as Idolatry)

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“For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”

- Romans 1:25

“In a sense this verse repeats the truth of verse 23, but it expresses more. **The truth of God** is not only the truth concerning God but also God’s truth concerning all things, including mankind. This truth is that people are creatures of God and can find true fulfillment only in worshiping and obediently serving God **the Creator**. **A lie** (lit., ‘the lie’) on the other hand says that the creature—angelic (Isa. 14:13–14; John 8:44) or human (Gen. 3:4–5)—can exist independent of God, self-sufficient, self-directing, and self-fulfilling. Mankind made himself his god in place of the true God. Because God the Creator **is forever praised** (in contrast with creatures who are undeserving of worship), Paul added **Amen**. This word transliterates in both Greek and English the Hebrew word meaning ‘so let it be.’ As an affirmation, not a wish, it places approval on what has just been said (cf. comments on 2 Cor. 1:20).”¹

I. Central Definitions of Racism

- A. Racism can be defined as the belief that one people group is more valuable than another and the practice of distinguishing one people group as more important than another.²
- B. “Fundamentally, racism has to do not merely with real or perceived differences between people groups but with the value and significance of these differences. It has to do with the presumption of superiority over other people groups and the conduct of personal and social life that manifest this presumption in personal, communal, and sociocultural ways. Racism has to do with beliefs, actions, and structures that centralize some by marginalizing others on the basis of supposed differences.”³
- C. Whereas the word racism is not in the Bible, the concept can be understood as a practice of unbiblical partiality (i.e. ungodly bias towards people groups that results in elevating one people group and demeaning another people group; a **respect of persons not sanctioned by God.**)

¹ John A. Witmer, “Romans,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, Vol. 2*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 443.

² John Piper, *Bloodlines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 239. Kindle Edition.

³ Douglas R. Sharp, *No Partiality: The Idolatry of Race and the New Humanity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 52.

II. How is Racism Idolatry according to Romans 1:25?

- A. **Deification of Mankind through Centralizing Race and Racism** – Racism is idolatry in that it deifies mankind, making race and racism the ruling principle and power of our lives that shape our belief systems, our lifestyles, and our relationships. We shape our view of life and living according to the belief system of race and racism above God’s narrative of how we should live and function to His glory. We live and relate to people according to the belief system of race and racism above God’s Kingdom agenda of Love. This is worship of the creation above the Creator (i.e. idolatry).
- B. **Belief in the Superiority of One Race above Another** – Racism is idolatry in that it has exchanged the truth about mankind for the lie that there are people groups that are more valuable and superior to other people groups. This lie redefines creation to fit a man-centered narrative and rejects God’s narrative that all people are equal and the creation of God to reflect His glory. This is worship of the creation above the Creator (i.e. idolatry).
- C. **Redefining the Value and Virtue of People through Race and Racism** – Racism is idolatry in that it redefines the value or virtue of people and people groups according to the standards of mankind as opposed to accepting the value and virtue of mankind established already by God. As one views another human being through the eyes of race and racism, they are left with ideas about themselves and other people that promote fallacies and ideologies based on the principles of man and tradition of the culture, rather than seeing themselves and other people according to the truth about mankind revealed by God through Scripture. This is an exchange of the truth for a lie leading to worship of the creation above the Creator (i.e. idolatry).
- D. **Self-Sufficiency, Self-Determination and Self-Domination through Race and Racism** – Racism is idolatry in that it promotes the lie that mankind is self-sufficient and has the power and authority to define and determine the destiny of one’s own people group and other people groups accordingly. The idea that one has the ability to determine the destiny of one’s own people group and the destiny of other people groups demonstrates disillusionment and a denial of who the Originator and Determiner of creation, life, and all people groups is. Racism is a rejection of God as Originator, Determiner and Sovereign over all and promotes a particular people group as Sovereign according to their own estimation, research, and calculations. This is an exchange of the truth for a lie resulting in worshiping the creation above the Creator (i.e. idolatry).
- E. **Dedication and Devotion to the Deification of One’s People Group and Denouncing of Other People Groups through Race and Racism** – Racism is idolatry in that it promotes dedication and devotion to the preservation and exaltation of one’s people group as opposed to dedication and devotion to self-sacrifice and the exaltation of Christ Jesus the Lord and His agenda. The idolatry is revealed in the magnification of one’s people above the magnification of God, the attributing of goodness to one’s people group and

the demeaning and/or demonizing of other people groups. This results in the deification of one's people group and the devaluing of other people groups. It demonstrates faith in and worship of oneself and one's people group above faith in Jesus Christ the Lord. This is an exchange of the truth for a lie leading to worship of the creation above the Creator (i.e. idolatry).

F. Solutions and Satisfaction for Man come through Race and Racism – Racism is idolatry in that it is built on the belief that the source of one's satisfaction and the solution to man's problems are determined by the elevation and promotion of one group of people above another. This is a rejection the Creator's assessment that man's problem is sin and his solution to and satisfaction in life will be found in salvation and sanctification in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is an exchange of the truth for a lie leading to worshiping the creation above the Creator (i.e. idolatry).

G. Rejecting and Ignoring God's Assessment of Mankind and Agenda for Mankind – Racism rejects and ignores that God created all of mankind through one man and one woman thereby creating all equal. Racism rejects and ignores the fact that God declares no one better or worse than another but that all are sinners in need of His salvation. Racism ignores that God is Sovereign and Savior of all mankind. Racism ignores the fact that God has called man to salvation and sanctification that leads to reflecting the love, harmony, and oneness of the character of God and living a life pleasing to God. This is an exchange of the truth for a lie leading to worshiping the creation above the Creator (i.e. idolatry).

III. Questions We Must Consider:

- A. Do I believe I am somewhat inferior, superior, or equal to other people groups? How do I demonstrate this in my conversations and in my interactions or involvement with other people groups?
- B. What have I been taught about other people groups that has led me to believe and respond the way I do? Does this line up with the Bible says?
- C. What experiences have I had in relation to other people groups that have led me to believe and respond the way I do? Have I processed this through the grid of the Bible?
- D. What do I want or not want from other people groups? Have I processed this through the grid of the Bible?
- E. What are the governmental policies, the infrastructure ideologies, or basic practices my culture has promoted and practiced toward other people groups that have led me to interact or involve myself the way I do with other people groups? What Scriptures do I use to validate my beliefs and responses to other people groups?

- F. How much of my interaction or involvement with other people groups are dominated by cultural preferences or personal ideologies as opposed to biblical insights and imperatives or vice versa?

Key Point:

The construct of race and racism, the ever-growing significance and value placed on the construct of race and racism, the rewards and punishments produced by the construct of race and racism and the promotion of death, division, and demeaning, dehumanizing and deifying humans created by the construct of race and racism is the fruit of idolatry (i.e. worship of the creation above the Creator).

Reflection:

“At its root, the idolatry of race results from idolizing the human, and the worship of the idol of race consists in the beliefs, rituals and practices that acknowledge the claim of race to be the source of the meaning and value of human life and the basis for loyalty and concern for others. The piety associated with the idolatry of race is framed by the myth of race and is expressed not only in the belief that race is real but also in the sense and sentiment the devotion and reverence that fabricate racism. The deification of race and the piety of racism are extraordinary examples of the kind of idolatry that Paul described when he spoke of those who “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25). But as the first chapter of Romans as a whole suggests, the idolatry of race and the cultic system of beliefs, rituals and practices of racism are a response to God and others, one that shapes and in no small way determines a relation to God and others. Race and racism have been and still are the characteristically idolatrous, sinful responses and relations of our time and place.The deification of race and the practice of racism amount to the displacement of God and the installation of our racial selves, our racial group or our race itself as the ruling power that shapes our lives.”⁴

⁴ Douglas R. Sharp, *No Partiality: The Idolatry of Race and the New Humanity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 253-254, 255.