

RACE, CROSS,  
AND THE CHRISTIAN

# BLOODLINES

**JOHN PIPER**

FOREWORD BY TIM KELLER

*Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian*

Copyright © Desiring God Foundation

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Josh Dennis

First printing 2011

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from *The New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-2852-1

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2853-8

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-2854-5

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2855-2

---

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Piper, John, 1946–

*Bloodlines : race, cross, and the Christian* / John Piper ; foreword by Tim Keller.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-2852-1 (hc)

1. Reconciliation—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Race discrimination—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Church and minorities. I. Title.

BT738.27.P57 2011

270.089—dc22

2011010732

---

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

LB 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11  
14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# CONTENTS

Foreword by Tim Keller	11
Preface	13
A Note to the Reader on <i>Race and Racism</i>	17

## PART ONE OUR WORLD: THE NEED FOR THE GOSPEL

Introduction	
Martin Luther King Jr.: What Was It Like for Those Who Weren't There?	23

### SECTION ONE

#### My Story, My Debt, My World: Why I Wrote the Book

1 My Story: From Greenville to Bethlehem	31
2 The Gospel I Love, the Debt I Owe, and the Church I Serve	43
3 Global Shifting and the New Face of the Church	51

### SECTION TWO

#### Black and White and the Blood of Jesus

4 Why This Book Gives Prominence to Black-White Relationships	59
5 Personal Responsibility and Systemic Intervention	71
6 The Power of the Gospel and the Roots of Racial Strife	87

## PART TWO GOD'S WORD: THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Introduction	
William Wilberforce: The Importance of Doctrine and "Coronary" Commitment	109

### SECTION ONE

#### The Accomplishment of the Gospel

7 The Mission of Jesus and the End of Ethnocentrism	115
8 The Creation of One New Humanity by the Blood of Christ	121

9	Ransomed for God from Every Tribe	129
10	Every People Justified the Same Way	147

**SECTION TWO**  
The Application of the Gospel

11	Dying with Christ for the Sake of Christ-Exalting Diversity	159
12	Living in Sync with Gospel Freedom	169
13	The Law of Liberty and the Peril of Partiality	181

**SECTION THREE**  
The Ultimate Goal of the Gospel

14	Why Is It Worth the Death of His Son?	193
----	---------------------------------------	-----

**SECTION FOUR**  
Two Issues: Interracial Marriage and Prejudice

15	Interracial Marriage	203
16	Probability, Prejudice, and Christ	217

	Conclusion: Confession, Warning, Plea	227
--	---------------------------------------	-----

**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Is There Such a Thing as Race?	234
A Word about Terminology	
Appendix 2: The Sovereignty of God and the Soul Dynamic:	241
God-Centered Theology and the Black Experience in America	
Appendix 3: How and Why Bethlehem Baptist Church Pursues	256
Ethnic Diversity	
Appendix 4: What Are the Implications of Noah's Curse?	263
Notes	268
Subject Index	281
Name Index	285
Scripture Index	289
Desiring God: A Note on Resources	295





---

# A NOTE TO THE READER ON *RACE AND RACISM*

I'm a stickler for clear definitions. I like to know what I am talking about. If you would rather just pick up my meaning as you go along, feel free to skip this section and go straight to the introduction. Stories are always more interesting.

Believe it or not, the existence of the reality of *race* itself is disputed. I mean seriously by very wise people whom I admire. I deal with this in appendix 1. And, of course, the term *racism* is ambiguous as well.

It seems to me that it is a healthy sign to wish that the term *race* did not exist. It has not served well to enhance human relations. As we use it, it is not a biblical category. We may not be able to communicate in our day without the term, but we can at least try to show why it's a fuzzy term that has often been hijacked by ideology for racist purposes.

## RACE IS MORE COMPLEX THAN COLOR—BUT NOT LESS

Nevertheless, in this book I have not tried to abandon the terms *race* and *racial*. As loaded as the terms are, they are too embedded in our language and in the thousands of books and articles and sermons and lectures and conversations that make up the world we must relate to. There is no escaping this historically, and, in the present day, the problems we face are conceived along racial lines understood mainly as color lines.

For example, in 1899 W. E. B. Du Bois delivered a speech to the First Pan-African Conference at Westminster Hall, London, and began like this:

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, the question as to how far differences of race—which show themselves chiefly in the color of the skin and the texture of the hair—will

## NOTE TO THE READER

---

hereafter be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization.<sup>1</sup>

I will not begrudge Du Bois the use of the term *race* in this sense. This is history. And it is still the way the race issue is powerfully formulated today. Unless I explicitly differentiate *race* and *racial* from *ethnicity* and *ethnic*, I would like you, the reader, to think of both when I mention either—that is, *ethnicity* with a physical component and *race* with a cultural component. Very often I use the terms together to draw out this combination of ideas.

### RACISM VALUES ONE RACE OVER ANOTHER

With regard to the term *racism*, it is possible to get oneself tied in so many knots that it feels hopeless to define. Several years ago, we spent months as a pastoral staff at our church trying to come up with a working definition. I never thought defining a single word could be so difficult. But I am simply going to cut the knot with a decision to work with someone else's definition.

In the summer of 2004, the Presbyterian Church in America settled on the following definition, which I find helpful: “Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races.”<sup>2</sup> In spite of saying above that I usually use the term *race* with cultural connotations (*ethnicity*), in this definition I am thinking of race primarily in terms of physical features. I am making a distinction between *race* and *ethnicity*.

The reason is that, since *ethnicity* includes beliefs and attitudes and behaviors, we are biblically and morally bound to value some aspects of some ethnicities over others. Where such valuing is truly rooted in biblical teaching about good and evil, this should not be called *racism*. There are aspects of every culture, including our own (whoever “our” is), which are sinful and in need of transformation. So the definition of *racism* here leaves room for assessing cultures on the basis of a biblical standard.

The focus of this definition of racism is on the *heart* and *behavior* of the racist. The *heart* that believes one race is more valuable than another



## NOTE TO THE READER

---

is a sinful heart. And that sin is called *racism*. The *behavior* that distinguishes one race as more valuable than another is a sinful behavior. And that sin is called *racism*. This personal focus on the term *racism* does not exclude the expression of this sin in structural ways—for example, laws and policies that demean or exclude on the basis of race. (See chapter 5 where I focus on the issue of structural racism.)



PART ONE

OUR WORLD:  
THE NEED  
FOR THE GOSPEL



---

## INTRODUCTION

### MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

*What Was It Like for Those Who Weren't There?*

A book on race written by a baby boomer,<sup>1</sup> who came of age in the 1960s, has to begin with the civil rights movement. It still grips us, defines us, in so many ways. After slavery itself and the Civil War, no event or movement in the last four hundred years has affected the racial climate in America today more than this movement. Things were done and said in those days that need to be known by those who weren't there. The most eloquent spokesman of the movement was Martin Luther King Jr. His vision and his description of the situation that gave rise to the movement help explain why this book exists—especially part 1, “Our World: The Need for the Gospel.”

#### THE LEADER

Martin Luther King Jr. was born January 15, 1929. On April 4, 1968, at 6:00 p.m., just outside Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, the thirty-nine-year-old King stood by the railing looking out over some rundown buildings just beyond Mulberry Street. James Earl Ray took aim with a .30 caliber rifle and blew away the right side of King's face and neck. He was pronounced dead at St. Joseph's Hospital an hour and five minutes later. The nonviolent voice against the rage of racism was gone.

Why would a thirty-nine-year-old man be killed? We need to teach our children this history. Some of us lived it and will never forget it. Segregation was the world we grew up in—legally mandated separation of races at all kinds of levels. Separate schools, separate motels, separate restrooms, separate swimming pools, separate drinking fountains. How could you more clearly communicate the lie that being black was like

a disease. It had an unbelievably oppressive and demeaning effect on the African-American community. And it had a deadening and defiling effect on the conscience of the white community.

King did not spark the movement. He was swept into it, almost against his will. The civil rights movement had many catalysts. One of the most important happened on May 17, 1954. That was the day that the Supreme Court decided the case called *Brown v. Board of Education*. It declared that state-imposed segregation in the public schools was a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Many scholars say that “*Brown* remains the most important Supreme Court decision in [the twentieth] century.”<sup>2</sup> Some of us would say that the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* was equally important, only for opposite reasons. *Brown* tried to restore rights to an oppressed group. *Roe v. Wade* took rights away from an oppressed group.

Another catalyst happened about a year and a half later. On December 1, 1955, a forty-two-year-old black woman named Rosa Parks (who died October 24, 2005) refused to surrender her seat to a white man on an officially segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. The black community of Montgomery rallied behind her when she was put in jail. They boycotted the buses for 381 days. The leader of the movement—by no choice of his own—was the twenty-six-year-old pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. And with that leadership, he became the unrivaled leader of the movement until his death thirteen years later. No one spoke in that cause with more influence.

#### “THE MOST ELOQUENT AND LEARNED EXPRESSION”

Martin Luther King called for freedoms and rights and justice that were long overdue. And he did it with an appeal to historic Christian vision, with amazing rhetorical skill, without condoning violence, and with unprecedented and lasting success. That’s why there is a holiday in his honor. One of his writings in particular provides a window on the mid-twentieth-century world of black Americans—“Letter from Birmingham Jail.”

The place is Birmingham, Alabama. The time is April 11, 1963. I was seventeen years old in Greenville, South Carolina. At the Gaston

## INTRODUCTION

---

Motel, Room 30, Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy, Wyatt Walker, and Fred Shuttlesworth decided to lead a peaceful, nonviolent demonstration the next day, Good Friday, against the racial injustices of the city.

As in most Southern cities in those days (including the one I was growing up in 350 miles away) bus seating was segregated; schools, parks, lunch counters, restrooms, drinking fountains—they were almost all segregated. Some called Birmingham the most segregated city in the country. Its bombings and torchings of black churches and homes had given it the name “Bombingham”—and “the Johannesburg of the South.”

There was one catch. The sheriff, Bull Connor, had served Martin Luther King with a state-court injunction that prohibited him and other movement leaders from conducting demonstrations. With a wife and four children back home in Atlanta, King decided to violate the injunction, pursue a peaceful, nonviolent demonstration, and willingly go to jail. On Good Friday, King led his fifty volunteers downtown, up to the police line, came face-to-face with Connor, and knelt down with Ralph Abernathy in prayer. He and all the demonstrators were thrown into paddy wagons and put in jail.

On Tuesday, April 16, King was shown a copy of the *Birmingham News*, which contained a letter from eight Christian and Jewish clergymen of Alabama (all white), criticizing King for his demonstration. In response, King wrote what has come to be called “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and which one biographer described as “the most eloquent and learned expression of the goals and philosophy of the nonviolent movement ever written.”<sup>3</sup>

### WHAT IT WAS LIKE—FOR THOSE WHO WEREN'T THERE

We need to hear the power and insight with which King spoke to my generation in the sixties—enraging thousands and inspiring thousands. The white clergy had all said he should be more patient, wait, and not demonstrate. He wrote:

## OUR WORLD: THE NEED FOR THE GOSPEL

---

Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, “Wait.” But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your 20 million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society;

. . . when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she cannot go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she’s told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people;

. . . when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking, “Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?”; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading “white” and “colored”; when your first name becomes “Nigger,” your middle name becomes “Boy” (however old you are) and your last name becomes “John,” and your wife and mother are never given the respected title “Mrs.”;

. . . when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness”—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.<sup>4</sup>

To the charge that he was an extremist, he responded like this:

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”? Was not Amos an extremist for justice: “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”? Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus”?



## INTRODUCTION

---

Was not Martin Luther an extremist: “Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God”? And John Bunyan: “I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.” And Abraham Lincoln: “Thus this nation cannot survive half slave and half free.” And Thomas Jefferson: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . .” So the question is not whether we will be extremist, but what kind of extremist we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love?<sup>5</sup>

And finally he delivered a powerful call to the church, which rings as true today as it did in 1963:

There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. . . . But the judgment of God is upon the church [today] as never before. If today’s church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the 20th century.<sup>6</sup>

That is Martin Luther King’s prophetic voice ringing out of the Birmingham jail in 1963.

### HOW MUCH HAS CHANGED IN THE HEART?

Many things have changed since 1963. And some deep things have not changed. Let me illustrate. There are probably more vicious white supremacists in America today than there were in 1968. The victims are as likely to be Latinos or Somali immigrants as African Americans whose ancestors have been here for centuries. The Ku Klux Klan has no corner on hate any more.

On June 7, 1998—that’s ’98, not ’68—outside Jasper, Texas, James Byrd, a forty-nine-year-old African American, was beaten and chained by his ankles to the back of a pickup truck and dragged two miles until his head ripped off. The perpetrators had racist tattoos, one of them depicting a black hanging from a tree. Many things have changed in the

last forty years, but in some people some deep things haven't changed. There is still plenty of hate.

### MORE THAN BLACK AND WHITE—BUT NOT LESS

I am aware that the issue of race relations is bigger and more complex than black and white relations in this country. I've devoted a chapter to the wider global reality we are facing (chapter 3), and another to why this book is especially (though not exclusively) focused on black-white relations (chapter 4). But we will do well not to speak in too many broad generalizations when dealing with race. Better to anchor our thoughts to the real world. And in the real world, people are one thing and not another. They may be complex, but they are not generalities. They are specific human beings. Focusing on my own history, and the black-white reality in particular, has helped me keep my feet on the ground and my heart connected to real people.

Part 1 of this book focuses on our world, as part 2 focuses on God's Word. Or we might say, part 1 deals with the issues raised by natural bloodlines, and part 2 deals with the new line stemming not from natural blood but from the shed blood of Jesus. What we will see in part 1 is that the world we live in is a world where only the gospel of Jesus Christ can bring the kind of racial and ethnic harmony that we were made to enjoy.



“In 2008, many hoped the election of an African-American president would finally bridge the racial divide. Today, we are left wondering why racial tensions have not abated. John Piper argues that the only solution powerful enough to bring about reconciliation is the gospel of Jesus Christ—the gospel that announces that, through his blood, Jesus has demolished the dividing wall that separates humanity and brings all ethnicities together into one body, the Church.”

**Juan R. Sanchez Jr.**, Preaching Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas; council member, the Gospel Coalition

“Piper has given us an exquisite work on the matter of race, addressing the issue with personal sensitivity and practical advice. A must read for those who wish to pursue unity God’s way.”

**Tony Evans**, President, The Urban Alternative; Senior Pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship

---

“Leaping off these pages is the power of the gospel to overcome and defeat racism and a call to cross-centered, holy justice in our attitudes and actions toward those who are not like us.”

**Crawford W. Loritts Jr.**, author; radio host, *Living a Legacy*; Senior Pastor, Fellowship Bible Church, Roswell, Georgia

“Piper bequeaths an outstanding—and at times, *risky*—work on race and ethnicity. His personal testimony from the 1960’s until now, and his exploration of African-American writers past and present, demonstrates the complexity of dealing honestly with the topic of racism. The only question that remains is whether or not individual members of the church will take deeply to heart this sincere analysis and become a steadfast, holy force for undoing the problems of racism in North America and the world.”

**Eric C. Redmond**, author, *Where Are All The Brothers? Straight Answers to Men’s Questions About the Church*; Senior Pastor, Reformation Alive, Temple Hill, Maryland

CHRISTIAN LIVING / SOCIAL ISSUES

