
FOREWORD

I was excited when I learned that John Piper was writing a book on race and the gospel of the cross. When John gave me the privilege of reading the manuscript, I devoured it and found that despite my high expectations I was not disappointed. It was helpful to me personally, helpful to me theologically (in understanding the relevance of the gospel to racial conflict), and it was especially encouraging to me to think that many in the evangelical world would read it.

John and I are both old enough to remember the complicity of evangelical churches and institutions with the systemic racism in the US before the civil rights movement. I took my first church in a small town in the South in the early 1970s. The courts had recently ruled that the whites-only public swimming pool, operated by the town with taxpayers' money, had to be integrated. So what did the town do? It shut the pool down completely, and the white people of the town opened a new private swimming pool and club, which of course, did not have to admit racial minorities. Because I was a young pastor, our family was often invited to swim there, and swim we did, not really cognizant of what the pool represented.

One of the reasons I think this book is so important is that conservative evangelicals (particularly white ones) seem to have become more indifferent to the sin of racism during my lifetime. Why? One reason, of course, is the stubbornness of the sinful heart. We never want to hear about what is wrong with us. Another factor may be cultural. Many have made racism and prejudice virtually the only thing they will still call a "sin," and they often lay the guilt for the sin of racism at the doorstep of those who are social conservatives. Because of that, many who identify themselves as conservatives simply don't want to hear about racism anymore. They give lip service to it being a sin, but they associate any sustained denunciation of racism with the liberal or secular systems of thought. John's book, which you have in your hands, is a strong anti-

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dote to this misconception. His motivation is simply as a preacher of the Word to bring to light what God says in it regarding race and racism.

There are many ways in which this book will help the church in its struggle with the sin of racism. First, John takes us to all the biblical texts that speak most directly to the subject of race. But—and this was most helpful to me—John does not stop there. He then goes to most of the central doctrines and themes of our faith and shows the implications of each one for our understanding of race. He demonstrates how Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom, his substitutionary atonement, the doctrine of conversion, of union with Christ, of justification by faith—all transform our attitude toward our own race and culture as well as to those belonging to other races and cultures.

I won't ever forget how one of the elders in my first church, who had been growing in his understanding of the gospel and of the cross of Jesus, said to me, "You know, I realize I've been a racist all my life." I hadn't spoken to him of racism at all, but as he was going deeper into the theology of grace, he connected the dots for himself. I must say that most of us are not that insightful, and that's why we need this volume. Let John Piper connect the dots for you.

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