

RACISM, NEW ZEALAND, THE BIBLE

Unless you have been living under a rock somewhere, you can't help but notice that the issue of racism is a hot topic at the moment. I googled racism and news and here were the results. Just from the last couple of weeks.

- # Racist taunt at Devonport beach shock Maori family.
- # Racism in the workplace
- # Story about a wellington cricket match where a fielder racially abused an outgoing batsman.
- # Story of a building company using racist language in a add promoting their services.
- # Southland headline. Te Hurihanganui launches in Gore to have hard conversations about racism
- #Asians can't be vegan': How Asian-Kiwis are smashing stereotypes
- # Our Truth, Tā Mātou Pono: a story about the mining settlement of Canton, near Riverton, and the racism they faced.

The good news is that this issue is being talked about and is coming to the fore. Racism can be unintentional, it can be informal. Joke, quip. Institutional. And deep seated. It can be deliberate. But it's impact on a person over time can be huge. And it's impact on society is to breed division, inequality, hatred and prejudice. Racism is about making quick judgments on the characteristics of a race to rate them as inferior or superior—demonstrating partiality or bias.

Denial

I suspect for many of us, our attitude to racism is one of denial. We deny our racist past by pointing out how much better we think we are than America or Australia. We deny we are racist, because to be called racist these days is an insult of the highest order. We deny we are racist because we see ourselves as good Christians and so of course we are not racist. We deny there is racism by minimizing it. There is no structural racism in NZ. It's just one or two bad apples. We deny there is racism because for most of us we are not on the receiving end of it. Most of us will experience very little racism because we belong to the majority culture.

And so if we deny there is a problem, then we can't do anything to address it. If we are not willing to even acknowledge there is an issue, then we cannot begin to address it. Racism is so pervasive because it appeals to the very core of our sinfulness. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent promised the woman that if she ate of the forbidden fruit, "you will be like God. (Genesis 3:5) From then to now, our desire to be our own god is at the root of all our sin.

Racism is a way to feel superior to others based on things that can't change. If I am white and you are not, I will always be white and you will always be not. So if I convince myself that being white is superior, I will always feel superior to you.

This temptation to racism is subtle and powerful. And Satan wants us not to acknowledge our discriminatory inclinations, because then we admit and repent of them.

The reality is that we all have racist attitudes and thoughts.

NZ History

On Monday we celebrate the Treaty of Waitangi. When it was signed in 1840, there was a world wide movement to get rid of slavery. Colonists thought the treaty was fair because it offered Maori the rights of British citizens. But underlying this was the attitude that British culture was superior. So alongside the treaty was an attitude of racism. Maori were considered superior to other indigenous cultures and so more able to be "integrated". Maori culture was encouraged alongside the belief that British culture was superior. From the very beginning the treaty was broken, and Maori were treated differently. Land was confiscated and when Maori resisted it being taken they were jailed and sometimes even executed.

Until 1945 Maori did not receive a pension or widows allows. Until 1951 there was a separate census for Maori. In early elections few Maori voted because to vote you had to hold individual title for land. In 1867 this was changed, but Maori could only vote in the 4 Maori electorates, despite the fact that proportionally they should have had 14 or so. Up until 1951 Maori voted on a separate day to the rest of NZ. It was only in 1967 that Maori were allowed to stand in the European seat. It was not until 1975 that Maori could choose if they voted in a Maori or European seat.

Up until the early 1960's there were some bars, hotels, cinemas and swimming pools that did not allow Maori to enter. From the 1940's to the 1980's speaking Maori was discouraged in schools, and some were punished for speaking it even informally in the playground.

Alongside the history of racism against Maori, is discrimination against Pacific Islanders and Asians. From the mid 1960's on, these forms of racism were increasingly challenged, particularly around the issue of sports teams and the All Blacks. However many Pakeha NZers believed that NZ had ideal race relations and that there were no issues.

The setting up of the Human Rights commission in 1971 and the Waitangi Tribunal gaining legal status in 1985 began to challenge racism at all levels.

We are still on a journey in this, and we still have a long way to go. But we cannot move forward until we understand our own history and until we understand the impact the racism has had on our country, particularly Maori and other minorities.



The Bible and Racism

Racism is a problem we can't ignore or run away from. It's an issue today, and it was an issue throughout history, including when the Bible was written. One of the earliest incidents of racism we see in the Bible is when Moses married a Cushite woman and his family objected. Numbers 12. Their racist attitude was a cover for a deeper attitude of jealousy.

But certainly in the NT, we see racism alive and well within society and the church. Foreigners, women and children we considered inferior. One key division was between Jew and Gentile. Some Jews who had come to faith were trying to force non-Jews to accept Jewish customs. To them to be a good Christian, you had to do Jewish religious activities.

Paul addressed it head on: (Romans 10:12). **Galatians 3:28** These statements absolutely revolutionary for the time.

God cares how we treat each other because we're all created in His image (Genesis 1:27). He makes no distinction between the inherent value of one race or ethnicity over another. God cares about people regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, and social status Deut. 10:17-19

Read Acts 10:34-35, 1 Corinthians 12:13, James 2:9, Revelation 7:9-10, Ephesians 2:14-18. The gospel, the good news, is more than just about being bought near to God. It also means we are bought near people that are very different from ourselves. The gospel restores broken relationship. Reconciliation is about the removed of prejudice so we can be in relationship with each other.

God is a reconciling God. The Gospel is, at its core, a message of reconciliation. God brings peace where there was once strife, and kindness where there was once animosity. He's done it with us and He can do it between us and between our neighbours, no matter what race or nationality.

If we belong to Jesus, we are part of His movement to bring more reconciliation between people and God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). As His representatives, we have the opportunity to share how the life-changing message of the Gospel creates a healthy relationship with God and healthy relationships between people, no matter who they are.

Our job, as we learn to follow Jesus step by step, includes reconciliation because the message of Jesus is that we all belong with God, together—no separation, no difference in status or worth.

Does the Bible promote Racism

Some have argued the Bible promotes racism, and or have used the Bible to support racism. Two key arguments have been the mark of Cain and the curse on Ham, both found in Genesis. Neither argument has any merit what so ever. It is a classic case of using the Bible to justify what the person wants to believe.

Our response as Christians to racism.

Tragedy is that the church that God intended was to model the very opposite of racism. It was to be a transforming community that modelled reconciliation and diversity. We have not been that. In fact, often we have been the exact opposite. But let's start at the personal level.

Ask the Holy Spirit to begin to reveal to you our own prejudices and blind spots. That is a brave prayer to pray. But we have to start with ourselves and confess our own sin.

Listen to the voices of others. Listen to the experiences of people who have are in a minority and who have encountered racism.

Learn our history. You can't grow if you don't know. There is no excuse for us not be aware of our history today. It is freely available. If we don't know our history, we can't understand the present. We cant understand the anger and pain that many still feel.

Speak up when we encounter racism. Office water cooler, friends. Much racism is casual. But we need to begin to call it out. Gently challenge it so that it is no longer acceptable. Racial putdowns, jokes. Speak up when we encounter policies that help embed the racial inequalities.

intentionally develop relationships with people of different cultures. Much of our racism comes from our lack of exposure to people who are different from ourselves. Having said that, often people say. I am not racist. I have lots of Maori friends. That does not mean you are not racist. They might well not be calling you out on your comments. But the breaking down of stereotypes and prejudices can only come out of relationship. Yet if we are honest, it is often easier to build relationship with people who are like ourselves.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. What racist attitudes did you experience in your family of origin?
2. Share a time when you have witnessed casual racism? Have you been on the receiving end of racist attitudes?
3. How much do you know of NZ's history? Is the history of NZ you know just the European history? How could you learn more?
4. Discuss the statement. "Everybody has racist thoughts and attitudes"
5. Why is there such strong denial or blindness towards our own racism?
6. What makes the gospel so radical when it comes to race? Reflect on the Scriptures and how they apply to us, and to ICBC
7. What actions do you need to take to grow in this area?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS