

Shaped by the Gospel: Race
Colossians 3:22-4:1

Intro:

- The title of the message this morning is *Shaped by the Gospel: Race and Work*. I am going to shift gears for us just a little bit. I am going to do two sermons on this particular text. I was not going to do this at first but I we needed to deal thoroughly with two important applications found in the text.

First the fascinating thing about this text is that it deals with slaves and masters. We do not have slaves and masters in our society today. There is slavery in our world but we call it human trafficking today but those who are human traffickers do not call themselves *slave masters* per say. This text is more complex then because of the language of slaves and master. We need to take time to unpack it properly.

Second we must address the topic of *slaves and masters* because of the sins closely associated with “slaves and master”—the sins of racism and prejudice. This was a problem in the first century, it was a problem in the churches and it is a problem for us today. So I am going to take two sermons to cover this text. This morning we will examine *how the gospel shapes race* and next Sunday, if the Lord wills, *how the gospel shapes work*.

We know the early church struggled with racism and prejudice. Paul addressed it many times in his letters in a variety of ways. In Ephesians he gave some vivid illustrations to show how Christ had broken down the hostility between the races in **Ephesians 2:14-18** where he talked about how Christ, by His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, had destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between the races and now they were one in Christ . . . [use illustration from Boice on the temple] . . . the dividing wall of hostilities of racism and prejudice are not torn down by erecting border walls or tearing down confederate statues. Only Jesus can remove the hostilities and heal the nations. Christ has already torn down everything that needs to be torn down.

- Colossians 3:22-4:1 is bringing to an end a section in the letter called the *Household Rules*.** What is unique in the family system in that day was that many families were made up of the husband, wife, children and then a servant or slave (or two). The slaves were just part of the family system.

For many Americans this family system is not common. Having a servant in the house is probably something only the very wealthy can afford and it would not look like the first century system did either. Servants today work like employees and have their own lives.

This is why the topic of “slaves and masters” is more complex for us. We use the same words but they have very different meanings and are tied to the ugly history of slavery and Jim Crow laws and civil rights abuses. These words are ripe with the sins of racism and prejudice. The scars of this period still plague our nation as we saw in Charlottesville, VA two weeks ago.

However, the sins of racism and prejudice were not unique to the institution of slavery in the U. S. or the first century. They have occurred in all societies that practiced slavery throughout history.

My point is that if the U. S. never had slavery there would still be racism and prejudice. Wherever there are sinners; racism and prejudice exists in some form. This is what sinners do and we saw that in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve in a perfect world felt God was holding out on them and was abusing His authority as God and so they sought to elevate themselves to His status and level the playing field.

Since that first sin in the Garden men and women and people of every tribe and tongue have sought to elevate themselves above one another and subjugate the other on basis of color of skin, economic status, where they are from, gender, age or educational status. As sinners we will find anything we can use to elevate ourselves above another person in order to keep them in their place and we will let them know.

- **The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write letters to help the churches to look back at the person and work of Christ and understand how he tore down the dividing wall of hostility.**
 - **Colossians 1:3-20** put the gospel arrow on the bowstring and Paul pulled it.
 - **In Colossians 3:1-17** the Holy Spirit pierced the heart of the sinner with the gospel-arrow by calling for transformation that bears gospel fruit.
 - In **Colossians 3:18-4:1** Paul's goal is to drive the arrow deep and leave it there with specifics about what that transformation looks like. Paul called Christians to wrestle with the thorny, sinful issues of the heart seen in two arenas of life: racism and work.

There is only one point for our sermon and we will make application at the end of the sermon: The only answer for racism and prejudice is reconciliation by the person and work of Jesus Christ. (Colossians 1:3-20, 3:11, 3:22-4:1)

- **When we study Colossians 3:22-4:1 obviously the issue of slavery jumps out at us.** So . . . while the text deals with how the gospel shapes work for the employee and the employer there is also an emphasis on racism and prejudice in **Colossians 3**. Let me point to five things in the text (three from the text and two from the larger context of Scripture) that indicate this:
 1. First is the immediate context of **v. 11**. From **v. 11**, we can conclude that there were some struggles with racism and prejudice in the church. Anywhere slavery exists racism and prejudice can be found.
 2. The second one is found in **v. 25**, which says, "*For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*" After admonishing the slaves to work for their masters as if they were working for the Lord Christ they could know that while their masters might not judge fairly that Christ will show no partiality and will judge fairly.
 3. The third one is found in **Colossians 4:1** where Paul then turns the admonishment around and admonishes the masters from the position of Christ. The judgment the masters were to give their slaves was to reflect that of God's judgment—just and fair. The motivation is found in the fact that in the ultimate sense that they would be judged as well.
 4. **Biblical context.** We know that Paul dealt with this issue in other letters.
 5. **Finally is the global context of the institution of slavery.** Where there is slavery you will find its wicked cousins racism and prejudice.
 - **Slaves who were Christians probably struggled with resentment or laziness** for how they were treated. The racism and prejudice most likely bled over into arenas of the family and in the church. Some of them probably had masters who were Christians and while they were followers of Christ perhaps how they treated their slaves had not changed. The gospel needed to penetrate that relationship.
 - **Then there were masters who were followers of Christ.** They possibly struggled with how to relate to a believing slave. To further complicate the relationship what if the slave became a church leader and was above them in church but not in home and in society.
- **So . . . Paul's teaching here was accompanied by a great amount of tension, for several reasons.** Consider that slavery was dehumanizing in nature. Ancient historians estimate that there were some 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire, or about

one-half the population. Because of this, work was considered below the dignity of the slave-owning Roman freeman. Practically everything was done by slaves even doctoring and teaching. The life of a slave was not very happy one. Ancient tradition, dating back to Aristotle, classified slaves as property or living tools. This is the very definition of human trafficking.

When it came to the role of slave masters, the Roman lawyer, Gaius said, “*We may not that it is universally accepted that the master possesses the power of life and death over a slave.*” The situation of slaves in general was not good, and for some it was terrible.

Dr. Kent Hughes said in the commentary on Colossians: “*Christianity’s preaching of the gospel with its explicit doctrine of equality raised the tension. Consider Paul’s teaching in Galatians 3:28, ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ We can be sure that both slaves and masters in Colossae attended Paul’s teaching in Colossians 3:22-4:1 eagerly.*”¹

- **Brothers and sisters we eagerly seek what the gospel has to say today.** Now more than ever we need the power of the gospel to reconcile our families, churches and our society.

Given our context in the U.S. with our history of slavery and civil rights abuses of African-Americans, the words “*slaves and masters*” is not some 150 year old memory but in some ways still feels like a scab that has just been ripped off. The sad thing is that texts like this in Colossians and Ephesians were misused in the 18th and 19th century churches to justify slavery in the U.S. It was primarily in the south but there were those in the north who felt that way just like there were those Christians and churches in the south that wanted slavery abolished.

- **It was this issue of slavery that divided American Baptists between Northern Baptists and Southern Baptists in 1845.** Most of the churches in the south believed it was permissible for someone who owned slaves to be sent as a missionary. The Baptists in the north disagreed but it was texts in the Bible like the one we are looking at this morning that did not explicitly forbid slavery that churches in the south held to, as biblical reasons that slave holders could be missionaries.

The Southern Baptist Convention was born out of this controversy in 1845. I am ashamed of this history in my denomination but over time the desire to hold to Scripture alone lead to the denomination to publically repent and ask for forgiveness from their African-American brothers and sisters in the denomination. Albeit it was in 1995 that it occurred but it happened. They waited too long to repent of this sin but I am glad it was done.

The Lord has used it to bring healing and transformation in the denomination. In 2012 Southern Baptists elected Fred Luter an African-American pastor from New Orleans as president of convention. Our own Robert Knight, African-American pastor at New Birth Baptist Church, here in Ames, is president of our state convention, the Baptist Convention of Iowa. *The goal is not integration but reconciliation and fellowship in Christ so that by many colors and ethnicities and from every tribe and tongue the glory of God is on display for the world to see as Christ is all and in all for us as followers of Christ.*

Southern Baptists have not dragged their feet in recent years. I am happy to say, at the Southern Baptist Convention this past summer, we passed a resolution condemning the “*alt right*” movement, “*white supremacy*” and “*white nationalism*.” Don’t believe the media scuttle that they struggled to do this. They did not.

Does this mean there is no prejudice and racism in Southern Baptist churches? No it does not. Passing resolutions do not change the depraved human heart but I am happy to be in a denomination that takes biblical stands on social injustices.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*, pgs. 129-130.

Only the Spirit of God, empowering the word of God will transform the sinner's heart. Only the gospel can change the hearts of those who protested in Charlottesville, VA two weeks ago. Only the gospel can address the deep, dark depraved heart of a sinner.

- **Look back at Colossians 3:11 because it is in v. 11 where Paul firsts mentions slaves in the church:** *"Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."* Paul's reference to *barbarians* and *Scythians* is a reference to the prejudice between the refined, cultured Romans and Greeks toward anyone who did not look like or talk like they did.

The reference to *slave* and *free* addressed one of the deepest divisions of class in their society and in the church. What Paul had to say in **v. 11** and in **Colossians 3:22-4:1** was absolutely staggering in his day because there was deep division and prejudice across ethnicity, religion and culture. It was a dividing wall of hostility.

Yet . . . while Paul did not call for the end of slavery, he did undermine the institution among followers of Christ by calling everyone who was in Christ a *saint* and a *brother and sister in Christ*. This is our glorious identity in Christ.

When we understand the depravity of our wicked, sinful hearts and that because of our sin we were all condemned to Hell and then we all find ourselves saved by sheer grace in Jesus it is hard, if not impossible, to treat a fellow believer with prejudice. All of the sudden we realize the ground is level at the foot of Christ's bloody cross.

The death of racism and prejudice is not accomplished by taking sensitivity training, it is not by making a new rule that says: *"no prejudice, no racism"* or passing a new laws for law breakers . . . all of these things have already been done and yet racism and prejudice still exists.

What is it that kills racism and prejudice? The knife in the heart of racism and prejudice is found in the last half of v. 11, which says: *"Christ is all."*

We need to ask ourselves: *"Why do we despise? Or hate? Or shun? Or avoid? Or disparage? Or distort? Is it not because we are weak and fearful and insecure and proud and angry and without deep peace and love in our souls? Do those ugly things come from people who say (and mean), 'Christ is everything to me'—people whose treasure is all an all-satisfying fellowship with Christ? . . . Oh that our churches would be filled with people who sing and mean the old hymn that says, 'Jesus is all the world to me, my life, my joy, my all.'"*²

- **Now do not hear what I am not saying.** I am not saying all we do is preach the gospel but do not speak about social injustice. That is not what I am saying. I think Dr. Russ Moore gets it right when he calls Christians to live a life of convictional kindness. We must call sin what it is --sin-- and racism and prejudice are sins.³ As Christians we must stand for justice for the oppressed and that means those oppressed by racism and prejudice. We identify the sin and call people to confess and repent and to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- **However, we are naive if we believe the face of racism and prejudice is simply based on the slavery that was in United States in the 19th century and the abuse of civil rights throughout the Jim Crow era.** Our enemy has many forms of slavery today and millions are trapped in it and many die from it.

² John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian*, pgs. 164-165.

³ Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*, pgs. 187-205.

- **There are new faces of racism and prejudice.** You see face of slavery, prejudice and racism today is not simply seen in the *white supremacy and the alt right* movements resistance to having a confederate statue torn down or the confederate flag removed or violently clashing with those who oppose them.

In some ways, I am wondering if this is not a diversion tactic by the enemy to get us to ignore the horrible atrocities that are going on in the name of legalized medicine and enabled by the law and tax payers dollars.

- **The new faces of racism and prejudice are found in the world wide wars against the weak and vulnerable.**
 - **Human Trafficking:** It was reported in 2014 that there are 21 million victims trapped in modern-day slavery. Of these, 14.2 million (68%) were exploited for labor, 4.5 million (22%) were sexually exploited, and 2.2 million (10%) were exploited in state-imposed forced labor. The majority of these trapped in human trafficking were women and children.⁴
 - **Abortion:** Prejudice and racism has found a new home in the abortion industry. It is rearing its head through extermination of the weak and disabled.

Eugenics is the philosophy and the science of improving a human population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable inheritable characteristics. Translation . . . cleanse the population of the weak and undesirable.

One of the most prominent Americans that was a proponent of eugenics was Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood. She called for the extermination of the weak in our society through birth control and abortion. It is said that the Nazis were greatly influence by her gospel of eradicate the weak and they killed 6 million Jews. Sanger and her doctrine are still held in high esteem as her bust stands in the Smithsonian museum proclaiming her work.⁵

Through Sanger's eugenic philosophy and modern medicine's ability to conduct genetic testing and selective abortions, **Iceland** now proudly proclaims it has almost **100%** eradicated it's country of downs syndrome.

What they really mean is that they have murdered all of those babies through abortion. Now before you get too upset you must realize that in the **U.S. 67%** of downs syndrome babies are aborted. So do not look down on Iceland.⁶

Even closer to home, Indiana University is suing the state of Indiana under a commerce law in order to obtain body parts of aborted babies from the state of Washington. Trafficking in the sale of the body parts of aborted babies.⁷

- **Eugenics is prejudice and racism. It is war on the weak.** This war is to eliminate an entire people groups and we will be a worse world if weakness is killed off for everyone is born created in the glorious image of God.
- Alveda King, daughter of slain civil-rights leader A. D. King and niece of Martin Luther King, Jr., quotes her uncle often when outlining her opposition of abortion. She writes: "[Martin Luther King, Jr.] once said, *"The Negro cannot win as long as he is willing to sacrifice the lives of his children for comfort and safety."* How can the "Dream" survive if we murder the children? Every aborted baby is like a slave in the womb of his or her mother. The mother decides his or her fate."⁸

⁴ <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-trafficking-numbers>.

⁵ https://world.wng.org/podcast/worldandeverything_itunes.xml.

⁶ https://world.wng.org/podcast/worldandeverything_itunes.xml.

⁷ <http://www.albertmohler.com/tag/indiana-university/>.

⁸ http://abort73.com/abortion/abortion_and_race/.

- **Abortion is the industry that carries out racism and prejudice.** Just consider these statistics: Statistically out of 1000 pregnancies 30% of black pregnancies end in abortion (excluding miscarriages). Among white women, the abortion ratio is 121 out of 1000—which means less than 11% of white pregnancies end in abortion. The abortion ratio among Hispanic women is 15%.⁹
- Well I must make some applications for us and bring the message to a conclusion.

Application:

- **How do we deal with the sin of old familiar face of racism and prejudice** that flows out of slavery and how to we deal with the sins of new faces of racism and prejudice that preys on the weak and vulnerable in abortion and human trafficking? The answer is the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- **One of the gospel issues with racism and prejudice is the struggle between self-justification vs. gospel justification.** Our first step is to confess and repent of our sin of self-justification. When it comes to the sin of prejudice and racism we subtly protect ourselves with sinful prejudice in our hearts. We tend to make generalizations about people based on stereotyping. We pre-judge them in order to elevate ourselves above them.

Christ called us to not judge by stereotypes when he said in John 7:24, *“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”* It is not that we cannot make judgments but that we must not make sinful, oversimplified, uncritical judgments based on the stereotype of race, color, and creed and on and on the criteria goes.

Pre-judged generalizations or prejudices are conclusions we make that protect us in our sin of self-justification for how we treat people. They create divisions between people where Christ has torn down and established peace. **Ephesians 2:14-16,** *“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility”¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”*

The killing of hostility between sinners was completed with the killing of Jesus Christ who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, a dark skinned, Semitic, Middle Eastern man who was nailed to a bloody Roman cross. The killing of Christ is what killed the hostility. For those who by faith trust Christ and turn from the sin they know true peace.

You see, peace between people is not made by, *“blood and soil” but instead the beaten, bruised, bloody body of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is our true ethnic heritage. Our bloodline in Christ is thicker than our ethnic bloodline.*

He is our justification for us before God. When sinners realize that they should have been on that cross and they continually preach that to themselves and remind themselves of the glory of God is seen in Him justifying undeserving sinners they will be humbled and will then treat each other with the grace and mercy of our King.

Then it will no longer be about human supremacy but instead Christ’s supremacy. I call it human supremacy because it does not matter if it is *white supremacy, ethnic supremacy, educational supremacy, social supremacy or economic supremacy or “whatever” supremacy* as sinners we all seek some path to be supreme over another person. Don’t be too hard on *white supremacist* until you deal with your sin of *supremacy*.

Until we bow the knee in faith before our King and confess His supremacy we will all seek our own supremacy. **The question is who’s supremacy are you seeking today: yours or Christ’s?**

⁹ Ibid.

- **The gospel reconciliation being the answer for racism and prejudice also means that we cannot be silent when it comes to the new faces of racism and prejudice that prey on the weak and vulnerable.** I am not talking about standing on the street with a placard and praying in front of Planned Parenthood on Hayward Street (not that there is anything wrong with that). I am not talking about clashing with rioters in the streets. However, I do think it means we do some significant things.

1. **First we pray.** We pray for the ends of racism and prejudice. We claim the shed blood of Christ as the answer and *we continue steadfastly in prayer until Jesus returns* because this battle will never be over until *Christ is all and in all*.
2. **Second we faithfully share the gospel with a lost world.** We pray and with our voices we seek to have gospel conversations with people on a regular basis.
3. **Third we strive to build genuine relationships across racial and ethnic lines.** We strive to build relationships with people of other religions. One area of racism and prejudice is between Christians and Muslims. Perhaps you take time to seek to build a relationship with a Muslim in order to get to know them. If it is Baptist and LDS then get to know an LDS family and find ways to love on them in the name of the true Jesus. Perhaps build a relationship with someone of another color and not just a causal relationship but strive to become genuine friends.

I keep using the word *genuine* because Romans 12 commands us to *let love be genuine*. Seek to obey this command and repent when you do not and thank the Lord Jesus that He genuinely loved across racial, ethnic and theological barriers in order to bring you to God.

4. **Fourth we find ways to serve.** I am talking about going and laying down our lives in hard places. I am not sure what this will look like for everyone.
 - However, I believe abortion is war on the weak and vulnerable and one way we can serve is by supporting Informed Choices right here in Ames. We already have three ladies serving there and I am sure they will be glad to answer any of your questions.
 - You may not be able to do what they do but your prayers for them and the clinic and your support is very important.
 - The Ames banquet to support Informed Choices is coming up Oct. 17th at the Gateway Hotel. Come sit at our table that our church is sponsoring.
 - You may not serve at the clinic but you can join us on our Grand Avenue Baptist Church table. Attend the banquet, give financially and pray for those who can serve.
 - Perhaps you are here and you have heard all of this talk about abortion and you have experienced the trauma of abortion. Please do not hear me desiring to beat up on you or make you feel guiltier than you already do. Here is what I want you to hear . . . there is forgiveness in Christ. There is healing in the Son of God who came and lived a perfect life in your place and died to pay for your sin. Find forgiveness and healing in Him. And for us here at Grand we want you to know we love you and would love to help you know the healing that the gospel brings.

Conclusion:

We are about to take the Lord Supper. The Lord's Supper is for sinners who are reconciled to the King and to one another. It is the time where by we remember that the Son of God the very King Himself took the form of a slave and died on the cross for sinners who wanted to elevate themselves to god-like status. In our place He stood condemned, He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God.