

**Breaking Through the Barrier of Racism**  
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We are in a series called Breakthrough and since February is Black History Month - today I am going to talk today about one of the biggest breakthroughs needed in the world today. I'm preaching on Breaking Through the Barrier of Racism.

Racism is one of the biggest sins on the planet. You will find it everywhere. And I want you to know that racism is not a skin problem; it's a sin problem!

Racism is the belief in the superiority of one race and the inferiority of other races. It's based on pride of self and hatred of others and both are sins!

Racism involves prejudice and discrimination against other races. Racism often results in unfair or abusive behavior towards other races. You can find racism in many different forms.

- It can be a taxi driver who won't pick someone up because of their color.
- It can be someone who would rather stand in the bus than sit by a person of another color.
- It can be a company that allows minorities to advance only so far.
- It can be a church that does not welcome all races.

As a church, before we can fight racism elsewhere, we must first deal with our own hearts and then we must overcome the demonic spirit behind racism. The only thing that will shut the door to racism is the cross of Christ! And the church is the institution God uses to bring change to a nation.

I grew up in the south in the days of racial segregation. I've seen the positive changes that have happened in the last 50 years. And I'm sad because it seems we're going backwards in many ways. You would think that in the year 2016 with the first African American president that we would be past all this. But we're not. In fact, these days the issue of race is in the news more than ever.

If the church does not face the problem of racism by dealing with it within the church and by taking authority over the spirit of racism in the world, ethnic conflict will keep spiraling out of control.

The longer we wait to confront this stronghold, the more powerful it will be! If racism is going to be healed, there must mutual responsibility. It's not just a black solution, a white solution or a Hispanic or Asian solution - all of us must do our part.

But, the Church must lead the way in shutting the door to racism.  
 How do we do that?

## 1- **The church must be obviously different from the world!**

Now – I know that the body of Christ is composed of all people groups – but it doesn't always appear that way because local churches are one of the most segregated places on earth. But that is not what God has called Grace Fellowship Church to be.

There are white churches, black churches, Hispanic churches, Asian churches, etc. Now – there's nothing wrong with those churches and I am not coming against them. There is a place for them. But less than 5% of churches are multi-ethnic. Do you know why? Because being a multi-ethnic church is not an easy thing to accomplish. Some people are just more comfortable worshipping with people who are like them. Other people have racial prejudices they need to overcome.

But God has called Grace Fellowship Church to be a reflection of heaven by being a church composed of all people groups of all colors of all ages. When I say the church should be a reflection of heaven on earth -

That means we're a place of salvation and healing and deliverance.  
That means we're a place where you find the presence and power of God.  
That also means the people who occupy our churches should look like the people who occupy heaven.

Revelation 5:9-10 says the occupants of heaven sing this song:

*You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.*

If the kingdom of heaven is composed of every nation, tribe, tongue and people – then I believe that the church should appear that way on earth. Together we can Touch Heaven and Change Earth and one of the ways we do that is by breaking down barriers of racism.

After all, we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ who was the greatest Barrier Breaker of all time! Jesus broke all kinds of barriers – like religious barriers or gender barriers. He also broke through racial barriers!

This was a big barrier to break. After all, Jesus ministered in Israel – God's chosen land – to Jews – God's chosen people. Jews considered themselves the top of the food chain. They lived very segregated lives - they – did not associate with non-Jews, or Gentiles. There was a huge barrier between Jews and all other ethnic groups.

For instance, there was a group of people living in Israel called the Samaritans.

The Samaritans were Jews who had intermarried with foreigners, so they were considered a mixed race. Because of that- Jewish people had nothing to do with them. And along comes Jesus! Once again He broke down a barrier. John 4:3-4 says:

*He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria.*

Galilee is in the north of Israel and Judea to the south – with Samaria right in between. The shortest most direct route went right through Samaria. But many Jews – because they did not want to associate with Samaritans – took a longer way by going around Samaria. However, Jesus said He needed to go through – not around Samaria. Jesus shows us a major principle in breaking down racial barriers –

## **2- The Principle of Intentionality**

Jesus did not take the usual route around Samaria. Jesus did not avoid Samaria or refuse to associate with Samaritans. He intentionally went to them. And it resulted in a whole city coming to faith in Christ!

There are great racial barriers in America. Many people avoid people of other races. Why? Some are afraid. Some are ignorant. Some are prejudiced. Some have been taught to hate by their parents. Some have been wounded by other races. But for whatever reason – they avoid people of other races.

When I lived in Mississippi in the 60's everything was totally segregated. There was a white area of town and a black area. There were white schools and black schools. There were white churches and black churches. There were separate drinking fountains and restrooms. Black people could not sit with white people in the movie theater. They had a separate entrance and had to sit in the balcony.

I never understood this. I was just a kid but many of my friends at church and school were full of hatred toward African Americans. They ignored them or avoided them like the plague.

Sometimes when my friends and I would walk to town, we had to walk through a black neighborhood. I had a friend who would not even walk on the sidewalk because he did not want to get that close to black people. So he walked out in the middle of the street. I thought that was the stupidest thing. So I refused to walk in the street. I walked on the sidewalk and to make matters worse – I actually greeted every black person I saw. That really made my friend mad.

Where did this hateful, racist attitude come from? No African American had ever harmed this boy. His attitude came from his parents. And their attitude came from their parents.

No one is born racist! Hatred and racism are passed down from generation to generation. When people grow up in an environment of hatred, that's what they live.

If we are going to break racial barriers like Jesus did, we must get intentional about it. We are intentional about marketing our church as a multi-ethnic church. When people of all races see those ads, they come to our church to see if this is really true. If we invite them here, then we must welcome and accept everyone God brings to our church regardless of their race.

Because of that, I expect each and every one of you to be greeters. Don't come in and sit down and wait for others to greet you. You be intentional about greeting people – especially new people and people of all races.

Then go beyond that and invite someone of another ethnicity out to eat or to get together at your house. When you get to know each other – you will see we are not as different as you might think.

At GFC, we are intentional about diversity on our ministry teams. That means sometimes we need to recruit more African Americans or Hispanics for a team and sometimes we need to recruit more whites.

Our vision is for diversity! If you want a white church, this is not it. If you want a black church, this is not it. If you want a Hispanic or Asian church - this is not it.

God has called us to be a reflection of heaven on earth. To do that...

### **3- We must be ministers of reconciliation.**

Reconciliation means to restore to relationship after division happens.

What racism divides – reconciliation unites.

What racism hurts – reconciliation heals.

What racism destroys – reconciliation restores.

What racism tears down – reconciliation builds up.

2 Corinthians 5:16-20 says:

*So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.*

*And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

These verses show us what it takes to be ministers of reconciliation. Reconciliation means to restore to relationship after division has taken place.

There is obvious racial division in this country. For us to be reconcilers we must:

- 1- Not look at others from a worldly point of view
- 2- We must view others as Christ view them
- 3- We must be ambassadors who appeal to others on God's behalf.

Jesus came to reconcile us to God and to each other. There was a barrier between us and God and He tore it down. We need to tell people about that.

There was also a barrier between people groups and He tore it down. We need to tell people about that also.

Ephesians 2:13-19 tells us that at one time we were once far from God, but the blood of Jesus brought us near. But that's not all!

*For He himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.*

As people groups, we can be divided by a wall of hostility – but Jesus has destroyed the barrier between us. He made peace out of hostility. How did He do it? Through the cross. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek nor black nor white nor Mexican nor Indian nor Asian. There is only the body of Christ. Galatians 3:26-28 says:

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

In Christ – your race or your occupation or your gender do not matter. We are all one in Christ.

That's what so beautiful about a multi-cultural church where black and white and brown and rich and poor and men and women and boys and girls all worship the same Lord together.

This is not to say we are color blind. We are all either black or white or whatever shade we are – we are either men or women. How many of us got to choose our race or our gender? None of us. We are all different and we honor that – we celebrate that. But what we do get to choose is Jesus. Romans 10:12-13 says:

*For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

And when we do that – we become one with each other. When churches reflect this truth – we are appearing on earth as we will appear in heaven.

So what this demands of us is to not think we are better than other. It requires us to accept each other as the Lord has accepted us. Yes - people should take appropriate pride in their race and culture. However, they should not think they are better than others.

White is not better than black.  
 Black is not better than brown.  
 Brown is not better than red.  
 Red is not better than yellow.  
 Yellow is not better than white.  
 It's all just a matter of pigmentation.

God created us all and loves us all and we are called to love each other.

#### **4- We must pray and do spiritual warfare against the spirit of racism**

Satan knows God's truth that a house divided cannot stand.  
 Satan knows that the place of unity is the place of blessing.  
 That's why he works to divide husbands and wives and families.  
 That's why he works to divide churches, nations and ethnic groups.  
 That's why racism is one of the biggest sins on the planet.  
 Because racism is driven by demonic forces.

Because of that – breaking down the barrier of racism is not a battle against people; it's a spiritual battle! Ephesians 6:12 says:

*For we do not wrestle with flesh and blood (physical opponents), but against the powers, against (the master spirits who are) the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spirit forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) sphere.*

There is a hierarchy of demonic powers from low level demons all the way up to world-ruling demons. I believe racism is a world-ruling spirit because you can see its impact all over the face of this planet. Racism has probably sown more death and destruction than any other demonic spirit.

Racism has enslaved people – killed people – held people back in life. Many wars throughout history were ignited by racism. Racism seems to be in the hearts of people everywhere. Why? Because sin is in the heart of people everywhere. And it's only increasing!

In Matthew 24, Jesus was asked what the signs of the end of time would be. Part of that answer is ethnic conflict. Jesus said:

*For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*

It seems kind of redundant for Jesus to say nations will rise against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms until you realize that the word translated nation is the Greek word ethnos.

Does that sound familiar? It's where we get our English word ethnic. The word ethnos is not talking about countries, but it literally means a race of people, a tribe, a people group. The word kingdom is talking about countries. Jesus declared that one of the prominent signs of the end of time is ethnic conflict. And one of the major issues we face today is ethnic conflict. So we need to pray and do spiritual warfare by binding a spirit of racism and loosing a spirit of reconciliation.

God created the church to do many things – like worship, make disciples. But listen to Ephesians 3:10-11

*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The word manifold literally means that God's wisdom is "many colored." God wants to show His many-colored wisdom through the church - to whom? To those demonic rulers of this world. To the spirit of racism.

One of the ways God's many-colored wisdom is shown is when people from different racial backgrounds are united in Christ in the church. And whenever and wherever different ethnic groups gather together and worship – that in itself is an act of spiritual warfare! Demons can't stand it when we worship – and they really can't stand it when blacks and whites and Hispanics and Asians worship together!

Why do you think it's so hard to build a multi-ethnic church? Because when we are a visible manifestation of God's manifold, multi-colored wisdom we are in the forefront in the war against racism. Satan fights that with all he's got! But we will overcome in Jesus name!

So let's stand and take authority over a spirit of racism and division!