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June 11, 2017

**A Christ-like Response  
Racism**

*Galatians 3:26-28; Acts 10:1-48*

**1. Racism:**

- \* Fueled by Hate
- \* Driven by Fear
- \* Of Losing Power

**2. Biblical Burden of Power:**

- \* Servitude
- \* Humility
- \* Love

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**Isms: A Christ-like Response**  
**Racism**  
**Galatians 3:26-28; Acts 10:1-48**

Kali Wilgus and Liz "LC" Connelly are two white women who started a pop-up Mexican food cart called "Kooks" earlier this year. Their food was recently featured and rated highly by "Willamette Week" Magazine. The two women had learned their techniques from the "tortilla ladies" of Puerto Nuevo, Mexico. They told the magazine that they gathered their recipes and tortilla-making processes during a holiday road-trip to the Baja California village.



The two women are pictured here from the article. Connelly said, "I picked the brains of every tortilla lady there in the worst broken Spanish ever, and they showed me a little of what they did. They told us the basic ingredients, and we saw them moving and stretching the dough similar to how pizza makers do before rolling it out with rolling pins."

When the Mexican cooks wouldn't give up their trade secrets, she and Wilgus "were peeking into the windows of every kitchen, totally fascinated by how easy they made it look."

Upon returning home, the two women essentially reverse-engineered the food from their memory, then opened their weekend pop-up inside a taco truck and began serving their Mexican-style tortillas filled with California-inspired ingredients.

Everyone was enjoying the food, that is until the city of Portland shut them down, accusing the two white women of "cultural appropriation." The "Portland Mercury," an alternative weekly newspaper of "all things Portland" called the closure a "victory," saying "Because of Portland's underlying racism, the people who rightly own these traditions and cultures that exist are already treated poorly...These appropriating businesses are erasing and exploiting their already marginalized identities for the purpose of profit and praise."<sup>1</sup>

This story is a prime example of how highly volatile, sensitive, and politicized the issue of race has become in our society, and how far some people will go in order to atone for their sense of white guilt. Of course, this story is only some lighter fare than the examples I could easily cite, and which we are all very familiar with

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/food-drink/2017/05/24/portland-burrito-shop-forced-to-close-amid-accusations-cultural-appropriation-stealing-recipes.html>

because we hear and read about them nearly every day: stories of police profiling and shooting black teenagers, men and women, violent protests in response to these shootings, quadrillion-dollar walls being built to keep illegal immigrants out, law-abiding Latin-American citizens and guests who are rounded up inside our country and deported without warning or reason. There are stories of rejection and beatings of middle-eastern looking men and women out of fear that they are Jihadists.

The issue of “racism” is the first in a series of “isms” that we are going to explore over the course of this summer in our sermon series called “Isms: A Christ-like Response.” There are so many ideas and philosophies and agendas that are swirling around us every day, and it’s hard to know sometimes which ones are good, which ones are bad, and sometimes we don’t even realize that they are influencing us and our faith – in ways that can be beneficial or dangerous to us. Some of them impact us in ways that are good, some bad, and some benign. Some of them infect our faith and leave us with a weak, watered-down, or we even end up with an altogether different faith than we started with. We are praying that this time would affirm, sound the alarm, and correct us in different ways, so that we can be and bring the presence of Christ most powerfully into our community and culture.

We also want to invite you to share your questions, observations, or concerns with us. You can do that in one of several ways: you can use the cards in the seat back in front of you, you can email us at “isms@wvcnaz.com” or you can message us through our WVC Facebook page. At the end of this series, the pastors will take a Sunday morning and have a panel discussion and do our best to respond to your questions and comments.

So we are beginning our series today with a big one: racism. As we begin this time today, I’m going to make an assumption that I don’t think anyone would disagree with: I think we can all agree that racism is wrong. I’m going to start from the premise that racism is a bad thing. So if you are here today, and you think racism is a good thing, then you aren’t going to enjoy this time. But even though we agree that racism is wrong, what concerns me is how much racism is a part of our thinking, and we don’t even realize it. I am growing uncomfortable with my own assumptions that I usually don’t even give a second thought to that in fact, are wrong. I think many of us would fit into that category. I grew up in a predominantly white city, went to predominantly white schools, I attended a predominantly white university, and I’ve pastored predominantly white churches. So I confess that some of my subtle – *but wrong* – perspectives have gone untested most of my life; I’ve never really been confronted with the issues. So my racism comes from ignorance, from what I’ve absorbed living in a white culture, and from a place of white privilege. When our dear friends, Brother Westley and Sister Anne were with us last winter from Guyana, I confessed to them that, while I do not see them as black or white or in between, I also have no idea what it is like to be constantly reminded that I’m not white. Yet people of any color in our culture are constantly reminded in subtle and not so subtle ways that they are not white. I have no idea what that is

like. I'm aware enough to know I don't know enough, and therefore I carry some white guilt.

So I'm going to give permission to the Holy Spirit to teach me and convict me – and if you want to do the same, make this prayer your own.

### *Pray*

Before I start, let me level the playing field: every one of us – regardless of our ethnicity or skin tone – every one of us needs the Holy Spirit to correct our attitudes and increase our love. So no one gets a pass today, whether you are from a majority or minority.

The Bible gives us all kinds of instructions about this. A couple of really obvious examples of this can be found in the New Testament. One of those is in Acts 10 – I'm not going to read it because it's a lengthy passage, but I'd encourage you to read it. In that passage, the Church is just beginning to expand from being primarily Jewish, into Gentile regions. This sets the stage for huge racial issues. God knew that Jesus' disciples – who were now the leaders of the Church – were going to struggle with issues of racism. So God gave Peter a vision of all kinds of animals descending from heaven on a sheet, and told Peter to eat from these animals. The Jews had very specific dietary laws about what meat was considered clean and kosher and what was not. So Peter resisted, but God said, "If I say something is clean, it's clean!" He then sent Peter into the home of a Gentile believer (who, to a Jew, would have been considered a person from an inferior, unclean race), and Peter was told to eat lunch with the guy and his family, and then pray for him, and then the Spirit filled them. This clearly made the point that in the Church there was no longer going to be racial divisions. Then the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in the city of Galatia:

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26-28, niv)

Paul took it a step further. In this, we learn that God has removed not only racial division, but socio-economic and gender divisions as well. Jew/Greek was racial, slave/free was socio-economic, and male/female was gender. The Bible says there are no more divisions in these things. He's not saying there must be absolute uniformity, but there *is* to be genuine equality. In Christ, our identity will no longer be based on our ethnicity, or our socio-economic status, or our gender; our identity will now be based on our equal need for Christ, and we are identified by the fact that Christ has saved us. Our identity is in our allegiance to Him alone. We are now all children of God. We might be different, but we are all united in our need and in our salvation. Agreed? If you can't agree with that, then I have to tell you that your position is at odds with Scripture and the whole of the Christian tradition since the beginning.

So moving on, then, when we think of racism we tend define it as hatred against another person or group because of the color of *their* skin or *their* ethnicity, but that

is too simplistic. Racism is defined as “prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's *own* race is superior.”<sup>2</sup> Racism is as much about someone’s attitude about his or her *own* race, as it is about another’s.

There’s no doubt when it comes to...

## 1. ***Racism***:

Racism is...

### - Fueled by ***Hate***

According to the Anti-Defamation League, “(Racism) may be *defined as the hatred of one person by another* — or the belief that another person is less than human — because of skin color, language, customs, place of birth or any factor that supposedly reveals the basic nature of that person. It has influenced wars, slavery, the formation of nations, and legal codes.”<sup>3</sup> According to the FBI, nearly 60% of all documented hate crimes last year were racially motivated.<sup>4</sup>

You might wonder how someone could have so much hate in them that they would dehumanize, mistreat, torture, and even kill someone simply because they are of a different race. There have been studies of children who are raised in racist homes, and there is no question that, unless Christ intervenes, a person can’t help but be a product of his or her upbringing and environment. But there is more to *this* kind of hate than upbringing; racism is fueled by hate that is...

### - Driven by ***Fear***

Research has shown that “most, if not all, hate crimes are linked by perceptions of threat”<sup>5</sup> of some kind. When you hear comments from people referring to a particular ethnicity and saying, “*They* are trying to take over!” What does that tell you? It tells you that the person is afraid – afraid of losing his or her way of life, or his or her comfort. When you hear comments from a minority-race person saying something like “All *they* want to do is keep us down!” I hear someone who is afraid of losing their power – their freedom.

Ultimately I think the fear that drives racism boils down to one thing: it is a fear...

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.google.com/#q=racism> (*italics added*)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.adl.org/racism> (*italics added*)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2015-hate-crime-statistics-released>

<sup>5</sup> Mark A. Walters and Rupert Brown with Susann Wiedlitzka, *Causes and Motivation of Hate Crime*, University of Sussex, © 2016 Equality and Human Rights Commission First published July 2016

## - Of Losing *Power*

For those of us who are white, we have enjoyed our privileged status for over two hundred years in this country; longer than that if you go back to Europe. It is easy for us to dismiss racism as less of an issue than it is to people of color, because we have the vantage point of power. But we, as white Christians, and I'm speaking to myself too, we must take a very hard look at our own attitudes, over and against the Christianity that we profess. James Cone, in his book "The Cross and the Lynching Tree," says, "How could whites confess and live the Christian faith and also impose three-and-a-half centuries of slavery and segregation upon black people? Self-interest and power corrupted their understanding of the Christian Gospel."<sup>6</sup> I could recommend a lot of books to you; but if you enjoy reading theology and you want to have your eyes opened and your heart wrenched, you *need* to read that book.

I'm asking us – I'm asking you and I'm asking myself, too – to take a hard look at our attitudes. There are subtle attitudes that we don't give a second thought, or that we think aren't that big of a deal, but we need to consider what they are, and what they really mean. When I hear people refer to immigrants who are here in the US from Mexico and they say, "They are taking over!" or, "They need to be sent back to their own country!" or, "Why can't they be forced to speak English like we do?" or so many other comments, what I hear is someone who has a fear of losing power. Now listen to me: I am NOT intending to address the issues of immigration. I AM talking about the attitudes that those kinds of comments might be revealing about our own hearts. I have opinions about those issues, as I'm sure you do too, and we can share those together in a private conversation. But what I believe God wants us to talk about here is our own hearts.

Be honest with yourself: when you hear of another murder in Yakima, do you immediately assume it was committed by a Mexican? Statistically and objectively, there are more shootings motivated by gangs than others, but what does that assumption say about your own heart? When I hear of Mexican families in our own church who are afraid of losing their children, and being arrested and detained or deported – whether they are here legally or not – my political assumptions are challenged by my personal relationships with them and by my Christian reality.

But I will also add that no person of any race is exempt from this kind of heart examination. No amount of victimization justifies the sin of racism. Many of our minority friends don't fear *losing* power – some are driven *for* power, which, although it is often legitimate, can easily cross the line into racism as well. When we hear about some factions (not all) of the "Black Lives Matter" movement, it is clear that they are not interested in justice, or fairness, or equality, but revenge and a reversal of power; rather than equality, they seek control and oppression. The door of racism swings both ways.

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<sup>6</sup> Cone, James H. *The cross and the lynching tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015, xvii.

Again – I’m not speaking about the political issues: I’m speaking about *your heart and mine*. I believe that it starts *there and here* – and when our hearts are right, we are *then* in the best position to affect positive change in our communities and country. And change is necessary my friends.

This issue of power is a significant issue. Power gets to the heart of the issue of sin because sin is all about power: sin is when *I* want the power to do whatever I want to do, regardless of what God or anyone else says. As human beings, we have power issues. But the Bible is clear that there is only one power to whom we all should bow, and that is Jesus Christ. Psalm 62:11 says:

“All power belongs to you, O God...” (Psalm 62:11)

In fact, in the Bible God recognizes that in the structures of this world, some of us are going to have positions of power over others. In the Bible, this kind of power is seen as a burden and a responsibility. I think if we will look at the...

## 2. Biblical Burden of ***Power***

...we will find the answers to the problem of racism in our own hearts, whether it is outright, blatant racism or it is subtle reverse racism or white privilege.

The Apostle Paul says this about those with power and those who are “weak:”

“To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, niv)

Jesus said to his disciples and to us:

“You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 25:24-28, nlt)

Jesus turns the issue of power upside down; he said that those who have power must willingly use it in order to live a life of...

### - ***Servitude***

Jesus made it clear multiple times that he expects us to take our cues from children and from servants. In one of his greatest teaching moments of all, Jesus set the example for us. Most of us know the story of the Last Supper, when Jesus gathered his disciples together, shared a Passover meal, but did so with a more complete meaning – he revealed what the original Passover was pointing to – His own sacrifice in our place by the shedding of his blood, the breaking of his body, given for us so that we could be forgiven of that sin for power. And then, to make sure the

disciples knew how they were supposed to behave from now on, he did something shocking. He got up from the table, set aside his clothes and put on an apron like a servant, filled a wash basin with water and grabbed a towel, and then the King of all Kings, the Creator of the Universe, knelt down before his creation and washed their filthy feet. Then he said this – to make sure there was no doubt in our minds about how what our attitudes and actions are supposed to be when it comes to power:

“Then he said, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as “Teacher” and “Master,” and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other’s feet. I’ve laid down a pattern for you. What I’ve done, you do. I’m only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn’t give orders to the employer. If you understand what I’m telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.’” (John 13:12-17, tmt)

Weigh your racist attitudes against the servant Savior’s actions, and align yourself to his heart and life. Jesus is our example – he humbled himself! If we are going to counteract racism in our own lives, we will need to follow Jesus’ actions and have attitudes of...

### - Humility

The Apostle Paul writes this in his letter to the church in Philippi:

“If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you *care*— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don’t push your way to the front; don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human*! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.” (Philippians 2:1-8, tmt)

Our fear of people who are unlike us, our fear of losing our comfortable way of life, our fear of losing power, and our hubris diminishes in humility. One cannot be a humble servant and have hatred.

But this is not an easy thing to just decide to do; to do requires a revolutionary transformation of heart and life, motivated by...



## - Love

The writer of the book of James in the New Testament wrote this about racial discrimination:

“Doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives? ... Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.” (James 2:4, 8, nlt)

To be humble servants of those who are different than us, those who are minority, those who are of a different color or ethnic background or country of origin, to LOVE them – this is not a self-help formula for a better attitude or a great way to win friends and influence people; this is what it means to be a Christian *at its core*.

Love is what binds these things altogether. The Bible says:

“Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.” (Colossians 3:10-14, nlt)

Jesus very plainly and clearly said, after washing the disciples’ feet:

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.” (John 13:34, nlt)

I have a friend in my previous church whose name is Cameron. He and I are the same age – to the day. We share the same birthday and year. Cameron is black, so we joked about being “brothers from other mothers.” This is a picture of him and his wife, Mary Ellen. He and I had a few conversations where he opened my eyes to what it was like to be black, especially in a small white Idaho town. I was shocked and disappointed to hear what he endured.

One day while I was studying in my office, Cameron came walking in and asked me to come out from behind my desk and sit on my couch. I asked him why, and he said, “You have to let me obey the Lord.” I didn’t want to disagree with that, so I did. He stepped outside my office for a moment and then stepped back in with a towel and a large bowl full of water. He knelt down in front of me, took off my shoes and socks, and then carefully, completely, he washed my feet, then thoroughly dried them. He hugged me, and then he left.



I'm not sure I can explain how I felt. Humbled. Loved. Convicted. Ashamed of my subtle racisms. Aware of my whiteness as this black man served me. I will never forget it as long as I live. He was Jesus to me.

My Christian family, that is what we are to be – servants, humble and loving toward others. Especially those of different races.

*Pray*