

## June 23, 2021 Presentation by Book Study Group #3

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Our target audiences: Christians who deny there is racism

Our goal: Education and awareness

Our Message: Systemic racism is a crisis we need to address.

Our Strategies: Using one-on-one discussions, listen to them, and be prepared to respond to their misunderstanding about racism.

Four of us have chosen a statement that we experienced personally which reflects the misunderstanding about racism.

**Stan to Kathy:** "I'm not racist! I'm color-blind! I don't see color. Everyone is the same to me!"

Kathy: You know, Stan, you're the fourth person who has said that to me in the last four months. Two of them are close Christian friends of mine, one I've considered like a sister to me that I've known for over 30 years!

We just spoke last week, and she would not acknowledge that we were different culturally, she kept insisting that we are one in Christ (which we are), and asked me, "Why do I keep bringing up diversity and that we **are** different, and that it's **okay** to be different?" I wanted to tell her that I know you meant well and meant it in a positive way. However when you say that, "I don't see color everyone is the same to me," it discounts my culture and heritage as an Asian American woman.

I want you to see my ethnicity and culture, embrace my unique differences, and acknowledge that it's okay, and even wonderful to be different! And please don't treat me 'less than' because I look different, but instead equal to everyone else. Please don't encourage me to be the 'same' as everyone else, or to assimilate to the white culture so I can be accepted or thought of as an equal. Just see me as me Kathy, an Asian American woman, your sister in Christ, unique and created by God.

Another woman I know, who is a counselor by profession, said to her, "Yes I've seen a lot of Asian people walking around. That's probably why they are all thin, because they all exercise and eat a lot of rice." I spent ten minutes trying to explain to her why this was racial profiling and stereotypical and racist remarks, and how she was judging people by how they look on the outside, not knowing anything about them personally. Then she tried to fix it and say "Well, maybe I should say **most** Asian people." She tried to defend what she said, since she meant it as a compliment, and she thought that this was totally okay to say. After that frustrating conversation of me trying to explain to her why this is so wrong to say, I still don't think she got it.

Stan's comment. Thanks, Kathy, I was clueless before, now I understand color-blindness much more now.

**Stan to Bob: I don't believe in this systemic racism deal.**

**Bob:** I hear you. I think vocabulary is part of the problem. By current usage, a racist no longer has to make blatant comments and actions. Today it may just involve living in a way that causes or allows discriminatory results around you. It may not even be conscious. In today's terminology you don't have to be a bad person to be a racist.

Genetically we are all the same except in such trivial traits as hair texture or skin tone. And yet, living in the same society, statistics show we have very different outcomes based on race.

Almost by definition, the system is racist.

I believe our country has a good heart. We have had strands of racism running through our history in housing, education, immigration, and employment. But as a good society, we have repeatedly made corrections. However, each time a backlash or just a gradual drifted has undone or circumvented our efforts. Sometimes this happens maliciously but often it's just the collective decisions of a lot of people.

We all, both white and minority, have been raised in the culture dictated by society. And that culture often varies by race. My upbringing told me everyone goes to college. Many Black's upbringing tells them that the police may not protect you, so you'd better find someone else to protect your back. And we each, both white and minority, often make unconscious decisions that disadvantage minorities.

When we operate consciously, we operate without racism, but when we fall back on a culture and tradition that was formed in a racist time, we take racist actions without even realizing we are doing it.

I have come to believe that systemic racism exists.

**Stan:** Thanks, Bob. That's a lot to think about.

**Stan to Mary: "I'm tired of hearing about racism. That's all anybody talks about and it's turning people off."**

**Mary:** Jeremiah 6:14 – “They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying ‘Peace, Peace’ when there is no peace.”

I think racism is that wound that has not been adequately addressed in this country and it is still oozing and keeping us sick *because* people have always been tired of hearing about it and would prefer to think that we have already dealt with it, when we haven't. I think we have dealt with symptoms, but not the wound.

When I think about the wound I think it goes back to our very beginnings as a country when we were passionately committed to forming a gov't based on the equality of all people, and yet at the same time we were functionally committed to free slave labor from Africa. There was this sick discrepancy between what we were saying and what we were doing, but we were so desperate to keep our slave labor that we backed it up with two things that nobody could argue with: the bible and science – the bible confirming that some were called to be slaves and some were called to be masters, and science proving that whites were a superior race to POC. It seems to me that that's when the sickness took root and spread – through the church, through our educational system, throughout the government and the economy. And the insidious part about this wound is that it insists on being covered up; it insists on never be called out for what it is.

Because of that I don't think we have ever really addressed the wound of racism, only the symptoms. George Floyd was not the wound but a symptom of the wound. The same could be said of Jim Crow and lynchings and all the racial inequities in this country – all of them pointing to this hidden abscess that is deeply embedded in our whole system and desperately needs diagnosing and tending, not silencing and covering it up.

I want to keep hearing about racism; I think it's important to keep hearing from the wound, especially those who are right in the middle of it because I think they are the best truth tellers about what is wrong with us. I want to stay close to them and listen to them, and I want the church to stay close to them and listen to them for two reasons: because it is the way of Jesus to be close to the wound, and because it is the only way for all of us to be well.

**Stan:** I never thought of racism as a wound. Thanks, Mary

**Stan to Carol:** “I sure don't understand all the fuss about changing school curriculums - it seems to me to be crazy, politically-correct nonsense!”

**Carol:** Well Stan, I didn't realize how much of my own education, particularly US History – was filtered through the lens of White Privilege.

Recently, I watched the PBS Special called “Race, the Power of an Illusion.” Then I understood how much of our Racial History was filtered out of my own education.

I learned that Thomas Jefferson was the first to articulate “The Theory of Race” and used “science” and “medical doctors” to ‘prove’ that Blacks were inferior in body and mind. And that led to beginning of all the policies our new government put in place to make slavery legal – ignoring “all men are created equal”.

It was declared that Indians, Indigenous People of America, were white, just Sun Tanned! and therefore could be civilized with religion and education. But 50 years later, that changed and we moved them onto Indian Reservations west of the Mississippi. We wanted their fertile land for cotton!

The Mexican–American War resulted in the US gaining the entire Southwest from TX to CA, but the US Government withheld citizenship to all Mexican Citizens and Indigenous people in the new territory even though the treaty promised it. It was finally granted – 80 years later!

The Chinese Exclusion Act prevented all Chinese immigrating to America. It was the first and only law enacted to prevent all members of a specific ethnic or national group from coming to the US. It was repealed 60 years later, allowing 105 Chinese to enter each year.

Because so much was at stake IF you were an immigrant who could become a naturalized citizen, there were many Supreme Court decisions about race:

Armenians and Turks are white; Japanese, Filipino and East Indians are NOT.

Race was finally eliminated as criteria for naturalized citizenship in 1952.

And our Federal Programs, like FHA loans, the GI Bill, and Social Security Benefits – they all excluded Blacks, People of Color, and Immigrants - simply by our governmental policies, laws, or practices.

So yes, Stan...we NEED new American History books – without the WHITE filters. It is important for our children to see our true history and how it has impacted so many people of color and immigrants today.

**Stan:** White filters=white supremacy.

**Stan:** “Thanks, Team. We have learned so much from this book study. Thank you to Kamal and Jennifer for organizing this class and inspiring us to take what we have learned back to our congregations. This concludes our group presentation.”