

Help Them Love the Different
Racial Harmony Sunday
[Romans 5:1–11](#)

Something you may or may not know about the third Sunday in January – it is both Racial Harmony Sunday and Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. In years past, we have focused on one or the other, or sometimes, like this year, focusing on each one over two Sundays.

Today, we will focus on racial harmony. I believe that, as the Church, we are to be unashamedly devoted to Christ-exalting ethnic justice and diversity. We are to give a glad-hearted embrace to the diversity in our land—and pray for it in the Church. For this is the way heaven will be. *“You were slain [Lord Jesus], and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation”* (Revelation 5:9).

The direction I want to go today is not so much to say new things; but to say some old, biblical things in a new context. I want to put some basic biblical truth in the context of how we raise our children, grandchildren and students to love people who are different from them.

Parents: The Primary Shapers – I start with the assumption that parents are charged by God to be the primary shapers and teachers of their children’s attitude to racial differences. The key passage behind that assumption is Ephesians 6:1-4: *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise). ‘that it may go well with you ...’ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”* This is the way God has set up the world for our great good. Where this breaks down, everything begins to break down.

Parents have a prominent role and responsibility in shaping the minds and hearts of their children in accord with the Lord’s instruction. Most particularly, parents are put here by God, among other reasons, to help their children love as Christ loves – and this

most certainly includes loving those who are different from us. Now, the rest of what I want to do is give some examples of how to do that.

8 Ways to Help Children Love Those Who Are Different – (Spoiler alert: The gospel of Christ comes in at #5. The reason it comes later is that this is the way it works in raising children. John Piper puts it this way, “Children can understand things about God and about what God commands before they can know the meaning of their own depravity and the glory of the way God worked salvation in Christ.” [P]

And while these 8 pointers are addressed particularly to parents, they apply to anyone who cares about helping children love people different from themselves. Keep in mind that on every point I am assuming that every parent is seeking to *be* what they are teaching their children to be. In other words, teach and *model*.

1. Help them believe in God’s wisdom and goodness in creating them with the body they have.

Most little children are wonderfully free from fretting about their body. They don’t think about it. If there is no pain, they just go from one thing to the next with no bothersome self-consciousness at all. But almost all children come to an age when they worry about their bodies. Am I too tall or too short? Too thin or too heavy? Too dark or too light? Cool hair or boring hair? Clear complexion or blemished? These fears, and the craving to be liked, can escalate into destructive dysfunctions and behaviors.

Not Self-Esteem But God’s Esteem – What is needed is not the world’s teaching on self-esteem, but God’s teaching on His sovereign goodness in creating our children the way they are. Psalm 139:14: “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” It doesn’t solve every problem. It’s just massively important. You are getting your children ready for adolescence from the day they are born.

And what you want your child to grasp as soon as possible is: 1) God made me. 2) God is very, very wise. 3) God is very, very good. 4) Therefore, we should trust Him. The way He made me is good. The battle of adolescence is not mainly a self-esteem issue.

It's a God issue. A trust issue. We are teaching our children from the beginning to trust God's goodness.

2. Help them believe in God's wisdom and goodness in creating *other people with the body they have.*

This simply takes the first truth and applies it to others. And if you have helped them grasp the idea of being created by God—an amazing and wonderful truth—and being created with wisdom and goodness—then they will not have as much trouble grasping that this is true for others as well.

And if they grasp that others, in all their differences, are created by a wise and good God, then you can draw out all the implications of that. For example, you would not make fun of God's work, would you? You would not hurt someone by staring at them as if they were made by a foolish god or a bad god, would you? And so on.

3. Help them believe that they, and all other children and adults, are made in God's image.

Genesis 1:27 – “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.” Build into your children from the beginning that they are different from all the animals because God made us like himself. This applies to all human beings, all races. We can know God. And love God. And think God's thoughts after him in the Bible. And talk to God. And reflect God in ways that no animal can.

We teach our children that being a human is an amazing and glorious thing. No race is an exception to this. And here is one of the main implications: What makes us like God (all of us) is infinitely more important than any physical thing that makes us unlike each other.

So we say to our children, if they are pulling away from someone who's different, “Is he more *like* you, or more *different* from you?” And if he says, “More different.” You say, “No, because he's created in God's image, and you're created in God's image. So

you are like each other in that really, really important way. The differences aren't nearly that important."

Creator and Commander – So the first three ways to help our children love those who are different from them all revolve around helping them know God as their *Creator* and what that means for their lives. The next examples relate to knowing God as the One who *Commands* us to love. So first our children meet God as their Creator. Then they meet him as the One who has given us the command to love.

4. Teach them that God tells us to do to others as we would like others to do to us.

Jesus said, "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12). This can be very powerful with smaller children who are just old enough to know what it feels like to be made fun of or excluded.

We teach them the Golden Rule to do to others what we would like to be done to us. And we apply it over and over again to their relationships and how they treat others. "Would you want to be treated that way? No. So let's not treat them that way either."

Jesus said, amazingly, "This sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). So build this into your children early and often.

Now we come to the gospel examples. These are the ones directly related to the gospel of Christ—his death for our sin and his death-conquering resurrection. And when these take root, the previous four ways are given the power of the gospel.

5. Teach and model for them that our own sin is uglier than anybody they may think is unattractive.

Sin is not an innocent mistake or a silly blunder or a noble flaw. Sin is ugly rebellion against God. Paul describes fallen man in Romans 3:13, "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips." Sin is abhorrent and ugly.

If our children are ever to grasp the gospel, they must grasp this about themselves. And we parents must as well! They and we are sinful. Until this is seen and felt in some significant measure, the gospel will not be cherished.

One way this relates to loving others who are different from us is this: When we realize that we are morally and spiritually marred by sin, we will not be given to despise others for mere outward appearances. [Pause] But mainly, the way this sense of sinfulness works is to prepare us for the next act.

6. Teach them God loves them in spite of the ugliness of our sin and he proved this by sending his Son to die for our sins and giving forgiveness to all who trust him.

“God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). This is the heart of the gospel. And it’s the deepest source of power for helping our children love others who are different from themselves.

So we say to our children, “Remember, your sin—and daddy’s sin and mommy’s sin—it’s an ugly thing. But it doesn’t stop God from loving you or me. God sent Jesus to die in our place, so that if we trust him, he forgives us all our sins and starts to make us into new, radiant people. So if God has loved us this way, shouldn’t we love others this way too?”

7. Teach them that because Jesus died for them and rose again, he becomes for them an all-satisfying Friend.

Paul said, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). To know Jesus—to have Jesus as my Savior and my King and my Friend is better than anything.

Help the children make the connection—and of course you have to make it for yourself—that if Jesus is this precious and this satisfying, then you don’t need to be afraid of anyone who’s different from you; and you don’t need to get your happiness by feeling superior to others or by putting others down. You have Jesus. And you are full. You have something to share. So don’t turn away from people. Turn toward people.

Help the children be so happy in knowing Jesus, and in being forgiven by Jesus, and being loved by God because of Jesus, that they spill over onto others freely with love, rather than getting their happiness by putting others down & running away from them.

Finally, to make sure that they are grasping the gospel and how it works in their lives:

8. Teach them to love others who are different from them, not in order to be accepted by God, but because they already are accepted by God because of Jesus.

When Paul says in Phil. 2:12, “Work out your own salvation,” he adds, “**because it is God who works in you.**” And when he says in Phil. 3:12, “I press on to make it my own.” he adds, “**because Christ Jesus has made me his own.**”

In other words, the efforts that we teach our children to make in being good and holy and kind and loving—these don’t make them Christians. These efforts don’t get God on their side. If they have been grasped by the gospel, they make these efforts *because* God is already on their side! And He is on their side because of what Jesus did for them, not what they do for him.

The Power of God in the Gospel – This is the power to love people different from ourselves. This is the key we give to our children. And above all, this is the key to the grace that enables us to be this kind of parent – this kind of person. [P] We live day by day from the love of God in the gospel of Jesus. [P] May God give our children eyes to see it, and in the beauty and power of it, to love others different from themselves.

(Credit given to Dr. John Piper)