

Racial Harmony and Interracial Marriage

by John Piper

The Bible teaches that interracial marriage is not inherently wrong and that God is not opposed to it, and that opposition to it is a root of racial distance and hostility.

Duration: 43:30

Scripture: Colossians 3:9-11

Topics: "Racial Reconciliation", "Interracial Marriage"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the challenges of raising a child with Christian standards in a world where beliefs are mocked. He emphasizes the importance of setting boundaries and instilling values in children, even if it is not easy. The speaker also discusses the topic of interracial marriage, highlighting that all races have one ancestor in the image of God and that in Christ, racial and social differences can be transformed from barriers to blessings. He concludes by stating that opposition to interracial marriage is a root cause of racial distance and hostility, and calls for the church to take a stand on this issue.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.DesiringGod.org. My aim today is to argue from Scripture and from experience that interracial marriage is not only permitted by God and the Bible, but is a positive good in our day. That is, it's not just to be tolerated, it's to be celebrated.

This is extremely controversial because it is opposed by people from all sides and all colors. When I was a senior in college, 1967, it was against the law in 16 states to marry interracially. And then the *Loving v. Virginia* decision happened that year, and the Supreme Court struck down all those laws.

That's really fresh. Laws reflect deep convictions, and when laws are changed, convictions don't change. At least not right away.

When I typed into my Google search engine a couple of weeks ago, Martin Luther King interracial marriage, guess what the first site was that came up? The KKK. Front page of the Ku Klux Klan, k-k-k.com, has this anachronistic quote. Interracial marriage is a violation of God's law and a communist ploy to weaken America.

Remember the communists? They're in China today, North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam. And everywhere else, coming down. And they will come down there.

But they didn't do it this way. Black opposition is significant. Lawrence Otis Graham wrote, Interracial marriage undermines African Americans' ability to introduce our children to black role models who accept their racial identity with pride.

So many blacks would oppose interracial marriage. Conservative whites even more so. H. Millard wrote, In his replacement with a non-European type, who now has enough mass in our society to pervert European-American ways, white people are going to have to struggle mightily to survive the neo-melting pot and avoid being part of the one-size-fits-all human model.

Call it what it is, genocide and extinction of the white genotype. I got a letter from a Christian white man. It goes like this.

As individuals, they are precious souls for whom Christ died and whom we are to love and seek to win. As a race, however, they are unique and different and have their own culture. I would never marry a black.

Why? Because I believe God made the races, separated them, and set the bounds of their habitation. Deuteronomy 32.8, Acts 17.26 He made them uniquely different and intended that these distinctions remain. God never intended the human race to become a mixed or mongrel race.

So, while I am strongly opposed to segregation, I favor separation that the uniqueness with which God made them is maintained. Now, to these conflicting views, that is, views that conflict with mine and oppose interracial marriage, I would add my experience. I was manifestly a southern teenage racist by any definition.

And I'm a sinner still, and therefore do not doubt that there are remnants of that in me to this day. And for those lingering attitudes and actions, I repent. Racism is a very difficult thing to define.

We've been working on it as a staff. We take about one staff meeting a month on this issue to try to simply get a vocabulary that at Bethlehem we can share. So when we use a word like racism, we know what we're talking about.

That's not easy. That's really not easy. Most recently, we are drawn, and I think probably we'll go here.

We haven't done any kind of official vote, but last time this is where we landed. We took the Presbyterian Church in America definition from their annual meeting last summer, and we believe it's about as close as you can get to what we should mean at this church. Racism, quote, racism is an explicit.

Every word counts in this definition is one sentence. Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races. That's what I mean when I call myself one in the 1950s and 60s.

South Carolina, where I grew up, Greenville, my attitudes and actions were demeaning and disrespectful toward nonwhites. And right at the heart of those attitudes was the issue of racial interracial marriage. Don't do that.

Bluebirds. Mate with bluebirds and redbirds mate with redbirds. Why can't they be happy? Can't go to school together.

For goodness sakes, you fall in love with the people you go to school with. This was easy. No big deal here.

What what is everybody being bent out of shape about? This won't work. That that was that was really clear to me. My mother washed my mouth out with soap literally once over a pink porcelain sink in the bathroom because I said, shut up to my sister.

Had she known what I said about blacks when she wasn't around, she would have washed my mouth out with gasoline. In 1963, when I was 17, our church voted on a Wednesday night to forbid black people from coming to this church. My sister's wedding was in December of 1963.

My mother invited all of the blacks that she knew, and when the ushers refused to seat them, my mother seated them, marched them herself into the sanctuary and sat them with the people. And I watched and my redemption began. Noel and I went to Urbana in 1967.

We were in love, headed for marriage, would be married a year from then. Raise your hand if you were at Urbana 67. OK, good.

That last night nobody was there. So tell me if I'm right. Noel and I remember it this way.

Warren Webster was on a panel. He was a missionary at that time. He spent 12 years in Pakistan.

In those days, they took questions from the audience, 12,000 people at Urbana 67. And one of the questions to Warren Webster was, what about the kids if your daughter falls in love with a Pakistani and wants to marry him? What are you going to do about that? What do you feel about that? And there was this silence. And Noel and I, coming from our backgrounds, listening intently.

And we will never forget, we to this day both remember the chills of the prophetic answer. It went something like this. Better a Christian Pakistani than a white, pagan, rich American.

And everything came, began to come clear about the relationship between Christianity and race. Four years later, I was in a class on ethics with Lewis Smedes at Fuller Seminary. And we had to write a paper.

And I wrote this paper. You remember paper like this? Sticky. If you type on it, you can erase it with a pencil eraser.

Remember those? Well, you young people don't remember paper like this. And the title of this paper is The Ethics of Interracial Marriage, written with a view to black-white marriages in America, Ethics T33, Dr. Smedes, by John Piper, spring 1971. And I settled it for myself.

Wrestled with ham and all that stuff. I just settled it. And I've never gone behind this paper.

There's the grade, I won't tell you what it was. A lot of blue ink on that paper. Now I'm at Bethlehem.

And if you don't have one of these, we still have these? Okay. If you don't have a pictorial directory, get one. If you're part, if you just come here.

And then go to the back page. And marvel at this page. Study this page.

And figure out where you're going to draw the line between the ones you like and the ones you don't like. It's kind of hard to draw a line here on this page. This is a beautiful page.

I went through and I counted 203 non-Anglos on the pictures. Some of you will get bent out of shape that I even thought in those categories, like, what's an Anglo? I have no idea what an Anglo is. I just picked out people that didn't look like me and rejoiced.

But here's the catch. Among those 203, and that's not all of them, of course, there are a lot of kids. And there are a lot of teenagers.

And there are a lot of single young adults. And guess what? They're going to fall in love with each other someday. Because church is where that ought to happen.

Of all the places where you should find a spouse, it isn't a bar and it isn't mainly the office. No sin against finding your spouse anywhere. But in God's economy, in a culture where Christians are not the norm, church is the normal place to find a spouse.

And they will. Therefore, we must, as a church, have a place to stand on this issue. We must know where we stand on this issue so we can all be on the same page and relax about this and celebrate this.

So my approach now is to go to four passages in the Bible, read them, comment on them, and then move towards some application. So passage number one, Genesis 1. God created human beings in his own image, and this image is preserved through the fall from generation to generation, from one set of parents to every human being. Genesis 1.27. So God created man in his own image.

In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. Male and female in the image of God, a stunning statement that can hardly be exaggerated in its impact and significance for human life, that we, among all the created beings on planet earth, are in the image of our Maker. Chapter 5 of Genesis, verses 1 to 3, make a very important point here.

When Adam and Eve sinned, that did not disappear. Genesis 5. 1 to 3. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God, male and female, he created them, he blessed them, named them man, when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he fathered a son in his own likeness after his image.

Now the point of saying that, verse 3, in his own likeness after his image, my son is that, is to say this is continuing. The same language, image, likeness, image and likeness of God, image and likeness of my son, Seth. Therefore today, generation after generation after generation, it goes on.

So, whether you like it or not, black, white, every other shade of yellow or brown or red, have the same great, great, great, great, great, great granddaddy. Get used to it. We have the same parents.

The only kind of marriages there are is interracial marriages. That's text number one. Text number two.

First Corinthians 7:39. A wife is bound to her husband as long as she lives. I'm sorry, as long as he lives.

But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes. Only in the Lord. The Bible forbids intermarriage between believer and unbeliever.

And no other prohibitions are in the Bible with regard to marriage. She is free to marry whom she wishes. Only in the Lord.

Deuteronomy 7.3. You shall not intermarry with the nations. You shall not give your daughters to their sons. Nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.

For they will turn your sons away from following me. There's the motive. There's the issue.

They will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you. The issue there is not color mixing, customs mixing, clan identity.

The issue is one common allegiance to the one true God. Therefore, the fulfillment of that text, the Israel of God may not intermarry with pagan nations. Today the true Israel of God may not intermarry with anybody else but the true Israel of God.

Namely, the church of Jesus Christ. That is absolutely clear. I pray, oh how I pray that God will use this church to raise up young people who have it fixed and settled in their soul.

I will never marry an unbeliever. I will not date towards marriage an unbeliever. I will not compromise the purity of the true Israel of God.

Filled with every color on planet earth. Oh, there is a law against intermarriage. Believe me, there is.

Do not marry an unbeliever. Christ is your king. Christ is your love.

Christ is your treasure. Christ is your all. It is unthinkable that you could fall in love with an unbeliever.

This is not a sermon about marriage to unbelievers. The Bible is very aware that there are such things. And I'm very aware that many of you are married to unbelievers.

If you did that when you were a Christian, you sinned. It is not a sin now for you to be married to one. The Bible is real clear how to handle that situation.

Love them like crazy into the kingdom. Keep your mouth shut most of the time. That's the way the Bible talks about it in 1 Peter 3. But I'm talking to unmarried people.

That the Bible has one prohibition. Keep the Israel of God, the church of Jesus Christ, pure. And filled with every color and much diversity.

That's text number 2. Text number 3. Colossians 3, 9 to 11. You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here, that is here in the new people of God, the new humanity with Christ as the head.

Here in this church is neither Greek nor Jew. Circumcised nor uncircumcised. Barbarian, scythian, slave, free.

Cover it, Paul. But Christ is all and in all. That does not mean that every minority culture or ethnicity is swallowed up and vanishes into the majority culture.

God does not obliterate all ethnic and cultural differences in Christ. He redeems them. He refines them.

He enriches them in the togetherness of his kingdom. The final image of the church in heaven is not without diversity. It is every tribe, tongue, people, nation.

That's the heavenly picture. God likes this. He's not going to blot it out.

Rather, the point of Colossians 3, 11 is not that culture, ethnicity, and race have no significance. They do have a significance. The point is they in Christ no longer serve as a barrier to deep, personal, intimate family relationships.

That's what Christ does. Singing alto is different from singing bass. And that is a significant musical difference and not a disqualification from being in the choir.

That's the meaning of choir. Differences are really helpful. When Christ is all and in all, differences take an important but a subordinate place to fellowship, and I will argue to marriage.

Last text. Numbers 12. The marriage of Moses to a black African woman.

You may not know that. And Miriam's response to that marriage and God's anger at Miriam's response. It gets real nitty gritty here now to see how your attitude shapes up.

Is it Miriam's? And if it is, you're in really grave danger. Numbers 12, verse 1. Miriam and Aaron. That's Moses' brother and sister.

Miriam and Aaron. It's a family thing. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married.

For he had married a Cushite woman. Now, my tone of voice there is intended to reflect my estimate of Miriam's attitude. I'll read it without the tone of voice and you supply your own.

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married. For he had married a Cushite woman. He had married a Cushite woman.

Well, who's a Cushite? Cush is the land south of Egypt, sometimes called Ethiopia in the Bible, sometimes south of there, and they were all known for being black. Jeremiah 13.23 is one of the biblical clues that we know this from external sources especially, but we also know it from the Bible because when it says in Jeremiah 13.23, can the Ethiopian, and that word Ethiopian there is exact Hebrew word as Cushite in Numbers 12.1. Can the Ethiopian, can the Cushite change his skin or the leopard his spots? So the point is he's grasping to show how unchangeable the condition of the people are and he picks a leopard and a Cushite. These people are black.

They can't make themselves any other color. This leopard has spots. It can make himself not have spots and you are this way and you can't do it without God.

You can't change yourself. So it's just an illusion to show Cushite were known for their different colored skin from Israel. Daniel Hayes, this book here, From Every People and Nation, a biblical theology of race that I've been reading, says this.

Cush is used regularly to refer to the area south of Egypt and above the cataracts of the Nile where a black African civilization flourished for over 2,000 years and thus it is quite clear that Moses marries a black African woman. Now what is significant about this is not that Moses did that. I mean Moses did lots of things he shouldn't have done.

What is significant about this is that Miriam doesn't like it at all. Neither does Aaron. And she gets in Moses' face about this marriage.

Let's read it again so you can see what the... I mean there are other issues going on here, authority issues, but the marriage is the one that's focused on. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses. Why? Because of the Cushite woman whom he had married.

For he married a Cushite woman. I wrote an advent poem on this years ago. The first line begins, My God, Moses, she's black.

So that was a very controversial poem in advent of 83 or whenever it was. It's online. You can read it because people didn't get it.

I mean some people didn't get it and I got emails. I like that poem very much. I still like that poem.

I was going to read it except my sermon is too long to leave time for that poem. So if you want to read my reconstruction of what happened here poetically, you can go to the website Desiring God and type in, My God, Moses, she's black or something like that. So here's the issue.

How does God respond to Miriam's response to this marriage? God's not saying anything negative about this marriage. He's cool about this, but he's not happy with Miriam. Takes him outside the camp to the woodshed, so to speak.

And he says, I talk with Moses mouth to mouth. Get out of his face. And a cloud came, settled over them.

Verse 10. When the cloud removed from over the tent, tent of meeting out there. Behold, Miriam was leprous like snow.

Oh, I get it. Snow. You wish you were more white, Miriam.

You like white. I show you white. Leprosy.

This is very interesting. If you ever thought that black was the symbol of uncleanness in the Bible, you better think again. Or God may strike you with some white uncleanness that you don't want.

The story does have a happy ending. Moses prays. Moses is a meek man.

He prays for his sister. Seven days later, she's whole. But God was not happy with her criticism of this interracial marriage.

Summary. All races, number one, all races have one ancestor in the image of God. Two, the Bible forbids intermarriage between believer and unbeliever, but not between races.

Three, in Christ, our oneness is profound and transforms racial and social differences from barriers to blessings. And four, criticizing one interracial marriage in the Bible was severely disciplined by God. Now, closing implications and application.

Opposition to interracial marriage is one of the deepest roots of racial distance, disrespect, and hostility in America. Challenge. Show me one place in the world, show me one place in the world where interracial marriage is despised or rejected or looked down upon or held in suspicion and the groups live with equal respect, honor, and opportunity.

It does not exist, I don't think. I don't think it exists because it can't exist. It won't happen.

Why? Because the specter, the supposed specter of interracial marriage demands that barrier after barrier after barrier have to be put up to keep young people from knowing each other and falling in love. They have to. You can't fellowship in church, you can't go to the same youth group, you can't go to camp together, you can't go to the same school, you can't live in the same neighborhood, you're going to hang out, you're going to fall in love.

You've got to keep these kids apart. There is no alternative if your heart is telling you interracial marriage is bad, interracial marriage is bad, you've got to keep this from happening. As long as we disapprove of interracial marriage, we will be pushing our children and ourselves away from each other.

It must be. Where racial intermarriage is disapproved of, therefore, the culture with money and power will always dominate and oppress. They will see to it.

If your kids don't make good spouses for my kids, you don't make good neighbors for me. Period. You may not say it, you've got to feel it.

There never has been, never will be, separate but equal. Because deep down we're saying, don't want my kid to marry one of them. That's not separate but equal.

No way. Here's a great irony of this. The very situation, I could name people in South Carolina, I could name relatives.

The very irony, the very situation of separation, suspicion and distrust and dislike that is brought about in part, in part by resistance to intermarriage. That situation brought about by resistance to interracial marriage is used to justify resistance to interracial marriage. Catch 22.

It's going to be hard for the couple. They're going to call the kids half-breeds. A couple came up to me after church last night.

She's Asian, he's Swedish. And they picked up their little girl and said, didn't you see a cute half-breed? That's a good church. It's a good church.

Catch 22. You know that phrase? Did you read that novel? It's now in our vocabulary. It's like an army being defeated because there aren't enough troops.

And the troops won't sign up because the army is being defeated. Catch 22. Resist, oppose, oppose, resist this interracial marriage and thus create all these suspicions and all this distance and all this dislike and then use that to justify why you're doing this.

Now Christ makes all the difference here. Here's where Christ breaks in. Catch 22s have miraculous breaking power.

Jesus breaks the power of a lot of catch 22s. I pray with people after the service. They give me catch 22s every week.

I face insoluble problems in your life. If I do this, this. If I do this, this.

There is no solution. I say, okay, let's pray. And God has a unheard of way of solving problems.

Breaks in. There's always a third way beyond what you think. Jesus Christ does not call us to prudent lives.

He calls us to God-centered, Christ-exalting, justice-advancing, counter-cultural, risk-taking love and courage. Question. Will it be harder to marry, to be married to another race? Will it be harder for the kids? Answer.

Maybe and maybe not. How do you know whether it will be harder than this other marriage, which may be hell hard? White on white and black on black. Tortured from day one.

Kids on drugs. Being sweet and compliant through their teen years and getting married five times before they're done. Breaking everybody's heart.

Who says it will be harder? Is it easy to take a child to the mission field? The risks are huge. No 911. Grandmama's in your face by her baby.

Is it easy to take a child and live in a mixed neighborhood? Either way, kids are going to be made fun of. Is it easy to grow up a child in a secular world and say, you're going to be a Christian. We're Christian.

And have his beliefs mocked at school. Is that easy? Is it easy to just bring up a child with standards? You're not going to wear that. I don't care if 10,000 kids are wearing that.

You're not wearing that. I'm the dad in this house. You're not going outside with that on.

And you'll be in at 11. 11. You're coming home at 11.

Is that easy? Whoever said getting married and having kids was easy. It's one of the hardest things in the world. It just happens to be right.

And rewarding. And God's will. And good for the world.

And a glory to God. Not easy. So, maybe.

Maybe not. That's beside the point. Whoever said that the criterion for being a godly person was to do an easy thing.

Oh, there's so much more to say. But I'm done. Watch the star for more.

I have just one more thing. I just felt I had to say it. There's no time to say it.

And I'll try to put it in the star. Let's close like this. Suffice it to say now, here at Bethlehem, that we're not going to underestimate the challenges of interracial marriage or transracial adoption.

We're not going to be naive. We're not naive. I mean, maybe some of you are naive.

A lot of us, we have taken real careful, deep, long-term stock about this issue. And life commitments have been made. And we're not going to be naive about the challenges of interracial marriage or interracial, transracial adoption.

However, we are going to celebrate the beauty of it and embrace the burden of it. That's life. We're going to celebrate the beauty of all the implications of diversity, including marriage and children, all shades of

children, all shapes of children.

We're going to celebrate that, and we're going to embrace the pain. How many times was I told, you're going to be 65 when she's 15 and she's black? Do you get that, Piper? I get it. You embrace that.

You embrace that with all the tears that will flow. This is a good place to be that person. Can't imagine being anywhere else than with you.

Let's pray. So, Father, across this room now and beyond, I pray for grace to love each other the way we should. Christians ought to be different on this issue.

We really ought to be different. Oh, Christ, be our all and be in all. And may our belonging to Christ be our main, decisive racial family identification.

We're a new humanity in Christ. He is our DNA. And then, God, build your church.

May we draw in every color, every culture, every ethnicity. Lord, help us. We don't know all that will mean for us.

North campus, downtown, south campus. But let it be something beautiful and counter-cultural for the kingdom's sake. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission. We invite you to visit DesiringGod online at www.DesiringGod.org. There you'll find hundreds of sermons, articles, radio broadcasts, and much more, all available to you at no charge. Our online store carries all of Pastor John's books, audio, and video resources.

You can also stay up to date on what's new at Desiring God. Again, our website is www.DesiringGod.org. Or call us toll free at 1-888-346-4700. Our mailing address is Desiring God, 2601 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406.

Desiring God exists to help you make God your treasure, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/12/SID12393.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-piper/racial-harmony-and-interracial-marriage/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net