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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Achieving Racial Unity and Oneness Through Biblical Authority and Application

Submitted to Dr. Mason

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The problem is that secular models for achieving racial reconciliation threaten the unity of Life Church. The true remedy for unity is found in biblical authority and application. The intervention research project addressed this problem by observing the negative impacts of methodologies such as Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality. Seven members of Life Church were recruited to participate in the group study. The first three phases of intervention were replete with survey questions and interviews that ascertained their worldview on understandings of race and how personal experiences have shaped the way they view people. The phase four intervention provided a theological lay out of why racism is grounded in sin and then proceeded to apply systematic biblical texts that addressed partiality and God's heart for unity and oneness.

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Abbreviations

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD *Liberty University School of Divinity*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Though the work of racial justice is challenging and will never truly end in this life, God has provided a colorful portrait of the goal. In a cosmic case of beginning with the end in mind, God pulls back the curtain of eternity to give a glimpse of future glory. The Apostle John wrote, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”¹ In that heavenly congregation, God’s people will finally see the culmination of His gathering a diverse people unified by faith in Christ. All will not be white; all will not be black. Instead, there will be a surrounding of the Lamb's throne as a redeemed picture of all the ethnic and cultural diversity God created. Skin color will no longer be a source of pain or arrogant pride but will serve as a multihued reflection of God’s image. People will no longer be alienated by earthly economic or social position. There will be no clamor for power over one another. The single focus will be worshiping God for eternity in sublime fellowship with our Creator and with each other.²

¹ Revelation 7:9 (New American Standard Bible).

²Jemar Tisby. *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019,) 23

As our world grapples with racial discord, it is the Church that must be set apart as an example of biblical unity. For the Church to take its rightful place, there must be a love for Jesus, His mission, and His Word. There should also be an honest recognition of the ongoing practice of growing in the understanding and way of unity and reconciliation. Being reconciled is only available to all people through Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Thus, one must desire for people to be reconciled to each other to be reconciled to God.

In this chapter, the ministry context of Life Church will be explored along with how biblical racial unity is displayed, according to John 17. There will also be an explanation of the problem presented in that Life Church must adhere to God's Word with intentionality to achieve racial oneness. The purpose statement will then follow, explaining how congregants of Life Church will accomplish God's heart for racial reconciliation to love one another and reach our neighbor. Some basic assumptions and presuppositions will be explained about current realities and future hope of racial reconciliation. Definitions will be used to articulate terminology that is being used to surround the topic. Finally, the thesis statement will reveal how Life Church can accomplish an ongoing practice of biblical racial unity in congruence with the words of Jesus in John 17.

Ministry Context

Life Church ("Life") was planted in 2005. The pastor who planted Life was a part of a large congregation that went through a church split. The result of that separation was the formulation of Life Church. The original diversity in terms of ethnic representation in the congregants was predominately white, with 10 percent non-white. The average attendance was 40-50 people. Life Church began meeting in a local elementary cafeteria and shortly after that moved to an historical African American theater downtown. The move to the heart of the city

created some tension with members who did not want to be in what they considered an “unsafe location.” Four to five families left the fellowship.

Nonetheless, Life Church remained in the historically black theater for two years until they moved to their current location which was less than one mile away. Staying in the heart of the city created even more discord because the existing building is now surrounded by government housing. Within a one-mile radius, 87 percent of the residents are African American; twenty percent are college students at the local University; and seventy percent of the residents live below the poverty line.³ After five years of nomadic wandering, Life Church finally had a home. The settling of a majority culture church in a non-majority community presented several challenges and opportunities. As mentioned before, the move into an inner-city context acted as a pruning tool to wield down the congregation to members who were at least willing to worship in a non-conventional Southern Baptist setting.

Changes in Leadership

Over the next five years, Life Church experienced periodical growth, but nothing that was sustainable beyond regular attenders. The mission of the church was to “*Love God, love people, and make disciples.*” The implementation of the mission was done very well internally but failed to be exemplified externally. There was no action plan for reaching the community and no intentionality in strategically partnering with organizations within the community. The congregation remained homogenous and stagnant in outward evangelism. One of the primary

³ U.S. Census Bureau. Selected housing characteristics, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5year estimates (2011) Retrieved from http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_5YR_DP04.

reasons for the lack of outreach was the church's desire to be a suburban ministry. Landing in the inner city was done out of necessity for a gathering place rather than intentionality to reach the urban community. Nonetheless, the church's desire should always be to grow where you are planted. The focus of Life Church was eventually to be uprooted and replanted somewhere else.

After twelve years of ministry, the planting pastor felt that he had taken Life Church as far as possible. There were no immorality or unethical behavior elements that drove the pastor to his decision. There was just a lingering sense of stagnation and an inability to take the people further into the next realm of ministry. The sanctuary has a seating capacity of nearly two hundred. The Sunday morning attendance was dipping below 50. As a 62-year-old pastor, he knew that his journey was complete at Life Church. Thus, he made the Elders aware of his desire to move on and hand the baton to someone else. The Elders reached out to an unsuspecting 30-year-old African American man to simply come and fill in for their pastor, who was out of town that weekend. He did not know that they were examining him as a potential candidate for a lead pastor. One of the things that were appealing about the new pastoral candidate was his employment in The Fellowship of Christian Athletes. This gave him access to all the local schools as well as ties to the local University. His ethnicity was also a way of adding credibility with the local community in which the church was planted. After the church's intentions were made known to the new minister, he later accepted the calling and began serving as the lead pastor in January of 2017.

Driving the Mission

The new pastor had the privilege of being born into a family of preachers. His father served as his ministry mentor and gave him many valuable insights on how to lead a church into

a new season of ministry under new pastoral leadership. The essential words of wisdom being, “Don’t go in flipping tables.” The idea was to go and observe. Get to know the congregants and allow them to embrace you. Do not be so quick to change everything only in the name of establishing a new order. Make small changes over time in the first year but accept that becoming the church’s preacher happens day one; however, becoming their pastor will occur over time. As a result of taking this approach, the church immediately began to take a turn for the better. A liveliness and excitement began to infiltrate the ministry.

One of the critical components that positively affected the ministry context was the resurrection of the mission statement. The desire to love God, love people, and make disciples is as biblical as it gets. Therefore, everything the pastor wanted to implement moving forward was to be driven through the mission statement. Establishing the framework for ministry was paramount if the church was going to be advanced and grow. Elders were in place but had not been thoroughly disciplined on how to lead and shepherd the church. People were heading up ministry but had no accountability nor resources. There was no formal membership process, no staff meetings, no evaluations, and no strategic planning for upcoming ministry. To reach the community and see discipleship flourish, all of these things had to be in place and find their purpose in the mission statement. Knowing that healthy ministry rises and falls on leadership meant that the new pastor had to start with his Elders’ team. Monthly meetings were established to disciple and train the men on how to lead and be led. The Elders also gained a greater understanding of the pastor’s heart and desire for vital ministry. The pastor identified ministry leaders to head up auxiliary groups and engaged in accountability, strategic planning, and discipleship. All of the engagement at Life Church now is geared towards the mission statement, which includes reaching our community expressing the commitment to “make disciples.”

The missions team partnered with the local recreation department to resource our community with food, clothes, literacy, and education programs. Under previous pastoral leadership, the church would travel four hours away every year to host a week-long vacation bible school in an impoverished community. Now the church focuses on doing Back Yard Bible Clubs in our community every summer. This has allowed the church to build relationships with community members and see several of them come to functions and events on the church property. A mission board was formulated to ensure that financial resources and quality time are invested in the church's local footprint. As a result, Life Church has partnered with a local private school stationed right in the heart of the inner city. We partner and provide mentors to the school, allowing us to effectively reach the students we see in the community every day.

A Culture of Hospitality

Life Church has always had a culture of hospitality and friendliness. One may attend many places on a Sunday morning for worship and leave feeling like their presence was not wanted. Life Church is not one of those places. There is an overwhelming sense of acceptance for anyone who would enter the doors seeking a place to worship. The culture of hospitality bleeds into every facet of the church. The expecting moms get baby showers, the bereaved receive comfort food, and the pastor never eats Sunday dinner alone. These statements indicate significant potential for the congregation's ownership of the mission statement. However, as will become apparent in the following analyses, there is more than just heliotropism⁴ at work here,

⁴ Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations*, (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004).

which describes how a plant grows because of sunlight. It may be said that gravitropism⁵, a plant desires to drive roots down and the stalk up, and even skototropism⁶, growing away from sunlight for the purpose of sustainability, may also provide metaphoric imagery of how Life Church functions. This is noted because hospitality and friendliness come second nature to this congregation as a mechanism for healthy growth and development. Those are desirable traits to people seeking a church that will embrace them for who they are. Life Church is a place that welcomes all people, but with all people comes all types of beliefs and worldviews. The threat is that Life Church would relax their biblical conviction for the sake of cultural expediency and palatability on the issues of racial reconciliation, biblical social justice, and unity.

Problem Presented

Life Church has a mission statement of Loving God, Loving People, and Making Disciples. This, however, cannot be fulfilled entirely if there is a lack of biblical understanding and application surrounding unity and oneness according to the intercessory “High Priestly” prayer Jesus prayed over the Church in John 17. The problem is that secular models for achieving racial reconciliation threaten Life Church, when the true remedy for unity is found in biblical instruction.

The church consists of many young millennial members longing to see drastic changes surrounding race relations in their community and world. Passion and vigor are wonderful traits, but the problem is that they are misplaced. Some of the wayward instructions come from

⁵ Following Branson’s botanical metaphor above, I use the term “gravitropism” (the tendency for plants to move in the direction of the gravitational pull) to describe an organization’s tendency to move toward that which is easy or comfortable.

⁶ The tendency for plants to move toward darkness. I use the term here to describe an organization’s tendency to move toward that which is sinful or toxic—not unlike Paul’s usage of *επιθυμία σαρκός*.

minority individuals who suggest studying and reading materials that propagate separatism and systemic realities that people have no control over. To label and condemn someone as racist because they have white skin is just as damaging as developing a racist preconceived notion because someone has black skin. As a black member of a predominantly white congregation, several things are seen and observed that are looming threats against truly achieving biblical racial unity and oneness.

To solve the problem that exists within Life Church, the Bible must be the object by which all things are judged and plan a course of action. John 17 is the primary compass that will be used to navigate the tremulous water of racial unrest.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research thesis is to help Life Church exemplify racial unity according to the Scriptures and to avoid unhelpful secular methods. The biblical emphasis on unity and oneness is the primary focus. Some methods and models currently exist but are harmful and counterproductive to achieving real unity, such as cultural Marxist theories rooted in drawing distinctions of separation rather than finding a common ground of unity. Also, there are detrimental analytical tools such as intersectionality that foster oppressed versus oppressor race wars. The purpose is to examine current methods that are not working and explain why the biblical application of John 17 does work in accomplishing racial unity and oneness. The objective is to condemn racism as sin while also elevating the solution found in the person of Jesus Christ. Sin's universal impact on humanity is the fundamental reason races need to be reconciled first to God and second to one another. Since sin is the root cause of the hostility between God and humankind and between fellow human beings, Jesus' sacrificial death for sin is God's provision for racial reconciliation.

Basic Assumptions

The researcher believes that congregants within Life Church genuinely seek to honor the Lord by engaging in a biblical worldview towards the rest of humanity concerning racial unity. However, the assumption is that external influences, such as upbringing, culture, and false doctrine, have ways of negating the power of God's remedy against racism found in Scripture. A discerning spirit, proper biblical interpretation, and practical application will protect the church from engaging in counterproductive methodologies that push one further from the goal of unity than towards it. Discovering the congregant's understanding of biblical unity, as well as exposing harmful forces against oneness, will prepare them to be effective in exemplifying God's heart for unity in the church and community.

The assumption is that participants from various ages, ethnicities, and social backgrounds will engage in the action research study. With that, there is the belief that the individuals will answer the interview questions in an honest and candid manner due to genuine interest in participating in the research with no other motives. Each participant will see the information as relevant and share various aspects of experience contributing to the study. The outcome will be a newfound understanding of what proper biblical implementation looks like concerning racial unity and oneness. The hope is that participants will leave with an eagerness to root out unhealthy race-related methods and exercise proper biblical application that speaks to achieving God's heart for racial unity.

Definitions

In this dissertation, the terms critical race theory, cultural Marxism, ethnicity, ethnic Gnosticism, ethnocentrism, intersectionality, Marxism, racism, reconciliation, white fragility,

and white privilege are defined in their ordinary usage in daily speech. However, for the sake of a clear understanding, this author will provide a brief definition of each term in order.

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but place them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, emotions, and the unconscious.⁷

Cultural Marxism simply refers to a twentieth-century development in Marxist thought that came to view Western culture as a critical source of human oppression. As such, Cultural Marxism is nothing more than the application of Marxist theory to culture.⁸

Cultural Hegemony is the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class which manipulates the culture of that society, the beliefs and explanations, perceptions, and values so that the imposed, ruling-class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm.⁹ It also represents the universally valid dominant ideology, which justifies the social, political, and economic status quo as natural and inevitable, perpetual and beneficial for every social class, rather than as artificial social constructs that benefit only the ruling class.¹⁰

⁷ R. Delgado, J. Stefancic, and A. Harris, *Introduction in Critical Race Theory*, 3rd ed. (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 3.

⁸ Bill Berkowitz, *Cultural Marxism Catching On*, The Southern Poverty Law Center (August 15, 2003), <https://tinyurl.com/z2gcgqt>.

⁹ Alan Bullock and Stephen Trombley, eds. *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, 3rd ed. (NY: Harper Collins, 1999), 387-88.

¹⁰ *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 5th ed. (NY, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 1215.

Ethnicity refers to one's ethnic origin or group.¹¹ One's ethnicity is a clear and distinctive mark of God's handiwork. Every nation, says Paul, derives its name from the Father (Ephesians 3: 4-15). Therefore, it is understood that one's ethnicity is also a sign of God's creation and goodness to all people of the earth.

Ethnic Gnosticism is a term crafted by Voddie Baucham to explain the phenomenon of people believing that somehow because of one's ethnicity, one can know when something or someone is racist.¹²

Ethnocentrism is the collective group of ideas, beliefs, and attitudes that groups of people may have about themselves compared to other groups of ethnically diverse populations. In some manner, ethnocentrism is related to culture and national ideas of uniqueness, separateness, and self-determination. As such, ethnocentrism may generate ethnic bias against those who are not of "us." The others suddenly become "them." this ethnic bias may escalate into a full-blown epidemic of "ethnic cleansing," which seeks to eliminate the other "them" because the other is less than "us."¹³

Intersectionality is an analytical tool used to examine the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender. They apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.¹⁴

¹¹ Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008), 23.

¹² Voddie Baucham, "Ethnic Gnosticism," accessed November 2, 2020, <https://founders.org/sermons/ethnic-gnosticism>

¹³ B. Bizumic, *Ethnocentrism: Integrated Perspectives*, (London; Routledge, 2018), 2.

¹⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 22.

Marxism is identified with German philosopher Karl Marx. In his dominant ideology thesis, he observed that the dominant group, which he called the ruling class, used social institutions such as schools to promote ideas, values, and morals that support their dominance. Subordinate groups resist the ideologies of the dominant group.¹⁵

Culturally, *Race* finds its most common definition as any of the significant biological divisions of mankind that are distinguished by color and texture of hair, color of skin and eyes, stature, or bodily proportions.¹⁶ This understanding is used to justify prejudice and division. Theologically and genetically, *Race* is defined as the unified creation of all of humanity known as the human race. While there is but one human race, God, as a display of his artistry created a multiplicity of ethnicities which are equal before him and are made in his image. Within this thesis project the researcher uses the term in both ways.

Cultural Social Gospel believes that Christianity is defined by Christian social action in the name of Jesus, not by doctrines about Jesus or experiences with Jesus.

Biblical Social Justice is the action of treating others, in all areas of life, in such a way as to uphold God's revealed standards of good and evil (giving them what they are due as image bearers) and rendering judgments through duly enacted means of human judicial enforcement that punish wrongdoers and reward the injured accordingly.¹⁷

¹⁵ Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, *Recognizing Race and Ethnicity: Power, Privilege, and Inequality*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 238, accessed September 7, 2020.

¹⁶ Henry M. Morris, *Scientific Creationism*. (San Diego, CA.: Creation Life Publishers, 1974), 13.

¹⁷ Paul Ellwanger, "Racism and Origins." Bible-Science Newsletter 19, no.1 (January 1981).

Racism is based on the flawed belief that a person's character and abilities can be determined by their physical characteristics, and that certain ethnic groups are inferior to others. To determine which racial group a person belongs to, racist people look purely at a person's physical appearance, not at what sort of personality, interests, or beliefs they have. Racism doesn't focus on all aspects of physical appearance but mainly on skin color and, sometimes, certain facial features.¹⁸

Reconciliation is to become united after a break or partition in one's relation, friendship, or personal self has occurred. One becomes effectively reconciled when seeking to amend fellowship or communion with another. Such reconciliation is the product of having acknowledged to oneself and the other that one has erred and that he or she needs to be forgiven.¹⁹

White fragility may be conceptualized as a response or "condition" produced and reproduced by the continual social and material advantages of whiteness. It is seen as the defensive reactions white people have when their racial worldviews, positions, or advantages are questioned or challenged. That defensiveness serves to maintain both comfort and positions in a racially inequitable society from which whites' benefit.²⁰

¹⁸ Chuck Robinson, *Racism*, (Folcroft, PA: National Highlights, 2016), 11-12.

¹⁹ Graham A. Cole, *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement Brings Shalom*, (Nottingham, England: Apollos), 20.

²⁰ Robin J. DiAngelo. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Race*. (Public Science Project, 2016), 129.

White privilege refers to the rights, benefits, and advantages enjoyed by white persons, or the immunity granted to whites that are not granted to non-whites; white privilege exempts white people from certain liabilities with which others are burdened.²¹

Wokeness refers to being aware or well informed in a political or cultural sense, especially regarding issues surrounding marginalized communities. It describes someone who has “woken up” to issues of social injustice and see to dismantle oppressive structures through non-biblical methods.

Multi-Cultural means consisting of or relating to many different nationalities and cultures.²²

Limitations

This research project's sample size consists of a smaller number of Life Church members who range from college students to senior adults. The conversation on race relations is a hot topic that many have sought to avoid. Some may feel that this research analysis is too intensive and may choose to leave the study. Maintaining a neutral stance and remaining silent about race issues is something many believers have chosen to do. Participants in this study could select to do the same once the process begins. Others may feel inadequate to properly discuss the topic due to a lack of education surrounding specific terminology. The research study uses formulated questions to gauge where the participant's comprehension of verbiage surrounding racial reconciliation currently exists. Some may feel inept due to a lack of understanding and choose to hold back, falsify answers, or withdraw from the study altogether.

²¹ Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, 41.

²²Webster's New World College Dictionary, 4th Edition. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2010).

The current health crisis of the world is a significant limitation of this study. Not knowing how things will unfold in terms of gatherings and personal interaction present a challenge to the preferred method of in-person data collection. The global pandemic of COVID-19 has majorly affected the senior adult population of Life Church. Some have contracted COVID, while others are afraid of getting it. The virus has also created concern and apprehension amongst congregants who have new-born and toddler-age children. This limited the number of people who want to contribute to the research study.

Negative assumptions on why the study is being conducted present a threat. Members may perceive that the researcher is trying to gather research to identify who is practicing proper biblical application and who is not. Some may perceive that turning such a sensitive topic into academic research is disingenuous and neglectful to the pain of those who feel marginalized.

Delimitations

One of the project's delimitations is based on Scripture, particularly the book of John, chapter 17, which explains the solution for racial unity and oneness. The author will extrapolate guidelines from Scripture to develop a practical model of racial reconciliation for Life Church. Another delimitation is the context in which the study will be conducted. Life Church is a diverse congregation that is planted in a multiethnic community. Participants will reflect that diversity. The target population will be Life Church members in the life stage categories of a college student, graduate student, young adult married with no children, young adult married with children, middle age, and senior adult.

Thesis Statement

If Life Church applies biblical instructions that speak to achieving racial unity, then the church will avoid using harmful, counterproductive secular methods. The intercessory prayer of

Jesus recorded in John 17 is one of the central passages that speaks to unity and oneness. In fulfilling this prayer, Life Church will bring glory to God by being unified with one another. Also, the church's oneness will testify to the validity and Lordship of Jesus Christ. The world will know that Jesus has accomplished the means by which racial reconciliation is achieved through his life and ultimately finished work on the cross. Following the instructions left by Jesus to the church to pursue oneness and unity in John 17 will bring about the Father's will for His people to point a lost world to salvation that lies in Jesus and achieve racial unity and oneness.

Jesus died as a sacrifice of atonement for humanity's sin and has accomplished reconciliation. Because Jesus died as a sacrifice of atonement for us all, his death reconciles all groups to God and to one another when they place faith in Jesus. Jesus' death shattered all ethnic boundary markers between ethnic groups and then recreated them into one new man. This reconciliatory act of God has the power not because it has made people groups no longer different or has caused them to surrender their ethnic identities, but because all groups, though different, are one human race in the Creation, and the power of the cross overcomes their differences due to sin since God has reconciled them by faith through Jesus' death. Therefore, notwithstanding their ethnic distinctions and individual idiosyncrasies, God recreates people of diverse ethnicities into one new man in Christ.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

While much has changed over the last century in terms of race, race remains a central organizing principle of our society and the subject of ongoing conflict and debate.²³ One of the primary places that racial disunity also has a deeply rooted residual effect is within the local church. Christians concerned about racial justice often repeat Martin Luther King Jr.'s proclamation that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week.²⁴ The literature review covers the topic of racial unity and oneness displayed amongst believers. In addition, it addresses prevailing thoughts about how the ideology of racial reconciliation is perceived to be achieved.

Literature Review

The topic of racial interactions within contemporary and historical literature consists of a vast body of work. The following literature review is intended to present some of those works for the purpose of examining a litany of robust methodologies and ideologies around the issue of racism and how it is perceived. There will also be various methods that address racial reconciliation both within the church and secular settings.

The Nature of Race and Racism

One of the central themes that weave through modern and historical literature is the complexity of racism. Racism is identified by most as being an apparent evil, yet it is still

²³Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, 5.

²⁴Jennifer Harvey. *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 19.

prevalent in the world today. Piper explains that the heart that believes one race is more valuable than another is a sinful heart. And that sin is called racism. The behavior that distinguishes one race as more valuable than another is sinful behavior.²⁵ If the origins of racism can be found in sinful human nature, then that is where one must begin to examine how it can be appropriately identified, and unity can take its place. Dr. Tony Evans quotes, “The problem with race in America is not fundamentally a problem with skin. It is a problem of sin. It is a problem, and people have not been willing to address the sin that has led to a division among skin as individuals hold tenaciously to their cultures.²⁶ Once there is an admittance that racism is a sin problem, there is then an obligation for the evangelical community to deal with it right away. As long as the issue of racism is social and not spiritual, it will never be handled in any ultimate sense. Dr. Russell Moore adds that while the commandment is known to love one’s neighbor, how often is it applied? And to be specific: How often is it applied to issues of race and ethnicity? If God’s greatest commandment for the Christian (after loving Him) is to love one another, then the church must begin there as it thinks through racial reconciliation. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, and most of the racial divides in our time are due to great evils. If one can understand how to love their neighbor, then racial reconciliation can indeed be pursued.²⁷ The desire to see unity and oneness amongst the body of Christ begins with an internal look at prevailing prejudice and preconceived notions concerning other ethnic groups. If unity is to be achieved, one must acknowledge a lack of love towards their neighbor. Also, a realization of how one’s worldview shapes how they view their neighbor. Kelly writes about how easily

²⁵ John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 19.

²⁶ Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We are Stronger Together*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015), 63.

²⁷ Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker, *The Gospel and Racial Reconciliation*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group ,2016), 39.

stereotypes can be applied to ethnic groups, racial groups, to a particular physical type, to an occupation, to religious affiliation, to a nation, or even to a smaller local region.²⁸

Coming to this awareness requires a moment of awakening. Since this conversation seems complicated, it is much easier to maintain the status quo rather than press into a relationship and dialogue with one another. However, if the Gospel transcends race and believers have the Spirit of God, disciples of Jesus should be able and willing to take off the blinders that hinder from seeing the problem and the need for reconciliation.²⁹ Dr. Piper displays a strong belief that the Gospel—the good news of Christ crucified in our place to remove the wrath of God and provide forgiveness of sins and power for sanctification—is our only hope for the kind of racial diversity and harmony that ultimately matters. If the Gospel's fullness is abandoned to make racial and ethnic diversity quicker or easier, a mere shadow of the kingdom is created, an imitation. As a result, there is a loss of the one thing that can bring about Christ-exalting diversity and harmony. Any other kind is an alluring snare.³⁰ There are mutual confessions that all should make. A confession can be made that a disservice to the Lord has been made by creating him in man's image. Pastor Efreem Smith, in an article in *Outreach Magazine*, says the following:

The son of God, Alpha and Omega, was multiethnic, multicultural. In the family tree of Jesus were the indigenous inhabitants of Israel, Palestine, Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, and Libya. If that is true, we need to present it, remember it. Then we need to ask what it means for us, through the Holy Spirit, for that Christ to live in us. We must wrestle with what it means to follow that Jesus, to surrender to that Jesus, to represent that Jesus. He walked on earth as a multiethnic, multicultural, Jewish human being. We have reduced him from that. In our culture, we have made Jesus look like whoever we are instead of

²⁸ Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship*. (Biblical Limits), (London: Routledge, 2002), 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁰ John Piper, 41.

who He is. We have made him white. Western. European. Democrat. Republican. Urban. Handsome. Comfortable.³¹

Race and Church History

To re-examine Dr. King's earlier quote is to face the reality that the charge of segregation within the church was made in the 1950s, and sadly is still true today. As of 2012, only about 20 percent of churchgoers attend ethnically diverse churches, where no one ethnic group makes up more than 80 percent of the congregation.³² This reality finds deep roots in a southern evangelical America that wielded the Bible to defend Jim Crow and perpetuate status quo inequalities.³³ An awareness and acceptance of this truth cannot be overlooked or downplayed if an honest healing attempt is made. According to Jacobson, slavery was frequently viewed in biblical terms as God's plan to Christianize Africans and is both natural and civilizing.³⁴ This foundational belief lessened the conviction of inhumane behavior and justified one race's dominance and authority over another. George Whitfield was more moderate on race than many of his white contemporaries. He excoriated enslavers for their physical abuse of slaves, calling them "monsters of barbarity." He expressed ambivalence about the practice of slavery itself, but he had no doubts about how masters should treat their laborers. "Unsure of 'whether it be lawful for Christians to buy slaves,' Whitefield was positive that 'it is sinful, when bought, to use them . . . as though they were Brutes.'" In Whitefield's view, the worst abuse was some of the enslaver's

³¹ Paul J. Pastor, "Efrem Smith Right-Side-Up-Side-Down", *Outreach Magazine* (2017), 81-87.

³² Michael Lee, "Race and Ethnicity," *Christian Today*, July 10, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/july/race-and-ethnicity.html>.

³³ Robin Dale Jacobson and Nancy D. Wadsworth, eds. *Faith and Race in American Political Life*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

refusal to allow the enslaved to be evangelized.³⁵ Christianity had inherent ideas of human equality embedded in its teachings. If slaves converted to Christianity, would they not begin to demand their freedom and social equality? How could missionaries preach to the slaves when their owners feared the loss of their unpaid labor? Over time, Europeans compromised the message of Christianity to accommodate slavery while also, in their minds, satisfying the requirement to make disciples.³⁶

Southern Baptist leaders have recently and openly confessed to the tainted racist past of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and their participation inequality towards blacks. The *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* holds a record of meeting minutes of an area-wide southern Baptist Pastors gathering in Dallas, Texas, discussing desegregation in the early 60s. The Dallas clergyman believed it was "better for them to be over there in their way, in their church, with their preacher, carrying on as they like to do," while "I'm over here with my flock and my kind . . . carrying on like we want to do."³⁷ This belief is still prevalent today and serves as one of the primary deterrents to achieving racial unity and oneness. Waddles exclaims that believers may not have much time left to offer the world a glimpse of this unity that will point the eyes of the watching world to the power of our great God. Yes, there is an urgency. Time is running out for everyone.³⁸ Nonetheless, while there is still time, the Church should reflect on the heart of Jesus, who prayed earnestly that his church might one day be one.

³⁵ Jemar Tisby, 47.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

³⁷ John W. Storey, "Texas Baptist Leadership, the Social Gospel, and Race, 1954-1968." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 83, 1 (1979), 29-46.

³⁸ Karen Waddles and John Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 27.

Hindrances to Unity

Harvey adds to the prevailing thought of disunity, explaining that if the church is genuinely committed to reconciliation, it is incumbent to dig deep and ask of both mainline and evangelical Christianity, “What is going on here?” Why is it that so much focused energy and attention on reconciliation has not yielded something new and different?³⁹ Historically and currently, various harmful ideologies and methodologies are surrounding racial reconciliation that creates disunity amongst multiethnic cultures rather than promoting Biblical unity. Well-intended individuals are searching for Christian literature that addresses the epidemic of racism and how it can be adequately examined from a biblical perspective. Critics like Latasha Morrison, author of *Be the Bridge*, have published materials under Christian sub-titles that do not reflect the Gospel's heart nor are the method for racial reconciliation. Morrison wrote, “Race, as we know it, is a political and social construct created by man for the purpose of asserting power and maintaining a hierarchy.”⁴⁰ Ironically, Morrison titles the book *Be the Bridge*, yet makes inflammatory statements like the following that truly burn bridges. Her first inaccurate assumption is that race was created and constructed by man. This is problematic because it was God’s originally desire and design. It is important to hold to a definition that originates the creation of humanity (race) in the divine creator. What is contemporarily called race is understood as ethnicity.⁴¹ Nonetheless, both are meant to bring glory to God.

Additional statements of harmful effect come from Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility*, which explains that while every one of every race holds prejudice and can discriminate against

³⁹ Jennifer Harvey, 49.

⁴⁰ Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God’s Heart for Racial Reconciliation* ((NY,NY: Crown, 2019).

⁴¹ Shawn Kelley, 198.

someone of another race, in the U.S and other white/shelter nations, only white people are in the position to oppress people of color collectively and throughout the whole of society.⁴² She also adds that White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside of the system of white supremacy.⁴³ Also, to be less white is to be less racially oppressive.⁴⁴ These ideologies promote somewhat of a counter racism towards whites simply because they are white. The concept of racism is prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people based on their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group. How will unity be achieved if it is placed on the top shelf and remains unreachable to those who want to achieve it biblically? Kelly elucidates that it is the radical critic's task to see behind the centuries of misreading and scrape away the despotic or compromised husk that has obscured the originary core that lies at the heart of the Gospel. In so doing, the radical critic is trying to make it possible for modern Christians to become truly free.⁴⁵

In her book *Dear White Christians*, Harvey addresses white majority culture and attempts to promote racial unity yet perpetuates dogmatic statements that further the racial divide. She expounds that history clarifies that whiteness is a racial identity unlike the racial identities of communities of color and that the moral work thus required of white people is of a different sort than that required of communities of color.⁴⁶ While there are undoubtedly different historical backgrounds related to race between blacks and whites, the biblical obligation to morality

⁴² Robin J. DiAngelo ,79.

⁴³ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁵ Shawn Kelley, 162.

⁴⁶Jennifer `Harvey, 117.

remains the same. Harvey also continues with the belief that the mention of whiteness is to name the reality that the light-skinned among us (people categorized as “white”) are implicated in perpetrating and perpetuating white supremacy, however actively or passively. To speak of whiteness is to explicitly name the reality that white people live out real agency-filled choices concerning racism and racial issues and state that white people have a particular and active relationship to white supremacy and racial injustice.⁴⁷ DiAngelo echoes that belief by stating that white identity is inherently racist, and white people do not exist outside of the system of white supremacy.⁴⁸ These notions about whiteness and the inability for majority culture to rise above white supremacy due to their skin color seems to make the hope for unity impossible to attain. DiAngelo sums up her discourse by writing that to be less white is to be less racially oppressive.⁴⁹

Further methods of harm towards achieving biblical unity and oneness have been described to be found in the social gospel movement. There is a distinction between biblical social Gospel and cultural social Gospel. Biblical social Gospel is rooted in the marriage between God’s justice and righteousness as a means to bring about liberation for the oppressed and downtrodden. The result of freedom is meant to result in worship of the liberating King (God).⁵⁰ The origins of the cultural, social Gospel are often traced to the rise of late 19th-century urban industrialization, immediately following the Civil War. Primarily, but not exclusively, rooted in Protestant churches, the social Gospel emphasized how Jesus’ ethical teachings

⁴⁷ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁸ Robin J. DiAngelo, 172.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 172

⁵⁰ G. Dorrien, *Social Ethics in the Making*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 27.

could remedy the problems caused by “Gilded Age” capitalism.⁵¹ Dorrien explains that the faults of the social gospel movement were extensive. It was sentimental, moralistic, romantic, and politically naive. It preached a gospel of cultural optimism and a Jesus of middle-class idealism.⁵²

The embracing of cultural social Gospel opens the door to cultural Marxism and critical race analytical tools like intersectionality. Marxist theories take as their starting point in Karl Marx’s assertion that capitalism is an economic system that is inherently inhumane because huge profits are generated through the exploitation of human beings. While Marx focused exclusively on class inequality instead of racial/ethnic inequality, some social scientists extend his argument to racial minorities by pointing out that not all humans, or workers as Marx viewed them, are exploited equally. Ethnic minority group members, for instance, tend to face greater exploitation under capitalism than do white workers.⁵³ In his dominant ideology thesis, Karl Marx observed that the dominant group, which he called the ruling class, used social institutions such as schools to promote ideas, values, and morals that support their dominance. Subordinate groups resist the ideologies of the dominant group.⁵⁴ Thus analytical tools like intersectionality are used to evaluate the level of oppression that a particular individual may face. Jacobson believes that religion is so central to U.S political life and questions of race, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of American identity, that it belongs in intersectional research.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid., 46.

⁵² Ibid., 60.

⁵³ Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, 110.

⁵⁴ Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, 238-239.

⁵⁵ Robin Dale Jacobson and Nancy D. Wadsworth, 12.

Intentionally Pursuing Unity and Oneness

The desire to pursue biblical unity and oneness amongst the people of God is accomplished through intentionality. This is a recurring theme that emerges throughout research and observation. In the Bible, unity is discussed not merely as suitable or desirable, but as essential. It is often said not just to be a blessing, but the greatest blessing of a people. Conversely, disunity is not merely unwanted; it is disastrous.⁵⁶ To avoid this downfall, intentionality must be engaged by both majority and minority cultures. George Yancey, in his work *Beyond Racial Gridlock*, expressed that any solution to racism that does not include the proactive actions of people of color is incomplete. Such a solution only encourages racial arrogance and pride on the part of racial minorities, even as it disempowers them from participating in solutions to racial problems.⁵⁷ A way forward in displaying oneness requires everyone to approach the table with grace and humility for one another. A solution that leads to racial reconciliation must include ways to restrain both the minorities and the majority from promoting racial evil.⁵⁸ Jesus tells the Father that the purpose of his disciples' unity is "so that the world may believe that you sent me." The disciples' unity does not end in itself. It is for the

⁵⁶ Alan Thompson, *One Lord, One People: The Unity of the Church in Acts in Its Literary Setting*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014), 120.

⁵⁷ George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 99.

⁵⁸ George Yancey, 71.

sake of witness to the world. To be in unity with Jesus and the Father will make them witnesses that will lead the world to believe in Jesus as the one whom God sent.⁵⁹

Oneness in the Local Church

Sin's universal impact on humanity is the fundamental reason races need to be reconciled first to God and second to one another. Since sin is the root cause of the hostility between God and humankind and between fellow human beings, Jesus' sacrificial death for sin is God's provision for racial reconciliation, and the Scriptures ground God's work of salvation in Jesus' sacrificial death for sin.⁶⁰ Since this work stands as accomplished, what should the local church be engaging in to see reconciliation come to fruition in everyday life? DeYmaz articulates that those attempting to build a healthy multiethnic church contribute to a legacy that will last forever. The environment that dedicated leaders help to create foreshadows the coming kingdom of heaven—a place where diverse people will live together, forever, as one. Such a church is not only a worthy vision to pursue on earth but an intended, eternal outcome.⁶¹ Understanding that the unity of diverse believers walking together as one in and through the local church provides for us the most effective means for reaching the world with the Gospel in the twenty-first century.⁶²

⁵⁹ Marianus Pale Hera, *Christology and Discipleship in John 17*, (Tubingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 156.

⁶⁰ Jarvis Williams, 66.

⁶¹ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation*, (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2007), 109.

⁶² Mark DeYmaz, 120.

Theological Foundations

Biblical References of Crossing Ethnic Lines

Racial unity and oneness are biblical principles that require biblical application and understanding to be accomplished. The book of Acts details an account of men and women who were of one accord (Acts. 2:1). The Holy Spirit descends amongst the people, which ushers in a new era in church history. Despite the miracle of Pentecost, the book of Acts shows how difficult it was for Jewish Christians to receive the message of the gospel as it related to race and the sin of racism. This is proven in Acts chapters 10 and 11 after Peter interacted with Roman Gentile men and women at Cornelius's house. God had to send multiple signs to Peter in order to open his heart up to even visiting a Gentile. First, he grants Peter a vision of a large sheet that descends from the sky. Within that sheet are various animals considered unclean to touch, much less consumed as prohibited by the Mosaic law. In Acts 10:17, God tells him not to consider anything he has created as unclean. Following this, God directly commands him to go with the men who will shortly appear at his door (vv.19-20). Peter hears from the men that the Gentile centurion had an encounter with an angel, which finally compels Peter to cross the racial divides. When Peter enters the home of Cornelius, he launches into his heartbreaking yet honest confession: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:34-35). Peter's Jewish counterparts could not conceptualize the fact that the gospel was going to the Gentiles. Peter then makes the statement in verse 17, "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?". Walking in racial unity is accomplished because of the faith that God gives us to believe and carry out His Word in the same way that He gave Peter the gift to believe and cross racial barriers with the blessing of

the gospel. This is one of the central themes in the book of Acts. This account shows the complexity of racism and how it takes the gospel message to break the foothold of racial separatism. The book of Acts demonstrates the continual change that happens amongst Jewish believers, under the power of the gospel, as they later embrace Samaritans, Africans (Acts 8), Romans (Acts 10), and Greeks (Acts 11).

Biblical References of Unity through Togetherness

The vision for unity is borne on the wings of the good news of the gospel. It is good news, and it is for all people. It is the good news that Luke proclaimed, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people; for today in the city of David, there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). The supernatural announcement is one of the most evident signs that God intends for his gospel to reach all nations and cultures.⁶³ Jesus's prayer in John 17 clarifies that His heart's desire is for oneness to be displayed amongst His people, just as He and the Father are one.⁶⁴ It is also intended for the Church to cross ethnic, cultural, and class lines and focus on bringing God glory until He returns to redeem His bride. This picture of the Church is what must fuel the prayers of the saints. Jesus placed a tremendous emphasis on His desire for believers to be one as His followers just hours before he would lay down His life for us. This is something that He is not asking His people to do only during "Unity Month" or "Special Oneness Sunday."⁶⁵ This is a mandate from the commander-in-chief that believers be one with Him (vertically) and, as a result, one with each other (horizontally).

⁶³ Karen Waddles and John Perkins, 45.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁶⁵ Tony Evans, 50.

Concerning the unity of the Church, Acts draws attention to the 'togetherness' of the early Christian community, frequently using terminology such as praying together (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:24), being together (1:15; 2:1, 44, 47; 5:12), holding everything in common (2:44), being of one heart and mind in agreement (4:32; 15:25), and sharing possessions (2:45; 4:32, 34).⁶⁶ There is a specific role that the Holy Spirit plays in creating unity and oneness within the body of Christ. There is also an underlying truth that Satan contributes to disunity amongst the people of God. The unifying role of the Holy Spirit may therefore be seen in the contrast between the community united in 'one heart' that follows an account of the filling of the Holy Spirit (4.31-32; cf. also 2.4-47) and the divisive activity that is the opposite of a united heart and that is characteristic of the role of Satan".⁶⁷ In the Bible, unity is discussed not merely as important or desirable, but as essential. First Corinthians 1:10 supports this thought by stating, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." Unity is often said not just to be a blessing but the greatest blessing of a people. Conversely, disunity is not merely unwanted; it is disastrous.⁶⁸

Biblical Basis for Identifying Racism as Sin

Seeing racism as being rooted in sin is foundational to address the problem in its totality. However, one must first begin with a biblical understanding of how sin negatively affected God's relationship with man. In the Pauline corpus, the Scriptures explain that disobedience broke human beings' relationship with God. Paul argues in Romans 1:18– 3:20 and 3:23 that all

⁶⁶ Alan Thompson, 1.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁸ Alan Thompson, 120.

humankind (both Jews and Gentiles) has sinned and consequently stand condemned before God. Paul first demonstrates the impact of the disobedience of Adam and Eve on humanity and thus sin's impact in severing humankind's relationship with God in Rom 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."⁶⁹ Romans 2– 3 offers further support that humankind's sin has severed their relationship with God. In Romans 2:1– 3:20, Paul develops the argument that God reveals his wrath upon Jews and Gentiles on account of sin and that both groups stand condemned before God in the judgment. From his argument in Romans 1:18– 32, he infers in Rom 2:1– 3:20 that neither Jew nor Gentile has an adequate defense before God for their sin, one which would exonerate them in God's law court, since God's judgment is "according to the truth" (Rom 2:2; see Rom 1:18)."⁷⁰

Exemplifying racial oneness is found in God's image, Christ's identity, and the Holy Spirits' call to unity of all people. Paul said in the book of Philippians, "Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind, (Phil 2:1-2)." The first church in Acts got it right. They learn that God's love required them to widen the net and embrace those who were considered outsiders before. The church in acts saw the urgent need to deal with any hint of ethnic superiority. When the Greek-speaking Jewish widows complained that they were not receiving the same kind of care that the Hebrew-speaking Jewish widows were receiving, the disciples quickly assembled a group of men to tend to the problem. In this

⁶⁹Jarvis Williams, 37.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 40.

church with different ethnicities, there was a beautiful picture of how the church is to live out this idea of unity in the body. It was a picture of the vision almost realized here on earth. They met from house to house, ate together, and met each other's needs, and God added to the church daily. They embraced the vision. They broke down the walls of resistance to loving those who were different.⁷¹ The function of racial unity and oneness amongst the Church is meant to serve as an ambient light to the world that the gospel is real and Jesus is legitimate. It is by oneness in the love of Jesus for the world that this world of hostility can be brought to belief and knowledge. In other words, the disciples fulfill the mission in the world.⁷²

Old Testament References of Racial Unity

When observing the theological implication of racial unity in the Old Testament, it requires one to go no further than the first book of the Bible. Genesis 1:1-3 paints the descriptive picture of God fashioning the world by his Word. God is Triune. One, yet existing in three equal, eternal, and distinct persons. He is perfect unity within diversity and diversity within unity. In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul urges the Christians to unity even though they have diverse gifts and callings. The unity that he calls for is motivated by an appeal to the unity we see within the Trinity in the book of Genesis.⁷³ The same foundations must be true for the church today if unity and oneness are the desired outcome. God in his very nature is the representation of unity in diversity. The Trinity characterizes three distinct persons, yet one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father of all.

⁷¹ Karen Waddles and John Perkins, 32.

⁷² Marianus Pale Hera, 26.

⁷³ P.T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 280.

The breach in holy communion with the Father came from the fragmentation of the fall. Genesis 3:7-24 records humans' disobedience and decision to turn away from walking in perfect relationship with God. The egregious act of selfishness also had a lingering effect on human beings' relationships with one another. Sin entered the world, and the alienation from God quickly led to violence towards other image-bearers of God (Genesis 4:8, 23-24). Following Cain and Abel's account, one can see the residual adverse effects of sin within human relations. Idolatry began to replace the fellowship and worship that mankind once directed to God. Now, the exaltation of self has supplanted the adulation of God. As a result of the influence of sin, individuals began to privilege their ethnicity over unity. Diversity started taking on the connotation of divisiveness. People groups began to enslave and belittle other nations based on their ethnic affiliation. This is seen in Exodus chapter one. When discussing the concept of race, it is important to highlight the biblical fact that human beings can be traced back to Adam and Eve, which means that there is only one race, namely humans. Acts 17:26 states, "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, for we are indeed his offspring". While there is but one human race, God, as a display of his artistry, decided to create a multiplicity of ethnicities.

Biblical Affirmation of Diversity of Culture

This affirmation of diverse cultures is clearly expressed in scripture. The prophet Joel pronounced in Joel 2:28 that in the last day's God will pour out his Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see

visions. The Holy Spirit's action reaches across all blockades of race, gender, and class, a point made unequivocally by God's message through the prophet. This passage, so full in its multicultural implications, became the primary frame of reference for Peter's sermon at Pentecost when people from fifteen language groups first heard the gospel preached in their own native tongues (Acts 2:8-12, 16-21). The unique observation about this Pentecost event is that it did not involve a miracle of making each person understand one language, but a miracle of preaching in many languages so each people group could understand the message. As individuals from diverse races, classes, and backgrounds are converted to trust in Christ, he reconciles them to God the Father and secondarily to one another. The Church, therefore, has an inherent and God-given diversity. This diversity is also experienced at the level of the local church. Paul wrote and addressed the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 12:12 by explaining that the body is one unit, even though it is made up of many parts, and so it is with Christ. Paul himself experienced a rich and blessed unity in Antioch where Jewish and Gentile Christians worshiped God together on equal ground (Acts 11:19-26). Acts 13:1-2 displays the multicultural nature of leaders in the mention of names listed as leaders in the church: Included among the congregation's prophets and teachers were: Barnabas, a wealthy Cypriot-born Jewish Levite; Simeon, called Niger, who was probably a black African proselyte to Judaism; Lucius of Cyrene, a Greco-Roman from North Africa; Manaen, who had been brought up with the Hellenized Jewish aristocrat Herod the Tetrarch; and Saul, a Tarsus-born Jew raised in Jerusalem, otherwise known by the Greco-Roman name Paul. The Book of Acts accentuates the cultural multiplicity of the church at Antioch. It was there that the men and women who were surrendered to Jesus were first called Christians (11:26). This was the newly coined phrase, meaning "Those of Christ," was created to describe these disciples in their unprecedented mix of culture. The non-converted Antiochians

were able to categorize the traditional religious experiences. They knew about the Jews who worshiped in their synagogues. They also had heard of the Gentiles who had converted to Judaism, and the group of Gentiles referred to as the "God-fearer", who respected Israel's God but stopped short of complete conversion. However, they could not explain the strange unity and oneness of these Antioch followers of Jesus. The pagan Antiochians could not rationalize how people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds could come together without discord and worship in complete unity and oneness.

Biblical Missional Implications of Racial Unity

This is also an emphasis of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. When Jesus gives the marching orders to the church, he does not merely command believers to disciple people who all look the same and are derived from similar regions. Jesus commands his church to make disciples of all people groups of the world by baptizing them in the name of the triune Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence, when one identifies as a Christian, they are now associating with a powerful testimony that speaks to the nature of the gospel that reconciles individuals and cultures to God. The gospel breaks the chains of hostility that divide Gentile from Jew, accomplishing Ephesians 2:14-16 which states, "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility". Paul's words to the Galatians in chapter 3 verse 28 expresses that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus". This means that ethnicity, economics, and gender do not serve as the ultimate human unifiers, but our oneness in Christ does.

This once again displays the beauty of how the gospel message destroys racial hierarchy and instead elevates the blessedness of multicultural reconciliation to God and one another. In the final book of the Bible, one can read the celebratory nature of enjoying heaven with redeemed men and women from all multicultural and multilingual heritage. Accordingly, in the Book of Revelation, "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" stands before the throne of God and the Lamb, singing praise (7:9). Those who belong to Jesus should not only long for that final gathering day of multicultural worship, but they should also long to see a foretaste of that reality here and now. In preparations for heaven, it would serve the church well to pursue diverse communities of worship to experience the joy of what awaits the believer in eternity. For disciples of Jesus, the bond that ties multicultural diversity together is a love for God and a love for one another. This is how the prayer that Jesus prayed in John chapter 17 can be fulfilled on the earth. Jesus relates his love for God the Father to how we should love our neighbor. Jesus said in John 17 verse 23, "I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me". John records similar words of Jesus in John 13:33-34, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples if you love one another." Since God is the Father and creator of all mankind, his love rests upon all of humanity. God, therefore, calls his disciples to reflect his love to all people, regardless of ethnic background.

Biblical Warning Against Partiality

Acts 10 and 11 provided a beginning point of reference for examining racial tension in the New Testament. Peter's display of stubbornness and prejudice was eventually overcome by three visions and God's blatant instruction to take the gospel across ethnic lines. However, it is

sad when one arrives at Galatians 2 to find that Peter had fallen back into a refusal to eat with Gentile believers. Paul provides a strong public rebuke to Peter when he states in Galatians 2:14-15, "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ". Paul presented an argument to Peter that explains the reality of God's fellowship with him not being based on his race and culture. Even though Peter was a devout Jew, his relationship with Jesus was based on grace alone. Therefore, how could he choose his fellowship based on race and culture? Paul made it clear that Peter's racism was a violation of the grace and mercy he had received from God. Paul also addressed the fear that Peter held on to. Paul's words called out and convicted Peter because of his appeal that Peter had forgotten Christ's love for him. When looking at the action of racism and bigotry, it is accurate to deem as fear and root its origin in sin. Having Christian accountability and biblical literacy will help address sinful prejudice behavior and keep the racial unity and oneness in focus for the believer. Never losing sight of God's grace and mercy extended to the sinner will assure individuals that they remain accepting and embracing to people from all ethnic groups.

The church should be leading the way in racial unity and oneness because of the blueprint and roadmap we find in scripture. Christian communities have a heavenly mandate to demonstrate the reality of Christ's transformative love to all peoples. As an effect of walking in obedience, communities of faith will discover and enjoy the benefit of racial unity and oneness as people are reconciled to God and to each other by the Lord Jesus.

Theoretical Foundations

Much research has been done surrounding the topic of racial reconciliation and methods to accomplish it. George Yancey, the author of *Beyond Racial Gridlock*, wrote on the model of colorblindness. Proponents of the colorblindness model argue that racial reconciliation will be achieved once race is ignored, and the discriminations of the past are forgotten. Advocates contend that by concentrating on the advances that have been made and acting in a colorblind manner will eradicate racism."⁷⁴ Many sociologists, though, are extremely critical of colorblindness as an ideology. They argue that as the mechanisms that reproduce racial inequality have become more covert and obscure than they were during the era of open, legal segregation, the language of explicit racism had given way to a discourse of colorblindness. But they fear that the refusal to take public note of race allows people to ignore manifestations of persistent discrimination.⁷⁵ The grand heavenly vision of Revelation 7 argues that God never intended for His body to be one group that all looked the same. From the beginning of Scripture to the end, the message of unity and diversity in the family of God is powerful. Waddles exclaims that unity was sown into the very fabric of creation: from one man, Adam, all of humanity was created. But this unity was to be reflected through great diversity.⁷⁶

Multicultural Model

The Multicultural Model for racial reconciliation is a model that offers to embrace all cultural groups since, this model aims to have a society in which, "distinct racial and ethnic

⁷⁴ George Yancey, 27.

⁷⁵ Steven L. McKenzie, *All God's Children: A Biblical Critique of Racism.*, 1st ed., (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 110.

⁷⁶ Karen Waddles and John Perkins, 21.

groups preserve their own identities."⁷⁷ This model is grounded on the philosophy of "cultural pluralism."⁷⁸ This philosophy allows minority cultures to establish cultural distinctiveness without any imposed segregation. Thus, multiculturalism is the practical implication of "cultural pluralism."⁷⁹ Many cultural and Christian progressives have embraced this model as the most viable model for improving the issue of racial discrimination and racism in America. The model originated in the writings of Horace Kallan, who attacked the idea that "minority racial groups had to give up their cultural identity to be thoroughly American."⁸⁰ Instead, he argued that, "members of all racial groups should be free to participate in all aspects of American institutions even as they maintain their own racial heritage."⁸¹ He further argued that America be considered a place where, "minority cultures are preserved, and societal conformity is minimized."⁸²

One of the positive implications of this model is that it seeks to correct some of the societies' Eurocentric excesses.⁸³ That means that the majority's perspective is dominant, while the cultural perspectives of the racial minorities in the United States are not as prominent. This dominant perspective's prevalence is widespread through literature, media, movies, politics, and education. This model also helps minority groups celebrate their own cultures.⁸⁴ This model aims

⁷⁷ George Yancey, 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 54.

⁸¹ George Yancey, 54.

⁸² Ibid., 54.

⁸³ Ibid., 55.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 56.

to envision a society in which, "distinct racial and ethnic cultures are not only encouraged but celebrated by all members of the society."⁸⁵

The weakness of the Multicultural Model is that it denigrates the culture of the majority. Thus, a society solely focused on minority values is no better than one based primarily on European American values. The other weakness of the Multicultural model is the reluctance of the advocates for the model to critique the minority group cultures. Multiculturalism often fails to create a proper balance between cultural tolerance and the need to recognize absolutes that all of us must follow, regardless of our racial or ethnic group.⁸⁶ Furthermore, since the need for the church is for a model that is grounded upon the liberating truth of the Gospel, multiculturalism would be a hindrance to such an aim because, "Multiculturalists cannot promote the truth because any assertion of the truth is subject to whether it violates some cultural dictates of a given group."⁸⁷

Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

Critical Theory began in the 1920s and was a designation for several generations of German philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition.⁸⁸ A theory was deemed critical when it sought to emancipate humans from slavery, act as a liberating influence, and create a world satisfying the needs and powers of humans. The Marxist element as it relates to the culture proposed that there is a class division in all societies between those in

⁸⁵ Ibid., 57

⁸⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁷ George Yancey, 59.

⁸⁸ Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, 45.

power and those without power. Cultural Marxism theorizes that those in power always oppress those not in power, creating two distinct classes: the oppressed and the oppressors.⁸⁹ Narrowly, various critical theories have been advanced, seeking to flesh out the power struggles between the oppressed class and the oppressor class, including feminist critical theory, postmodern critical theory, queer critical theory, and critical race theory.⁹⁰

Critical Race Theory (CRT) began as a theoretical, philosophical movement within American law schools in the late 1970s and mid 1980s as a reworking of critical legal studies on race with emphases on postmodernism, moral relativism, and social constructionism.⁹¹ CRT originally held that the law and legal institutions are inherently and systemically racist and that race itself is a socially constructed concept that is used by the racially defined oppressor class to further their economic and political interests at the expense of the racially defined oppressed class.⁹² CRT has further been expanded to infer that all social institutions are inherently and systemically racist and operate to promote the interests of the racially defined oppressor class against the racially defined oppressed class.

Intersectionality developed from within CRT and feminist critical theory emphasizing that there are various aspects of a person's identity (race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, religion, disability, etc.) that could place them within either an oppressed class or an oppressor class.⁹³ Intersectionality purports that those who have more overlapping categories fitting in the

⁸⁹ Bill Berkowitz, <https://tinyurl.com/z2gcgqt>.

⁹⁰ Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, 62.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹² Kathleen J. Fitzgerald, 52.

⁹³ Patricia Hill Collins, 122.

oppressed class result in a compounding of that oppression. Intersectionality leads to Identity Politics, in which individual people seek to advance their given groups cause in relation to their lack of public support.⁹⁴

The result of Intersectionality is that society is broken into a tiered society in which the groups with the most combined aspects of oppression are placed in the lowest tier and those with the most combined aspects of power/oppressing in the highest tier. Intersectionality could be diagrammed as a ladder, specifically detailing color and sexual orientation with the rungs from top to bottom being represented by (1) a white, heterosexual male, then (2) a white, heterosexual female, (3) a white, homosexual male, (4) a white, homosexual female, (5) a black, heterosexual male, (6) a black, heterosexual female, (7) a black, homosexual male, (8) a black, homosexual female, (9) a white, transgender male/female, and (10) a black, transgender male/female.⁹⁵ Thus, racism has been redefined according to the power dynamics of those on the ladder, and thus only those in an oppressor class can act racist against those in a lower oppressed class. Those in an oppressed class cannot act racist against those in an oppressed class above them.

Social justice describes what occurs when an oppressed identity group is given more agency than they previously had.⁹⁶ The moral responsibility of those with more combined aspects of power (those higher on the ladder) is to divest themselves of their power and elevate the cultural voice of those lower than themselves. This is what it means to be Woke, in that those in positions of power are awakened to their oppression of others and are called to renounce racism

⁹⁴ Ibid., 147.

⁹⁵ Karen V. Guth, "Laying Claim to Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Legacy," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 48, 1 (2020): 38.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 40.

by seeking to lift up those who have been oppressed by their participation in the system that is inherently racist.

One of CRT's significant weaknesses is that it replaces *Imago Dei* with an elevated emphasis on humanism as the central focus. The image of God is what unifies all of humanity and places God as the creator of all human diversity. Genesis 1 and 2 highlight the origin of man and God's intention to place His divine design as the cord that binds the human race together. Therefore, since every person is made in the image of God, they are grounded in a system of unity that began in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image." As a result, humanity is fundamentally united by God designed formation. CRT does not provide much space for this basic truth as it seeks to exalt fundamental anthropological differences, leaving unity as a very difficult thing to be grasped.

Second, CRT creates new forms of unrighteousness and creates performative ways to become more righteous. CRT does not address racism as sin, which requires confession and repentance, but approaches it as unfairly distributed power based on societally founded inequities. The solution, according to CRT, is to rebalance power. This occurs when "privileged" people acknowledge their privilege and unfair advantages bestowed upon them. The overarching truth is that everyone experiences certain privileges based on many different facets, including their ethnicity. Privileges are not inherently wrong if they do not overstep biblical bounds and infringe upon love for one's neighbor. To rework humanity's major problem is to also lose sight of the one biblical solution. CRT claims that individuals are unrighteous because they are a part of a privileged group, a status one carries by virtue of their background and skin color. This nullifies the ability for racial reconciliation to truly be achieved and creates an impossible path to unity and oneness.

While one can affirm the intention of CRT, there should be a deep concern that this position is short-sighted and is fundamentally disconnected from a true biblical foundation. CRT and Intersectionality are fundamentally distinct from biblical Christianity, even if areas of concern overlap regarding oppression. There should be a fully affirmed biblical justice that is pursued by the church as it relates to race, gender, and other aspect of unjust oppression. However, the solutions that CRT and Intersectionality propose to the issue of societal oppression are radically different than Gospel redemption. Biblical Christianity that is resolutely ethical is the proper response to the secular theories of CRT and Intersectionality.

Biblical Racial Reconciliation Model

The Biblical Racial Reconciliation Model advocated by this author seeks to advance the dialogue about racial injustice and justice issues by proposing a solution to that problem using the scriptures as the primary tool towards healing. Being created in the image of God (Gen 1:26) and redeemed by the power of the Gospel (Gal 3:28) and reflecting the triune God (John 17) shape the framework for realizing racial unity. This model's strengths are the bedrock truths that translate to any tribe, tongue, and nation of people. The scriptures convey the core of God's heart for humanity and enable the believer to be carried out God's love as ambassadors of His Kingdom (2 Corinthian 5:20).

This model's weakness is that it can only be fully realized and completed by those who have been redeemed and regenerated. Seeking to carry out the law of Scripture minus the heart of Scripture will simply create legalists who engage in behavior modification without heart transformation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research project was a qualitative survey and informal interviews to understand the prevailing thoughts of secular racial reconciliation models and how they affect the body of Life Church. In using a survey methodology, this author sought to accomplish three things: first, understanding the existing ideologies surrounding race relations within the Church and community. Secondly, to educate the participants in their understanding of the harmful effects of race reconciliation methods that are not biblically centered; thirdly, to present a model of racial unity that is informed by biblical application for the purpose of representing God's heart for unity and oneness. Thus, this methodology seeks to elucidate the ideological underpinnings that sustain and guide racial reconciliation in a healthy Christ-centered way. The importance of embracing the biblical model and study is based on the conviction that God is fully glorified when his children live in love for one another.

Creating a research forum that placed the participant in a position of helpfulness to their Church's overall health served to develop buy-in, honesty, and motivation to see the project through to its completion. The writer wanted the project to be educational and encouraging to the participant. Creating one-on-one and group sessions helped make the participant feel like they were a part of a meaningful group engaging in an important topic. Those in the project were involved by dialoguing how racism has impacted the Church. They also were given the questions before meetings to develop robust, thought-out answers. They were informed through constant communication via phone calls, emails, and personal interaction. The emphasis in the survey is

to present as precisely as possible the trajectories of thought, ideologies, and political currents that might have influenced the outcomes of racial problems in the culture at large and their influence and lasting impact on the social dynamics of the Church.

Intervention Design

Life Church is a fellowship of believers planted within an urban context for approximately six years. Caucasians make up the more significant percentage of congregants, with a remaining racial demographic comprised of African American, Hispanic, Taiwanese, and Asian Americans. The researcher will select a group of seven individuals representing the diverse makeup of the congregation to take place in this ministry research project. These participants in this study have been chosen because they offer variety in gender, age, ethnicity, education, and stages of life. The writer selected college/graduate students, young married, middle age, and working-class participants. Specifically, Millennials: Born between 1984 and 2002; Busters/Gen-Xers: Born between 1965 and 1983; Boomers: Born between 1946 and 1964; and Elders: Born between 1945 or earlier. These individuals are influencers in their perspective communities and offer much credibility to the overall team. The initial target group is active within the Church and contributes leadership in various areas of the Church.

Life Church has a mission statement of Loving God, Loving People, and Making Disciples. This is the bloodline of the Church and drives every area of ministry they engage in. It is even primarily written on one of the prominent brick walls for regular attenders and first-time visitors to see. Unity and oneness on all fronts are required to fulfill this imperative mission statement. This, however, cannot be fulfilled entirely if there is a lack of biblical understanding and application surrounding unity and oneness according to the intercessory prayer of Jesus over the Church in John 17. The context that surrounds Life Church carries the potential to disrupt

biblical unity and oneness by propagating secular models that claim to be the solution for achieving racial reconciliation when the proper firewall against disunity and false doctrine is found in biblical instruction. This DMIN action research thesis aims to help Life Church exemplify racial unity according to the Scriptures and avoid unhelpful secular methods. The purpose and objectives of the project's intervention align with the project thesis, problem statement, and research question.

The writer issued consent forms to each participant to get their agreement of participation in the thesis project. Modifications have been made so that the document reflects the specifics of this project. All participants received the consent form four weeks before the project implementation began. Each person had one week to read the form and respond with any questions or concerns that pertained to the project. The following describes the information issued to each participant prior to their consented agreement to join the project. A personal description was given that detailed the researcher's name and title of the project. Participants were informed that this study is being conducted as a thesis project for Liberty University. The purpose is to analyze the effects of racial unity and oneness at Life Church of Athens to complete a Doctor of Ministry degree on behalf of the researcher.

The purpose of this research is to help Life Church exemplify racial unity according to the Scriptures and avoid unhelpful secular racial reconciliation methods. Participants were told that if they consent, they will be asked several questions in an oral interview that will take place at Life Church. An audiotape recording of the discussion will be stored in a secure USB drive for the purpose of research gathering. Each interview will take approximately 1–2 hours of the participant's time. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If one chooses to participate, they may still refuse to answer any question for any reason. One may also withdraw from the

study at any time. There are no known risks associated with this interview. However, one might feel distressed during the conversation. If this happens, an open line of communication has been established with the researcher, and prompt notification of dissatisfaction will be highly encouraged. While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that one may enjoy sharing their answers to the survey questions or that one will find the conversation meaningful. This study is intended to benefit the congregation of Life Church by enlivening our discourse on the theology and practice of biblical racial unity.

Confidentiality and anonymity are a part of this research project. Participants' names will be kept confidential in all reporting and/or writing related to this study. The researcher will be the only person present, other than participants for the interviews and the only individual who listens to the tapes. When the ethnography is written, the researcher will use pseudonyms—made up names—for all participants, unless otherwise specified in writing that one wishes to be identified by name. If there is a desire for a personal pseudonym for the study, an indication of the name must be sent to the researcher before submission of data and recorded information. The results will be shared through an ethnography—a written account of what is learned—based on these interviews together with recorded data and historical research. This ethnography will be submitted to the Liberty University professor (or research supervisor) at the end of the term. The findings of this study will also be shared with the congregation of Life Church. Portions of the ethnography may be printed and made available to the members. There is the possibility that this study will be published or referred to in published writing in the future. In this event, pseudonyms (as described above) will continue to be used, and some identifying details may be altered to further protect anonymity.

Participants agree to an audiotaped interview for this research study by signing the consent form. Opportunities to have questions answered to participants' satisfaction will remain open and available. A copy of the consent document will be given to each participant.

This research has taken a qualitative approach, looking for the depth of understanding and experiences from this small group of selected congregates surrounding the church's climate of race relations. The first step was to submit a series of qualitative survey questions that helped the researcher gauge the baseline understanding of how the participants perceive race relations within the community. Once the questions were distributed, the participants gathered to discuss the first round of questions in a group setting. Personal preparations include having adequate audio recording equipment, reserving sufficient meeting space for the participants, and ensuring that the space is COVID safe, and all guidelines are followed. If participants do not feel comfortable meeting in person, there will be an opportunity to meet via Zoom call.

Participants were chosen based on their demographic and involvement in Life Church. Seven individuals were presented with the thesis topic and intention of the project. The purpose of this action research thesis is to help Life Church exemplify racial unity according to the Scriptures and avoid unhelpful secular methods. If Life Church applies biblical instructions that speak to achieving racial unity, then the church will avoid using harmful, counterproductive secular methods that do not accomplish oneness. Participant A was selected due to her career in early childhood education and volunteerism within the local Church.

Participant A has primarily taught in settings that include a variety of cultural influences and ethnic backgrounds. This participant is middle age and of Italian descent. She is the mother of 3 bi-racial children blended with African American and Caucasian ethnicities. Participant A

was interested in implementing this project because of her desire to learn how biblical truth can be exercised as the primary tool to address and provide solutions for racial discord and disunity.

Participant B is a white middle-class male. His work history includes academic and athletic development at a local University. Participant B is in his mid-twenties and is married with no children and has served as a member of Life Church for three years. Participant B has an extroverted personality and is very engaged with people and cultures of all kinds. His desire to join this project was due to a yearning to see how the Church can engage racism in a biblical way and unveil solutions for unity and oneness.

Participant C and D are an interracial African American and Caucasian married couple. They are raising one child and have served at Life Church for two years. Participant C works as a teacher and coach at the local High School. The school is blended with Anglo, Hispanic, African American, and Asian populations. He is currently coaching the sports of football and track. As a minority teacher and coach, participant C would like to see how the biblical application of racial unity can begin to infiltrate the structures around us, such as the schools and sports fields. His desire is to see how this project can help effect change in the areas he serves. Participant D works as a personal trainer at a local gym and is passionate about fitness and holistic health. She sees how fitness can play a role in the unification of people groups. Her inquiry is to contemplate how this implementation can help provide more gospel-centered ways of identifying the Christian response to racial separatism. Participant C and D both desire to see a safer world for their child to grow up in. There is major concern as to how their bi-racial baby will be perceived and accepted in a world torn by racial prejudice and unbiblical ideologies pertaining to race relations.

Participant E is a recent college graduate from the local University. He is of Hispanic descent and has served at Life Church for two years. He finished school with a degree in business and finance and has landed a job in a homogeneous work environment. Participant E has seen the current cultural and racial tensions through a unique lens as a Hispanic. The negative perceptions of people groups due to assumptions is something he wants to see change. His desire is to bring light to the disparity that exists but also highlight the hope that subsequently exists in Jesus.

Participant F is a stay-at-home mother of one child and has served at Life Church for three years. She is Anglo and is the oldest daughter of a preacher. Participant F has been married for five years and enjoys spending time with other moms in the Church. She has witnessed the effects of racism and is passionate about seeing the love of Christ and obedience to His Word overshadow the dark depths and sin of racism.

Participant G works for his family business in the mechanical parts industry. He is a former college athlete and has served at Life Church for three years. He has a particular passion for mission ministry and desires to eventually work full-time in a mission ministry capacity. Participant G is married with one child and is originally from the area where Life Church is planted. His desire is to learn how scriptural instruction can be applied to the current tensions of race in our community. He works within a homogeneous Anglo atmosphere and sees where a proper biblical application on this topic is desperately needed.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Phase One

The implementation of the intervention design began with a series of questions that provided information about the participant's background and worldview. The questions included

are: *What State and City did you grow up in? What were the ethnic demographics like where you grew up? Did you interact with people who were of a different ethnicity than you? Did you have family members you would consider to be racist? What were the demographics of your educational setting? Have you been in an environment where insensitive racial comments were made?* Data was collected from all seven participants and documented through a recording device and written in a Word document as each participant explains their answers to these questions.

Phase 1 continued with a series of survey questions administered at the Life Church facility. These questions are intended to observe the participant's general outlook on racism and how they perceive its effects. This will allow the researcher to intricately begin to unravel the underlying ideologies that make up the participant's worldview on race and racism. Perceptions govern assumptions and decisions. The belief that racism is not prevalent will unveil certain participants disconnect with current racial methodologies. A response that affirms racism's existence will give way to discussing the cause of it and remote systems that offer solutions to racial disunity. The first implemented question was, *"Is racism mostly a problem of the past, not the present? Why or why not?"*. In order to establish a contextual framework for understanding the participant's view of racism, the researcher must first know where they place racism on the continuum of time. This will explain the participant's outlook on race relations as well as their involvement or lack thereof in opposing it.

The second implemented survey question in Phase 1 is, *"Do you believe that there is hostility amongst racial groups today? If so, why do you think it exists?"*. This question will allow the researcher to comprehend the participant's view on racial hostility and which people groups they think are affected negatively by racial tensions. Many people fail to realize that

racism is not simply an issue that is solely plagued by Anglo-Americans and African Americans. This question is intended to broaden the scope of racism and unravel the fact that it is not exclusive to only two ethnicities. It is also utilized to expose prejudice across the board that might be lurking in the hearts of individuals who have relegated racial hostility to only two people groups.

The third question presented in Phase 1 was, "*Does mainstream media have a negative impact on race relations? Why or Why not?*". The objective of this question is to evaluate the outside sources that can affect one's outlook surrounding race relations. All participants have access to some form of mainstream media. This question will allow the researcher to analyze their response and see if mainstream media has contributed to the racial discord in our community.

The fourth implemented question in Phase 1 is, "*Are people of color often put at a social disadvantage because of their race when they enter a majority white culture church like Life Church? Why or why not?*". This question gets at the heart of ethnic disparity, potentially leading to social isolation. The goal was to uncover what blind spots exist within the participants. It is also a question that presents the reality that all people may not have the same lens when it comes to how they view the environment in which they engage. Those who are a part of a majority culture may not realize the emotions and feelings of those who are not members of that majority culture. The perception of those who are in a normalized homogenous environment could be misaligned with those who might feel disadvantaged because of their race. This question has the potential to also reveal that minorities who interact with a majority culture at Life Church do not feel like their ethnicity places them at a social disadvantage. Room was allowed for participants

to expound on their opinions and give sufficient details as to why they answered the way they did.

The fifth and final implemented question in Phase 1 was, *"Is reverse racism or prejudicial treatment of white people a problem in our community? If not a problem, explain. If it is a problem, please explain how this is displayed."* This question opens a dialog about the essence of racism, its actions, and its core definition. The question was labeled "reverse" racism for the sake of cultural clarity. Reverse racism implies that the act of racism is primarily one-sided, which is not valid, but the implications of society would suggest that it is. This question speaks to the nature of racism not relegated to one particular group. If a participant responds that "reverse racism" does not exist, this will lead to an exploration of why they believe racism can only be one-sided. If a participant responds that "reverse racism" does exist, we will then explore why they feel this way and examine the details of how racism has been witnessed and experienced by that participant.

Phase Two

Phase 2 was a singular interview question to each participant that was administered over the phone. Each participant was contacted and conducted the interview over the course of a week and dedicated 1 hour of their time to the implementation of this question. The phone interview was selected due to scheduling conflicts and the rise of COVID cases in Athens-Clarke County. The safety of each participant was considered, so the researcher made the decision to conduct phone interviews out of safety for the participants. The Phase 2 question was, *"Do you believe that racism is rooted in sin, or is it more of a social, behavioral defect? Please explain your answer."* The purpose of Phase 2 is to aim the project towards a theological and doctrinal grounding. Thus far, all the questions have been directed towards the participant's general

opinion surrounding race relations within their personal context. Asking if racism is rooted in sin allows the researcher to observe what theological framework is guiding each participant's answer. Determining if racism is rooted in sin will ultimately disclose how one pursues solutions to the dreadful action of racism. The primary issue that renders secular racial reconciliation models powerless is their absence of biblical truth and persistence in scientific and robotic research. For this project to reach its intended outcome, the participants must see the origin of racism as Sin. This allows the researcher to dial into a theological conversation and expose the prevailing secular philosophy that racism is simply a behavioral defect cured by behavior modification. Some of those modifications may include cultural sensitivity classes, behavioral therapy, or simple admittance of guilt and shame. Each of these remedies addresses the problem on a surface level but does not achieve true heart change that can only come through repentance.

Phase Three

The third phase of survey questions took place in a group setting at Life Church and dealt with perceptions of how participants believe the local context of Life Church is handling racial disunity and how the Church should engage moving forward. The first question presented was, *"In your opinion, is Life Church contributing to racial unity or racial disunity? Explain"*. Each participant was individually asked this question and was allowed to freely respond without any interruptions. The interview question allowed the cohort study group to evaluate the previous sessions and see how each gathering and round of questioning led to this question. Triangulation of data was done to gather different views and opinions. Focusing on the context of Life Church is ultimately where we want to see biblical practices take place and advance racial unity and oneness. Participants were selected because of their involvement and volunteer service within Life Church. Asking the question of how Life Church is doing in racial unity was intended to

make the participants consider the lens through which they view the Church. For example, when they are asked about how well Life Church is functioning in this area, do they immediately assume that the pastors, elders, and staff are primarily responsible for producing positive engagement in this area? Do they place the onus of positive racial interaction and involvement on themselves and look inward to see how well they contribute to racial unity? Will it be a simple diagnosis of poor rapport and engagement with minority congregants that leads to honesty about the problem but no understanding of how to find solutions?

To delve deeper into the Phase 3 question, several definitions were given and explained to participants to expand their understanding of terms that are associated with secular social justice and racial reconciliation. These definitions further measure the reality of how Life Church members feel the body of the church is dealing with racial unity. It also uncovers the belief system surrounding the implementation of specific racial reconciliation methodologies. The idea is to understand what participants believe is the proper course of action to achieve racial unity and to see how deep the counterproductive methods have infiltrated the congregation. The first term given was *Critical Race Theory (CRT)*. The *Critical Race Theory (CRT)* movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, emotions, and the unconscious.⁹⁷ Critical Race Theory is the leading secular ideology that has been used to identify racial disparity and assign the act of oppression and inequity to the majority race that controls the

⁹⁷ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris. *Introduction In Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd.ed. (New York: NYU Press, 2017). 3.

power and privilege. To further understand critical race theory, another term and definition are required. *Intersectionality* is an analytical tool used to examine the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender. They apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.⁹⁸ This analytical tool is being used by businesses, schools, corporations, and churches to indoctrinate individuals on classifying racism. The issue is that it presents no solution to ending racism. It simply operates as a tool to analyze it. Informing participants on this terminology provides them the opportunity to be made aware of what exists in the realm of secular racial methodology and see areas in which it may be taking place within their context.

The second question issued in Phase 3 was, "*Should Life Church embrace social/secular models like Critical Race Theory to address racial unity? Please explain your answer.*" The aim of this question is to see how participants perceive the effectiveness of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality as an analytical tool. If racism exists within the local church context, the concern that follows should be one of seeking a solution to address the discrimination and implement a new system of reconciliation. Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are two terms that have risen to the top of conversations about race. They appear to be the methods that speak to the heinous issue of racial discrimination and offer convincing descriptions to address the problem. Many local churches have openly embraced critical race theory due to their desire to see change and healing take place. However, the problem at hand is that well-intended, sincere Christians have opened their hands to receive any and all suggestions in order to right the wrongs. Surveying the participant's opinions on these secular theories allows the researcher to

⁹⁸ Patricia Hill Collins. *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 22.

observe if the cohort is using biblical discernment to initially see if a scriptural and theological stance supports these secular methods.

The third question implemented with the participants in Phase 3 was, "*Is Intersectionality an analytical tool that can be supported by Scripture? Why or why not?*". Once again, this is where we take secular methodology and place it side-by-side with doctrinal orthodoxy. The ultimate purpose of the project is to identify secular models and see how they stand when held to the light of the Scriptures. This question required participants to search the Scriptures and see if there is any theological backing to support Intersectionality as a legitimate tool to not only identify racism but also provide viable solutions towards racial unity and oneness. If Scripture could be found, it was then expected of the participants to present that Scripture in context and show how it supports the theory of Intersectionality. The overall goal is to expose these methods as insufficient means to achieve racial reconciliation, then present a biblical case that undermines these secular theories and uplift the biblical application of obedience to Scripture that results in true reconciliation.

Question number four in Phase 3 was, "*Do you believe that Guilt and Shame should be used as tools to address racism towards minority cultures and create repentance in majority cultures? Why or why not? What biblical implications support your answer?*". To embrace guilt and shame implies that an offense has been committed that requires restitution or admittance of an offendable act by an individual. Guilt and shame are emotions that come from a place of sadness or regret. When looking at the action and effect of racism, it should elicit despondency and disdain for the harmful effects on those who have endured it. However, this question drives the thesis of the project towards a solution. If racism is still prevalent and displays itself in the actions and habits of some, how then does one not only address the problem but also provide an

antidote to its harsh realities? Secular methodologies would suggest that guilt and shame are necessary by-products if majority ethnic groups that earnestly desire to do right by minority groups they have oppressed. These theories also suggest that members of the majority ethnic group should lament through guilt and shame even if they are far removed from the racist past of their ancestors. While lamenting the racist past of America is appropriate and necessary for the believer, it would appear to be a far stretch from Scripture to indicate that repentance can be accomplished on behalf of someone else's Sin. Guilt (and so the feeling of guilt) is tied to believed or actual responsibility for wrongdoing or causing harm. It carries along with it a desire to confess, to be forgiven, or to make some kinds of amends or reparations. Shame is tied to failing to live up to expectations and ideals either of our own or of other people. Those other people could be individuals whom we value, so we internalize their ideals. Its characteristic behavioral tendency is to want to hide, to not be seen, or, in extreme cases, self-loathing or hatred. Shame affects who we are as a whole and the kind of person we see ourselves to be. The secular models like Critical Race Theory would suggest that all those who seek to acknowledge the act of racism should also recognize their part in the racism. Guilt and shame are the ways in which genuine sorrow is embraced. However, biblical repentance starts with acknowledgment but finds its culmination in the personhood of Christ and seeing oneself in light of His atoning work on the cross to pay our sin debt.

Phase Four

The fourth phase of implementation is where the researcher introduced his solution on how to biblically attain racial unity and oneness within the Life Church context. This implementation also bears implications on the larger community outside of Life Church due to the universal nature of biblical application in racial reconciliation. The intent was to introduce

the transformative power of the Gospel and show how a biblical approach is the only viable solution for sustained racial unity and oneness within the Church and community. The thesis statement of this project is if Life Church applies biblical instructions that speak to achieving racial unity, then the Church will avoid using harmful, counterproductive secular methods. The execution of this phase was done through a video recording that was distributed to each participant via Google docs. Each member received the phase four video of the following content and had two weeks to return a written response of 3 to 4 paragraphs.

Grounding Racism in Sin

Phase 4 began with grounding racism in Sin. This is where the thesis project must start so that the resolution to racial disunity can be found in theological and doctrinal implications and application. The following is a list of passages that were used to systematically ground racism or partiality as an act of Sin that is counter to the actions of a professing believer in Jesus:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment." (Jn. 7:24)

For God shows no partiality. (Rom. 2:11)

These also are sayings of the wise. Partiality in judging is not good. (Prv. 24:23)

To show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread, a man will do wrong. (Prv. 28:21)

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. (1 Tim. 5:21)

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. (Jm. 2:1)

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing Sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (Jm. 2:8-9).

So, Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, (Act. 10:34)

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7)

For the Lord, your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. (Deut. 10:17)

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Rom. 10:12-13)

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. (1 Jn. 2:9)

But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 Jn. 2:11)

For in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:13)

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. (Act. 15:9)

The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction. (Rom. 3:22)

Each passage was read and explained as a biblical premise that condemns separatism as an act of Sin. Many of the references specifically addressed ethnic groups and how a life in Christ is the agent that unifies those groups rather than their ethnicity (Gal. 3:28, Rom. 10:12-13, 1 Cor. 12:13, Acts 15:9). The engagement in a life that promotes a lack of unity and oneness because of one's ethnicity is a violation of Scripture and grieves the heart of God.

It was necessary to present the alternate secular belief that racism originates from a behavioral flaw yet prove how that prognosis addresses the issue but does nothing to fix it. The racism that flows from an individual is undoubtedly a terrible behavior, but simply leaving it at that affords the offender a real way to change the core of who they are. The secular belief of behaviorism would suggest that the racist participates in sensitivity courses that help them better understand the world around them. In addition, there would be behavioral therapy suggestions

that seek to identify and help change potentially self-destructive or unhealthy behaviors. Possibly even opportunities to engage in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training that present the many ways one could and should value the contributions of multi-ethnic, multi-gendered, multi-generational individuals. All of these are good programs that might potentially lead to behavior modification but will ultimately fall short of providing heart transformation. The racist can change their behavior, but only God can change their heart. An acknowledgment that racism is sinful because it goes against the biblical command for unity and oneness is the first step towards redeeming the offender. The second step is to repent of that Sin and confess that repentance is the next course of action, which means one is choosing to turn from that Sin and do it no more. Overall, if one desires to see the world be rid of racisms, it begins with acknowledging its origin and dealing with it in a biblical way that leads towards heart change. Suppose racism continues to be simplified as a behavioral blemish. In that case, our community will continue to suffer from the effects of unregenerate individuals who go along to get along but have no intention of pursuing togetherness among people of different ethnicities. This ensures that racial unity and oneness will lie just beyond our grasps.

Created in the Image of God

In this implementation phase, the researcher used two primary biblical passages to show that prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people based on their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group is a direct violation of *Imago Dei*. *Imago Dei* is the biblical premise that every man, woman, boy, and girl ever created hold inherent value (Ps 139) because they were created in the image of God. Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a decentralized political and social movement that seeks to highlight racism, discrimination, and inequality experienced by black people. One of their major pillars of outcry for this organization

is that black lives do not matter to society. This arose from the terrible deaths and murders of African Americans like George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Brianna Taylor. These deaths sparked a national uproar amongst minority communities who questioned if black lives carried any value to members of majority communities. Asking if one's life holds inherent value is a legitimate question. However, the answer to that question is not found in the eye of the beholder but in the hands of the Creator. Genesis chapter one begins with the creation narrative. After God created the world, everything in it, and everything surrounding it, he created mankind. Genesis 1:26 reads, "Then God said, "let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the last star and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." The question "does my life matter?" is directly addressed and answered in Genesis 1:26. All human life carries inherent value because all of humanity was created in the image of God. The very imprint of the trinity is stamped on every human life and is given value because the Bible reveals that every person is made in the image of God.

The second text furthers the value that God places on the diversity of human life by painting a picture of what heaven is and will be like for all eternity. Revelation chapter 7 gives an account of what the servant John saw on the island of Patmos as the Angel of the Lord revealed it to him in a vision.

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (Rev. 7:9-12)

This passage proves that the diverse tapestry of human ethnicity is valued based on the artistry we see displayed throughout heaven, with people worshipping God from every nation, tribe, and tongue. John describes it as " a great multitude that no one could number." Simply stated, that is a lot of people! If God somehow did not value human life and/or ethnic unity, he certainly would not create an environment where he would have to see and listen to them for all eternity. Most people will admit that heaven is their end goal. The problem, however, with those who do not embrace racial unity and oneness is that their concept of heaven is not a biblical one. There will be no segregated sections of heaven. If individuals want to prepare themselves for heaven, they should start now by crossing ethnic barriers and immersing themselves in biblical love and affection for their diverse neighbors.

Threats to Unity

To fully understand the value of unity, it is necessary to lay out concepts that are a threat to achieving unity. One of the most prevalent models that exist is Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory is an "outgrowth of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which was a leftist movement that challenged traditional legal scholarship."⁹⁹ According to the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs:

CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. CRT also rejects the traditions of liberalism and meritocracy. Legal discourse says that the law is neutral and colorblind, however, CRT challenges this legal "truth" by examining liberalism and meritocracy as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ "What Is Critical Race Theory?" UCLA School of Public Affairs, Critical Race Studies, <https://spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

The researcher chose to use Richard Delgado's book titled *Introduction to Critical Race Theory (Third Edition)* to lay out the worldview of CRT, which is based on four key presuppositions. First, *Racism is Normal*. It is the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country.¹⁰¹ The simplified form of interpreting this principle is that racism is everywhere all the time and is unavoidable. The most popular book on Critical Race Theory is a work titled *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. DiAngelo says that in terms of interactions with people, you do not have to ask whether racism occurred; you ask how racism manifested itself here.¹⁰² The reason racism can be assumed is that the public proclamation is that everything is racist.

The 1619 Project undergirds Critical Race Theory by furthering the racist narrative in American history. In her Pulitzer Prize-winning works, Nikole Hannah-Jones explains that in late August 1619, a ship arrived in the British colony of Virginia bearing a cargo of twenty to thirty enslaved people from Africa. Their arrival led to the barbaric and unprecedented system of American chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years. This is sometimes referred to as the country's original Sin, but it is more than that: It is the source of so much that still defines the United States.¹⁰³ History books would state that the United States of American was founded July 4, 1776, when the 13 colonies adopted the Declaration of Independence. The 1619 Project would suggest that America was not founded in 1776. Instead, it was established in 1619 when black slaves first arrived on American soil. If America is defined by the first-time black slaves

¹⁰¹ Richard Delgado, *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition)* (NY, NY: New York University Press, Kindle Edition), 8.

¹⁰² Robin J. DiAngelo. "*White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Race.*" (Boston: Beacon, 2018), 173

¹⁰³ Nikole Hannah-Jones. *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*. (NY, NY: One World Publisher, 2021)

disembarked on U.S land, then America is defined by racism. The 1619 Project is about the first premise of CRT. One must define America by racism.

The second presupposition is the Convergence Theory, also known as the Interest Convergence Theory. This idea expresses that racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class whites (physically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it."¹⁰⁴ This means whites are incapable of righteous actions on race and only undo racism when it benefits them when their interests converge with the interests of people of color. Suppose an action on behalf of white people is not explicitly racist. In that case, this means that the white person must have benefited from the situation because that is the only time that white people will do anything other than be racist. According to this presupposition and CRT, white people are not only racist but incurably so.

The third principle is Anti-Liberalism. Critical Race Theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.¹⁰⁵ This principle also promotes the ideology that knowledge is socially constructed. Storytelling and narrative reading is the way black people forward knowledge vs. the Science/reason method of white people. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism. The "legal storytelling" movement urges black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law's master narratives.¹⁰⁶ The belief that knowledge is socially constructed pushes that there is no objective

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 11.

truth. One cannot determine whether hegemony is objectively true. One cannot determine that because the caste systems of America have constructed whatever the hegemony is, and it exists because it has been fabricated by the oppressor for the purpose of oppression.

While this is a well-established summary, Tara Yosso, one of the most-cited academics on Critical Race Theory, expands Delgado's fourth tenet with a very important dimension:

The centrality of experiential knowledge. CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination.¹⁰⁷

Achieving Biblical Racial Unity and Oneness

At this stage of the thesis project, the objective was to describe biblical narratives that explicitly dealt with unity and oneness amongst people groups. It was also the researcher's desire to highlight the heart of God and how He feels about his followers walking in unity and oneness towards each other. Acts chapter 10 is about Peter and his interaction with Cornelius. Cornelius was a centurion of the Italian band. The author tells us that he was a God-fearing man who, although not a Jew and not circumcised, practiced some Jewish traditions along with his household. He renounced idolatry and prayed to God. He was visited by an angel of God during his prayers and was told to look for Simon Peter, who would tell him what God had wanted him to do. In a vision, Peter was ordered by God to get up, kill certain animals, and eat them. However, Peter did not want to consume unclean meat because of Jewish tradition. In the vision, God told him that what He has cleansed is no longer considered common or unclean. Therefore, Peter obeyed and did what God commanded. After this, Cornelius came to the place where Peter

¹⁰⁷ Tara J. Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (August 23, 2006), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1361332052000341006>.

was staying and met him. As he fell to his feet at the sight of Peter, Peter told him to rise because he was also a man and not worthy of worship. Cornelius felt it was appropriate to worship Peter, possibly because of the ethnic dividing walls he had been taught to believe his entire life. Could it be that this Gentile man believed the lies that Jews are of a higher class and status than gentiles? The response of Peter to command that Cornelius rise up is the reaction every believer should have if anyone ever feels less than due to their ethnicity or association with a particular people group.

The story of Peter preaching the Gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile, is a turning point in the Bible. It was not customary for Jews to have Gentiles in their homes or preach the Gospel to them. But the reason for Peter's vision was because God wanted him to go forth and spread the Word to those who were not Jewish. This would fulfill Jesus' command in Matthew, in which he instructed the apostles to preach to all nations. In the vision, God was telling Peter that he who is cleansed by God is no longer common or unclean, referring to Cornelius.

Acts chapter 11 starts with Peter going back to Jerusalem after he preached the Gospel to a Gentile centurion named Cornelius. During this time, the Jews were regarded as a favored people, and many thought that salvation was only meant for them. As a result, the other apostles were not pleased with Peter's actions. However, after Peter's experience with Cornelius, things changed, and God commanded that the Word was to be preached to everyone and not just the Jews. The other apostles were reluctant about this at first, but they accepted it after Peter told them of his experience. Peter told the other apostles about his vision. He was in a trance-like state when he saw a vessel descend from heaven. This was when the Lord told him three times to eat beasts that he considered unclean. The Lord then said to him that anything cleansed by God was no longer considered unclean. Immediately following this vision, Cornelius visited him and

told him about an angel visiting his house. Peter said that as he was speaking to Cornelius and his men, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, just as it did with the apostles. Only after Peter explained this did the other apostles understand that the Holy Spirit is not only reserved for them but can also be shared with the Gentiles. The apostles set forth and journeyed across the land. They shared the Good News with all types of people. They spread out and traveled far. The Word of the Lord reached many nations, and both Jews and Gentiles were saved. Barnabas was sent forth to Antioch to preach the message of Jesus. He later called for Saul to join him. This was where disciples were first called "Christians."

One of the most well-known prayers between Jesus and His Father is recorded in John chapter 17. This interaction is labeled as the High Priestly Prayer. The heart of Jesus is heavy with the cross in his impending future and the followers he is about to leave behind. Jesus is aware of the trials and tribulations they will face for his name's sake. He is cognizant of the threats to the kingdom, but none more significant than the threat against unity. Jesus begins his supplication, as He demonstrated in the prayer, glorifying the Father. He affirms that everything that He has been given to do is completed as requested. He expresses a yearning to share in the fellowship of glorying with His Father. Jesus' love for His followers is never more evident than in this passage in which He fervently asks the Father to watch over them because they will be charged with continuing the work that He began. Furthermore, Jesus knew that they would be doing so in a world that would not be particularly receptive to their message and would sometimes even be hostile towards them. He understood the challenges that the disciples would face by living in the world without being worldly. He earnestly asked the Father to protect them and keep the "evil one" away. Jesus concludes His prayer by praying for those who would come to believe in Him by the words of His followers after He was gone. The focus of this part of

Jesus' prayer is for unity on the part of believers to mirror the unity of Jesus with His Father. He knew that the ultimate distraction and disruption to kingdom advancement would be a lack of unity and oneness. Here in this passage, Jesus does not mention ethnicity, gender, race, class, social status, or creed as the agent that ultimately unifies his followers. In contrast, the definitive unifier that he does mention is love. Love for the Father and love for one another is how the world will know that Jesus is who the Bible says he is. This is the final prayer that Jesus leaves behind before He heads towards calvary. His final charge should be the church's continual commands.

Phase Five Exit Interview Question

The fifth and final phase was an informal exit interview that examined what has changed in the participant's understanding of worldly models that exist and how they threaten the ability to achieve Christ-centered reconciliation, unity, and oneness. The first question was, "*How would you say your perspective has changed from the phase 1 intervention to now?*". The hope was that this thesis project would serve as a tool to help provide a clear defense of biblical truth in the area of racial reconciliation. The second statement was, "*Describe the importance of having a biblical view of racial reconciliation.*" There are plenty of alternate theories, ideologies, and methodologies that would love to infiltrate the Church and provide replacement beliefs for biblical instruction. Believers, however, have clear directives from the Bible that are intended to guide our lifestyles and the way in which we see the world. The final question is, "*What impact on our church and community will be had if we implement an example of love, unity, and oneness within our human interactions?*". This is the "so what" question. The Church should not just proclaim what sounds like Jesus, but we should intently live like Jesus. Describing how the community changes when unity is embraced should ultimately paint a picture of Revelation 7:9.

Chapter 4: Results

Phase One Results

At the onset of implementation, there was a major concern with how participants would react to the topic at hand. The racial tensions in America were at an all-time high with various riots, demonstrations, and horrible interactions between government authorities and communities of color. The apprehension to engage in the conversation was felt but not rejected by participants due to their desire to fully see the issues and work towards biblical solutions to achieve racial unity and oneness. Chapter 4 describes the results from the thesis project as laid out in chapter 3.

Each participant openly interacted with each question and gave honest perspective as to their experience and opinion concerning race relations both in the church and surrounding communities. None of the results have been altered or adjusted from the participants initial comments. All information has been recorded and safely secured in word documents and recording devices that are only accessible to the researcher. No compensation was offered to the participants other than the internal feeling of joy they would feel from helping their pastor complete this project. There was also reassurance given that they would be making a huge difference in the lives of many people who will read and study this project. The ideology that upholds the project was expressed to the participants. They were told from the very beginning that the purpose of this action research was to help Life Church exemplify racial unity according to the Scriptures and avoid unhelpful secular models. If Life Church applies biblical instructions that speak to achieving racial unity, then the church will avoid using harmful, counterproductive secular methods that do not accomplish oneness.

Participant Backgrounds

In the beginning stages of Phase 1 implementation, each participant was asked a series of questions that helped paint the picture of their worldview and upbringing. This was significant to discover because it helped the researcher better understand the lens through which they saw the world. How one is raised to believe highly influences their actions, reasonings, and thought processes.

Participant A was asked to describe her background and earliest memories of how she was raised and what influenced the world in which she lived. She began her childhood raised by a single mother in Athens-Clarke County, GA. This county is one of the more diverse counties in the state of Georgia. Participant A explained that her elementary school classroom consisted of African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. Her mother had a diverse group of adult friends that would frequent the house where they lived. Participant A's mother even dated a black man for a brief time during her childhood. Racist actions were never a part of her life because she was taught by her mother that all people are created equal, and you love who you love.

Participant B shared a similar background of being raised in a single parent home as a child. He recounted a phrase that was commonly used by his mother to emphasize the necessity of equality. She would say, "treat others the way you want to be treated". This has stuck with participant B even up to now as a 28-year-old man.

Participants C and D were also raised in single parent homes. Participant C described his earliest memories, playing in a Gwinnett County neighborhood with groups of friends who were of mixed race and ethnicity. He knew nothing of racial separatism because everyone played and saw each other as neighbors and friends. He used the word "melting pot" to describe the earliest memories of his context.

Participant F shared a similar melting pot experience due to her father's line of work. She lived in New York for twelve years where her father planted a church on the outskirts of the city. The ministry failed to provide all the necessary finances that came with supporting a wife and four children. As the oldest of those four siblings, Participant F saw her dad pull double duty at both the church and local Pizzeria Uno restaurant to make ends meet. As a server and bartender, he would interact with people from every walk of life and invite them to church. Participant F described seeing drug dealers, prostitutes, and the homeless walking through the doors and not thinking twice about it. She did not know anything other than loving people for who they are rather than what they look like.

Participant D shared a comparable experience of how her mother went above and beyond to teach her that she and her siblings they were no better than anyone else because of their melanin count. She described this instruction as being highly important to the shaping of her world view because she was raised in a majority Caucasian area. The county was named White County, which Participant D said in a sarcastic jovial way. Exposure to people outside of her race was limited and rarely seen, yet her mother knew that all people deserve to be treated fairly.

Participant G also grew up in a predominately white area. He described there being only one black kid in his elementary school. His neighborhood lacked diversity early in his childhood but saw a change in his middle school years when a Hispanic family moved next door. They refrained from engaging with one another because of the language barrier. Participant G was raised in church but also saw a major lack of diversity there as well. This continued through college, as Participant G attended a private Christian institution that had less than a two percent minority. Participant C also experienced a lack of diversity within the context of his religious

experience. He was raised in a predominant black church and was taught by his father that the America he was being raised in was different for him as a black man.

Participant C started out in a melting pot neighborhood but began to see a change by middle school. More Hispanic families moved into the Gwinnett County area and created a “white flight” for most non-minority families. Now suddenly, the area developed a reputation of being an unscrupulous place to live. The perception was that Mexicans were to be seen as bad and dirty. The mentality shifted from unity to separatism. These dividing walls created a “us versus them” attitude and each ethnic group had to stick with their own and protect their own. Participant G also echoed the same sentiment in his upbringing. Participant C’s father wanted to make sure that his son knew how to carry himself to avoid negative stereotypes and labels. Participant C was taught that he would never be considered for a good job if he wore an Afro, earrings, corn rows, or dread locks. Participant C’s father consistently stated “you’re black and you need to be presentable”. The underlying notion was that being a black man was already a disadvantage in a white America. Participant C then described how his worldview and understanding of himself had greatly changed since those early influential years. As a teacher and coach, he believed that people should look presentable, but it was not based on one’s skin color. He expounded that there are still effects of racism and people who choose to judge others based on the color of their skin. However, that is a sin issue not a “you” issue. A person is not defined by the sinful opinion or lifestyles of others. They are distinct because of the creator’s personal touch and approval.

Participant E was adopted raised in North Carolina by a single mother. Participant E and his brother were adopted at the ages of 5 and 3 into a loving Christ centered home. Participant E’s biological mother was white, and his father was Hispanic. The father was not a citizen and

was deported back to Mexico. His mother was not in a situation that she could adequately provide and take care of her children, so she gave them up for adoption. They initially went into foster care at the ages of 5 and 3 and were quickly adopted into their new home. As a young man, Participant E's adoptive mother raised him in church and consistently had him involved in summer camps, retreats, and local missions work in low-income areas and neighborhoods. Although Participant E was raised to embrace racial unity, his context remained homogenous, primarily being surrounded by Anglo people.

This was the same case for Participant B. His high school experience did not provide him the diverse environment he would have preferred. A total of eight black students and 20 Hispanic students were his only educational interactions with minorities. Despite his limited exposure, he still sought to treat everyone the same. Participant A was raised in a diverse community but transferred to the same high school as B and experienced the same lack of diversity in that county.

Both A and B witnessed racist actions from fellow students and friends. Although they saw racial insensitivity from others, they themselves never participated in it. Participant A explained that a few of the blacks in her high school were largely accepted because they were great athletes. Those who were not athletes were outcast. Participant F detailed how much her life changed when she and her family moved from New York to Georgia her freshman year. This was when she began to see racism for the first time. She would hear racist stereotypical jokes being made by peers such as Asians being bad drivers and African Americans being better at sports because they are black. In college, Participant F stated that her best friend was black and said that she was the first white friend that had never made an insensitive black joke about her.

Later, Participant F had a Caucasian friend that adopted a boy who was bi-racial (half Hispanic, half black). She described how people would stare at them when they would go places.

Relationally, Participants A and D have a lot in common. Both have been in inter-racial relationships, have African American husbands, and bi-racial children. Participant A began to date African American men in high school and received criticism from her friends and family. She recollected being called a “nigger lover”. Participant D dated her current husband for 10 months and encountered a great deal of resistance and racism towards her husband. Her friends would say “My parents would never let me date a black guy” and “Have you always had a thing for black guys”, as if it was something taboo to do. It was not until her relationship with her then boyfriend began to blossom that she saw racist actions emerge from her family. Her grandmother made it known that they did not approve of their granddaughter dating a black man. One year for Thanksgiving the grandmother made everyone aware that Participant D’s boyfriend was not going to be invited to her house. They then moved Thanksgiving to her sister’s house, and everyone except the grandmother had a great time.

Sports and college played a major role in helping participants B, D, E, and G be exposed to more ethnic diversity. Participant E’s college studies brought him to the University of Georgia where he made many new friends who were from all walks of life. Participant B also attended UGA and was a van driver for former UGA football players at home games. He would take them to the alumni tail gate and witness the unique experience of what felt like a backyard bar-b-que. This was an opportunity for B to experience the complexity of different cultures. Participants C, D, and G played collegiate sports and claim that being an athlete opened their eyes to an entirely new world of diversity and taught them to embrace racial unity on a new level.

Phase One: Survey Questions

The following are results captured from Phase 1 survey questions. In this section, each participant had to answer the question, “*Is racism mostly a problem of the past, not the present? Why or why not?*”

All participants emphatically agreed that racism was not just a problem of the past, but also has present implications and manifestations. Participant A stated that racism is a modern reality because it is displayed in current politics, relationships, and her own daughter’s interactions with peers. Raising a bi-racial child has opened her eyes to the divisiveness that still exist amongst various ethnicities. According to A, it is not slavery, lynching, or beatings that are taking place, but the implicit biases and judgments of other races that has not changed. There are stereotypes that are still applied unfairly. Participant F responded in a similar vein by explaining that racism is both a problem of the past and now. It was different in the past, meaning that we do not have blatantly racist legislation like Jim Crow and segregation, but there are still divides and people are treated differently. Participant E agrees with this statement. Participant F mentioned that she thought racism was made up during her college years, but when she got married and moved to a rural country town, she realized that it was still real and there are hateful people who exist in the world.

Participant D answered the question by expounding on her disappointment with current racial events in America. Race riots, protest, and the death of African Americans at the hands of police revealed how much further we must go in racial unity. As a teacher, she sees separatism take place and hopes to do her part to see that end. Participants B agreed that the fight for equality continues today and should be waged by everyone who claims to know Christ. Participant G felt that racism still exists but has developed overtime and morphed into more discrete forms of racial isolation and segregation.

The following are the participants' responses to question two in Phase 1. *Do you believe that there is hostility amongst racial groups today? If so, why do you think it exists?*

Participant C believed that racism of the past is not just a "black person vs white person issue". If we are to look at any progress being made in race relations, one must consider all ethnicities and how they have interacted with one another over time. This gives a better gauge of how well or not so well America has done in this area. Participant B blamed the current racial divide on unconscious micro-aggressions that reside within people. Participant G believed that these micro-aggressions are a result of ideologies that have been passed down from previous generations. He supposed that individuals continue racism because they are taught to do so. No child enters the world disliking someone because of their skin color. He also claimed that churches have done a poor job of tearing down the dividing wall of racial hostility. This is seen on Sunday mornings when white people primarily go to white churches and black people predominantly go to black churches. People are afraid to visit churches that consist of different ethnicities because of fear, assumptions, and a lack of desire to escape comfort zones.

Participant E made a similar point by stating that the racial divide amongst churches proves that hostility still exists. He grew up seeing people groups stick together because it was more comfortable and convenient. Participant A concurred with this point by saying that differences scare people. Traditions, cultures, and a lack of familiarity can create fear. Often individuals create false narratives about people groups based on assumptions instead of getting to know them. Participant D felt that every ethnicity carries a stigma, which creates hostility. People presuppose that their differences result in a lack of compatibility and the only thing to fill that disparity is hostility. Those differences also can lead to feelings of presumed racism, and even elitism. Participant D believed that the existing hostility amongst racial groups is ultimately an issue of pride. Participant F was adamant that racial hostility is bred from ignorance. Most

people who are racist do not believe that they are. She gave a personal testimony of the struggle with her husband's family. They regularly exhibit racist behaviors that contribute to the acrimony of racial hostility. Her conclusion was that racial resentment primarily comes down to the sinfulness of humanity. Participant B has not experienced much of the hostility due to the nature of his homogeneous surroundings but feels that the enmity presides because of people's inability to concede and admit wrong.

The following are the participants' responses to question three in Phase 1. *“Does mainstream media have a negative impact on race relations? Why or why not?”*

All participants felt that mainstream media has amplified the racial tensions in America. Participant F said that it has had a huge negative on society. In the interest of gaining more ratings, media has intentionally fired up people by showing and telling one-sided stories. She felt that media has made it necessary for her to prove that she is not racist because of the way that majority culture people are cast. Participant C echoed this thought that mainstream media is biased because they do not tell the whole story. There is implied racism with every case involving whites and blacks. Participant G sensed that mainstream media fuels the fire by telling audiences what they want to hear. They will take interactions and twist them into racially tense situations. Participant E continued that media embellishes the divisions. Participants A, B, C, and D all agreed that the agenda and political leaning of the source can be pushed towards a one-sided angle, but they also believed that mainstream media can serve a positive purpose as well. Participant A pointed out that media can be good because it raises awareness of events that take place beyond the routine of our daily life and interactions. Learning about tragedies and current happenings helps individuals stay informed on what is happening. Participant C remarked that media can be a blessing because it connects one to the world, but it is also a curse because it is easy to find a source that manipulates the stories according to personal leanings and affiliations.

If one wants to find truth, Participant B expressed that the likelihood of that being revealed on mainstream media is minuscule. Participant D believed that media has its place but in moderation. Her personal practice is to gather the pertinent information she needs then turn the media sources off.

The following are the participants' responses to the fourth question in Phase 1. *“Are people of color often put at a social disadvantage because of their race when they enter a majority white culture church like Life Church? Why or why not?”*

Participants reflected on the culture of Life Church and how this question applies to what they have seen and experienced during church gatherings. Not only did they consider their church context but also the environments they have interacted with in other local churches. Participant A conveyed those stereotypes can create fear that acts as a natural barrier of culture clashing. This can cause minorities to feel socially disadvantaged when entering majority environments like an all-white church. With different ethnicities comes diverse cultural norms and expressions. If those expressions are manifested in an ethnic majority environment, it can come across as off putting, which could result in a feeling of isolation for the minority. An example Participant A gave was the various styles of worship. If a black person is accustomed to being vocal during the worship experience and they do this during a service while visiting an all-white church, there is a good chance that the black individual will be the recipient of stares and whispers from the congregation. They may then feel that their cultural expression was the cause for the social ostracization. Participant B stated that cultural differences might impede minorities from freely worshipping in the way they want to. Participant G believed that social disadvantages based on race depends on the church one attends. Rural churches tend to be more homogeneous, thus hold on to more “backwards thinking” and are less inviting to diverse parishioners. Participant F has attended churches like this in her hometown. Participant E felt

that any social disadvantage a minority might feel in church is a residual effect of the history of racism in America. Some churches would love to be more diverse but do not know how to accomplish it. Participant D believed that minorities are often placed at a social disadvantage within other churches. They can often be made to feel like the “token black person” and give churches a false sense that the diversity box has been checked. Participant C said that the disadvantage is real because it is how minorities are taught to feel. In his words “it’s just us”. He felt that people may be surprised but in general are glad to see diverse families walk through the doors. Sometimes people attend churches that placate to their ethnic comfortability, but Participant C pursued church fellowships because of their theology. He admitted that having a blended family often made them feel like the leprechaun, but he was able to work past that and assumed the best about people they do not know.

Each participant reflected on their general thoughts about church interactions with minorities and majority culture people groups, but the totality of the research cohort trusts that members of Life Church have never put someone at a social disadvantage because of their race. Participant D stated that it is pivotal to look at people as image bearers of God and see people through the lens of scripture. We should also assume the best when minorities enter the congregation and get greeted for the first time. That welcome and interaction is not happening because they are a minority, but it is happening because they are new, and people are glad to see them. Participant A said that Life Church is a more inclusive environment than most and has a healthy representation of people across an ethnically diverse spectrum. Participant E sought to do his best to make all people feel welcome and felt that our church has an established atmosphere of inclusivity, seeing that our leadership is diverse, and the pastor is African American.

The following are the participants' responses to the fourth question in Phase 1. *“Is reverse racism or prejudicial treatment of white people a problem in our community? If not a problem, explain. If it is a problem, please explain how this is displayed”*.

Participant C exclaimed that reverse racism towards whites is a problem and is equally as wrong as racism towards blacks. Participant C mentioned that there are racist black people in his family who have improper views towards white people. He felt that black culture was super sensitive and everything people said was cast as being wrong. To empower a nationality is important but over empowerment can do the same damage one is trying to avoid. According to Participant B, racism is racism. It is worthy of acknowledging that reverse racism is a reality and has created a culture where it is more acceptable to diminish whites because of the harmful light in which they are cast. Participant F agreed that there is a problem with racism all around. It has to do with the hurt that is passed down, yet never dealt with. It is a problem, and everyone needs to learn to love. Participant A concurred that love should be at the forefront of ethnic interactions and an admittance of distrust could be the spark that ignites the flame of unity. Participant G pointed out how the reverse racism has been seen in the way law enforcement is treated. If the officer is white and there was an altercation with a minority, the stigma is that the officer was undoubtedly racist which is why the altercation ensued. The bias is assumed, and the false narrative is spread. Participant D has experienced reverse racism from various black women when they learn that she is married to a black man. Sometimes there are judgmental glares while other times there are insensitive comments that are made to point out how it is wrong for her to marry outside of her ethnicity. Participant E concurred that blacks can display racist actions and engage with in a non-harmonious way. There is a gulf that has been built between races instead of a bridge. When whites are racist towards blacks it is more of downward motion, meaning that blacks are less than others. When blacks are racist towards whites it is more of an upward

motion, meaning that whites think they are better than others. Neither mentality is right and both lead to a furthering of the gulf that separates us.

Phase Two Results

Phase Two: Survey Questions

Participants were asked the following question: *“Do you believe that racism is rooted in sin, or is it more of a social, behavioral defect? Please explain your answer.”* The following are the results.

Participant E believed that racism was rooted in sin because it is ultimately a consequence of the fall. Participant E raised the question of wondering how racism is dealt with if it is not a sin issue. The behavior is an outflow of sin and is not just a flaw in someone’s personality. It boils down to the sin of pride and selfishness. Participant D agreed that racism is a matter of sin and comes down to pride. That sin can only be handled with repentance if it is done towards someone and forgiveness if you are the one offended. Repentance cannot be accomplished on behalf of someone else’s sin such as ancestors or relatives. One must acknowledge their own heart of sin and pursue reconciliation. Participant E continued that the world possibly classifies racism as a behavioral defect because it is actively opposed to biblical methodology and Christian beliefs. This left one looking for answers elsewhere like sociology or psychology. It is the fallen condition of man that says, “I can identify my own problems, I can fix myself, and I am not willing to acknowledge my own weaknesses”. Participant G continued the idea that racism of a heart problem of sin that can only be solved through biblical application. The Bible teaches how God intended for mankind to interact with one another. Therapy and understanding behavioral patterns are not bad things, but therapy can only identify the problem. The Bible provides a real solution to the problem.

Participant A saw the action of racism from members of her family and also witnessed what true repentance looks like when those family members admitted their action as sin and sought to confess that sin before the Lord. Participant F saw the solution to the sinful act of racism as found in scripture like Genesis 1:26 which considers all of humanity to be created in the image of God. Participant C deducted that racism must be grounded as a sin issue because it counters the theology of the Bible. Participant B concluded that racism is grounded in sin, but he admitted that it is a more complex than arriving at an immediate “yes”. He felt that on the surface, acts of racism are behavioral because they require an outward display of racial hostility towards a people group. This is behavioral, but under the surface it is motivated by sinful inclinations. It is complex and messy, but eventually the root of it (sin) will be exposed.

Phase Three Results

Phase Three: Survey Questions

The study group was asked, *“In your opinion, is Life Church contributing to racial unity or racial disunity? Explain.”* The following results were identified.

Each member of the thesis project began by explaining their personal experience while at Life Church versus their experience at previous churches. Participant A explained that she grew up in a primitive Baptist church that was very legalistic and took pride in following the law but had little to no grace for its members and the surrounding community. This acted as an isolating agent that prevented several diverse people groups from entering their congregation. When Participant A moved to the city of Athens, one of the first things she prioritized was her search for a new church family. She did a quick google search and Life Church appeared at the top of the page. She attended the church with her husband and two children. The culture of love and acceptance was immediately felt. Since then, Participant A has become a member, serves in

children's ministry, and on the hospitality team. Participant A felt that Life Church contributes to racial unity because of their emphasis to evangelize the surrounding community which is majority minority. The low economic status of the community allows Life Church to provide many basic services and act as an agent of unity, peace, and love. Participant B also found the church through a website search. It was obvious to him that racial diversity would be a priority because there on the front page of the church website was a picture of the pastor and his wife. The pastor was black, and his wife was white. There are no other churches in the area that have a pastor who is in an interracial marriage. The assumption of unity was found to be true once Participant B got assimilated into the church and began to serve as a Life Group leader alongside his wife. Life Church contributes to racial unity because of the welcoming environment that is evident as soon as someone enters the building. People are not made to feel isolated or awkward because the congregants are intentional about making visitors feel like they belong here.

Participant D resonated with Life Church because she is in an interracial marriage as well. Participant D expressed that it is rare to find a couple in church leadership that reflect her marriage and family. The pastor does a great job of highlighting the unifying nature of scripture and rallies the congregation around God's way of doing life with people as opposed to the world's way that ultimately leads to separating people. Participant F spoke highly of Life Church's commitment to racial unity and oneness. She and her husband knew a current member and decided to visit the church to see if it could be a fit for she and her newly married husband. They eventually made the decision to join the church because of her desire to raise a family in a multi-ethnic church. Participant F served in children's ministry and loved seeing the commitment to biblical unity and diversity in how the curriculum is selected. She also was thankful for how the church reaches children from a wide range of ethnically diverse children. They now have a

daughter and are thankful to be a part of a church family that bridging the racial divide through Christian love and biblical application.

Participant C engaged in Life Church because of his relationship with the pastor in previous ministry endeavors. Both Participant C and the pastor served as huddle leaders at various Fellowship of Christian Athletes camps across the state. Participant C moved to Athens because of a teaching opening at the local high school and served as the defensive coordinator for the football team. Participant C wanted to attend a church that reflected the diversity of his classroom. He also wanted a place where his students could visit and feel welcomed no matter the shade of their skin. Participant C felt that Life Church contributed to racial unity because the diversity of the community was reflected in the seats of the church. He felt that there is room for even more diversity and hoped to be a contributor to that by continuing to invite students and individuals from all walks of life.

As a college student, Participant E was drawn to Life Church because of the multi-ethnic and multi-generational reality of the church. Participant E grew up in a church that was not ethnically diverse and desperately wanted to be involved in a local fellowship that was. Participant E felt that the diverse context of his university classroom should not be more advanced in this area than the local church. Unfortunately, most churches are far behind in this area and do not care to advance. In Participant E's opinion, Life Church is on the front lines of racial unity and defies the odds. They are a Southern Baptist church in the deep south that is majority white and is being led by an African American pastor. Participant G reminisced on his experience with Life Church when he told his family that we would be attending a church that had a black pastor. His family quickly resisted that and offered suggestions as to why they should not attend a church like that. Participant G refused to take their advice and committed to

the church through membership despite his family's narrow-minded thinking that propagated sinful narratives of ethnic separatism in church fellowship. He agreed that Life Church is a shining example of what racial unity can and should look like in the body of Christ. The church is not perfect but seeks to perfect our relationships with people by loving them according to Christ's commandments.

Two definitions (Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality) were given so that participants could be better informed on how to answer the following question:

“Should Life Church embrace social/secular models like Critical Race Theory to address racial unity? Please explain your answer”.

Participant G stated that a primary threat to all churches is the acceptance of theories and practices that sound good but do not fully align with scripture. Satan is tactful in his approach to deceive the church. He will take something that appeals to the emotion of mankind and mix up a remedy that is part truth and part lies. It requires a discerning spirit to know when something that sounds good is not good. Participants C and F were not aware of the CRT and Intersectionality definitions. They were completely naive to the harmful effects these ideologies have on local churches. After learning about the definitions of these terms, they were more inclined to resist the acceptance of them at Life Church. Like Participant G, they too felt that the implementation of these methods could easily infiltrate into a congregation if not properly vetted and discerned. Participants A and D felt that Life Church should not embrace secular models like CRT because they do not find any grounding in scripture. The more concerning fact is that these models sound good on the surface and present reasonings for real problems we have faced and still face in America. These methodologies can prey on sincere hearts that want to see change in the world and are looking for answers to the awful disparities that take place. The reality of sinful actions towards various ethnic groups is problematic, but the desire for honest change and real solutions

that lead to unity is not found in worldly reasoning and deduction. It is only found in the truth and application of God's word.

Participant B did not see a setting in which CRT advances unity in the church. His understanding of CRT leads to more division and separation amongst people from different ethnic backgrounds. God did not give us His word to look at its instruction and say that something more needs to be added to it like CRT. God did not intend for CRT to be the thing that proved an insufficiency in the scriptures. There is nothing that the bible cannot speak to and offer solutions for, especially in the realm of racial unity. Participant E concurred with the group that CRT should not be embraced by Life Church. However, he saw how it could be attractive and appeal to a lot of people. The fact that it is seen as a tool of proclamation on behalf of the downtrodden and discarded is a method that lends itself to the ears of a hurting and broken culture. The heart of Bible believing Christians is one that wants to see all wrongs made right. CRT addresses the least and the lost which was the primary heart of Jesus. Some might say that CRT is in line with the empathetic nature of Jesus. This, however, is when one must go the extra theological mile to make sure that any doctrine presented is sound and aligns itself with all of scripture.

The following are the results gathered from the third question in Phase 3, *“Is intersectionality an analytical tool that can be supported by scripture? Why or why not?”*

Most of the participants were not aware of the definition nor purpose of Intersectionality. Participant A expressed a thankfulness for a better understanding and felt like Intersectionality as an analytical tool does a great job of highlighting all the reasons people are divided rather than united. Participant D agreed with this thought and further it by explaining that Intersectionality cannot be supported by scripture and should not be supported within the local church. Participant F saw no place in scripture where elevating differences based on sinful separation is endorsed or

tolerated. Jesus described his interaction with woman at the well in John chapter 4 and pointed out their differences, but his purpose in doing that was to explain how those difference do not act as barriers to her receiving the gospel. Participant B pointed out the overarching purpose of the thesis project and tied the question back into it. He concluded that unity and oneness cannot be accomplished through secular ideologies like CRT and Intersectionality. Intersectionality intentionally seeks to reveal every way possible that keeps individuals from being unified. This is not supported in scripture. Participants C, F, and G all came to similar reasonings that Intersectionality elevates one's ethnicity as the primary lens through which the world should see them versus the lens of Genesis 1:26, which elevates all of humanity as being created in the image of God. Participant F pointed out that the things which make us different do not also make us less than. Those things, however, make us unique and special. Participant G stated that the goal is not uniformity but unity. Participant E explained that unity means we can celebrate each other's differences. Intersectionality result in demonizing differences and using that as a tool to widen the racial divide.

Results from question 4 in Phase 3 were gathered. The researcher asked, "*Do you believe that guilt and shame should be used as tools to address racism towards minority cultures and create repentance in majority cultures? Why or why not?*"

Participant C exclaimed that he has been the recipient of racist comments, actions, and unfair treatment based on his skin color. He believed that guilt can serve a purpose of creating remorse that leads to repentance and heart change. However, guilt is not beneficial if it is meant to be universally applied to all majority ethnic people, even those who have not committed racist acts. Shame can be beneficial, only if it is experienced as an emotion that leads to more empathy and understanding. Participants E and D did not see the purpose in embracing guilt or shame regarding how they engage with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Their posture is that

relationships are valued based on how each person serves the other. Lamenting over the past and present hurt of your neighbor is biblical. Nonetheless, being made to feel personal guilt and shame for things someone else did is neither helpful nor conducive to progressing towards reconciliation. Participants A and B saw how guilt and shame would be alluded to as pathways to remorse, but they raised the question of wondering how long one must feel guilty and shameful? Does the guilt and shame continue forever, or is there a point in which the guilt and shame can be atoned for? Participants F and G hold to the same notion that guilt, and shame do not equal repentance. They can be used as tools to address the heart of the offender, but they are not emotions that can be used synonymously with repentance.

Phase Four Results

Implementation Results

Phase 4 was the implementation stage of the thesis project. The following are results that were captured as an outcome of the implementation.

Participant A stated that she agreed that racism is a sin issue. The commandment to love God is a divine rule. When we truly love God, we obey what He commands. This obedience is not rooted in religious requirements. It is rooted in the fact that we know God first loved us, so we naturally want to please him. The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. As we love God, He helps us to better love others. We are called to love. Our willingness to love others can be seen by our interactions with others who do not look, act, or believe like us. We are all created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This scripture defends the sanctity of all human life. Every human, regardless of race, bears the image of Christ, and must be treated with equal dignity and rights. Participant A continued that secular race models, such as the CRT, create blanket statements that remove all accountability for a person's beliefs or actions. These models distract from biblical truths and convictions. CRT only creates more division and propagates

more racism and separatism. Our culture has contributed to the ideas that are supported in the CRT. The influence of mainstream media, social platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, etc., allows a bias narrative to be told, void of any solutions. The only way to pursue true unity and reconciliation is through obedience to the word of God.

Participant B shared that information the researcher presented, regarding the systems and theories that society currently relies upon for creating reconciliation and unity, showed that these systems/theories are ill-equipped to do just that. Participant B is more inclined to believe that they would do just the opposite and create more tension. These systems only benefit the party utilizing it and cause more frustration, agitation, and unrest in those who do not subscribe to the same beliefs. The only truth the church should be relying upon to mend this seemingly growing chasm in racial tensions is the truth of the Gospel. Participant D offered thanks to the researcher for clarifying CRT. She feels like there is much more to learn but she has a better grasp now than before. Participant D did not necessarily think that all white people are inherently racist. However, she thought that people of different races tend to struggle with stereotyping and making general assumptions based on what culture communicates about a particular race. Participant D also felt that the laws of the past have encouraged institutional racism and caused a further divide between white and black people. It is false to say that race is just a social construct created by white people.

Participant C extended the thoughts on CRT by expressing that he had no idea what it was about and only heard of it as talking points for people. According to Participant C, this theory seems degrading to white people and victimizes other races. Participant G also stated that he knew little about CRT but learned a lot through the researcher's implementation. Participant G communicated that CRT is a threat to unity. CRT is unbiblical yet churches are trying to use it

as a solution to racism. In the researcher's explanation, Participant G discovered that CRT deems religion as a social construct that allows the oppressor to gain while the oppressed loses.

Intersectionality seems to be racist in and of itself. The determining factor of being a racist comes down to what skin color you enter the world with at birth. It has nothing to do with upbringing or character. If one is a white male with blue eyes and blonde hair, that individual is considered the oppressor. If a person is black, female, and transgender they automatically considered to be the most oppressed. This theory makes no sense to Participant G. If this is the case, there is no solution to racism.

Participant G also pointed out that the 1619 project was problematic as well. The United States has a horrible and sinful past of racism and slavery. Conversely, the 1619 project said that the United States was not founded in 1776 but instead in 1619 when black slaves were brought here. Participant G wondered where the Native Americans who were already here fit in that premise? Does this imply that a country is not a country without slavery? Participant B exclaimed that as a middle-aged, married, white male he can recall his first encounter and origin of distaste for CRT. While attending The University of Georgia, he encountered many professors that subscribed to the doctrine of CRT and would also utilize it for material in class. Participant B saw this come to light in a class entitled *Social Aspects of Sport*. While in this class it became apparent that he was considered the oppressor because of his ethnic identification with the majority population. What he did not realize in the moment was how the narrative of CRT pins people against one another. CRT stirs more agitation than understanding and leaves no room for discussion.

Participant E found that the scriptural references and implications were of upmost value when desiring to pursue racial unity and oneness. Genesis 1:26 stood out as a clarion call to all

people that their worth and significance is found in the creator. For Participant C, Genesis 1:26 is a truth he appreciates daily. He had moments where he did not feel cared for or protected the same way other races may. Participant C tried not to focus on those things and saw himself through the truth of who God declared him to be through the Bible. Participant E recounted from the implementation that if one is trying to figure out if their life matters or not, they cannot go to a secular source to answer a spiritual question.

Revelation 7:9 paints a beautiful picture of what heaven looks like. This speaks to the love God has for diversity. It was his idea. John 17 gives believers clear instruction to love one another. This proves the validity of Jesus and Christianity as a whole. When professing disciples chose not to follow John 17, it diluted the Gospel and sent the wrong message to the watching world. Participants F learned that Christians need to, instead of running to a movement, run to the word of God for guidance. We need to have a full grasp of how God sees creation so we can teach others what He has to say about the topic of racial disunity. We should pray for and help and guidance for those who want to know what God says about racism. Along with that, we should also pray and help guide those whose hearts may be in the wrong place, such as supporters of movements such as Black Lives Matter, as well as for those who may look down on those different than themselves.

Participant G agreed that Christians should have discernment and filter what he hears through the Bible. Participant G stated that the researcher had some helpful ways to approach racism and work for a solution. First, the word of God can break those barriers. Participant A is well-read and believed that word of God will be able to do that. We should also be bold to proclaim what the word of God says. Identify racism as a sin and let the Holy Spirit work. Prayer for the salvation of the racist and advocacy for the least and the lost should always be the

response of the believer. Participant G understood racism and the sinful nature of it before being involved in this study, but he believes he now has a better understanding about the secular forces and theories that are the driving factors behind the divisiveness and furtherance of racism. He also feels better equipped with the knowledge of these theories so he can now combat and pursue unity as a solution against racism through scripture and prayer.

Participant B detailed a primary point that he learned through this project. He explained that if one does not subscribe to CRT, it is important to not have a hardened heart towards those that do. Unfortunately, in today's climate, it seems like individuals can only pick one side, and when the side is picked, the other side automatically becomes your enemy. The Church should be the center for change in the arena of racism. It will involve difficult conversations and confrontations with people that we know and love. It will involve sharing the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus and the love He has for us. It will push the church to be more active and uncomfortable, which is a good and necessary thing. Participant D has no doubt after this study that racism is a sin issue. During the height of racial tensions last year, she admitted to being one of those people who believed that preaching the Gospel was not enough. Participant D felt like action needed to take place. However, like Peter's experience in Acts 10, it is the Gospel that can pierce and unify seemingly different people. Unfortunately, Participant D did not think we will experience the solution (reconciliation) until Heaven. Thankfully, because of the work of Christ, anyone can be justified through faith and claim the righteousness of Christ. Participant G emphatically stated that she does not get to claim a higher level of righteousness than anyone else just because she is white.

Phase Five Exit Questionnaire Results

Phase five is the exit interview that was conducted with each participant. The first question was, *“How would you say your perspective has changed from phase 1 to now?”*

Participant A has advanced in many areas concerning racial unity and oneness. She felt that this study was able to help her articulate what she has felt but has not been able to fully understand. The secular models that exist threaten true unity and should be expounded on so more Christians can properly understand what we are up against.

Participant B has developed a stronger sensitivity towards those who feel marginalized because of their ethnicity. This project helped him see that the church is vital in carrying out the message of John 17 so that the world may know that reconciliation and neighborly love is solidified in the application of the Gospel. He also feels more equipped to have conversation about things like CRT and Ethnic Gnosticism.

Participant C has grown in his understanding of how secular theories negatively affect all people and claim to offer solutions to racism but are truly counterproductive to it. At the onset, he had a preconceived notion of what the thesis project was about and where the conclusions would go, but his perspective was challenged and evolved with each interview. He hopes to carry his newfound enlightenment to his students and athletes.

Participant D appreciated how much she has learned and looks forward to teaching her daughter the importance of discerning everything through the filter of scripture. As a wife to an African American man and mother to a bi-racial daughter, Participant D wanted to continue her learning process in the areas of racial unity and oneness. Her family is the primary example of what racial reconciliation can result in. Observing passages like Acts 10 and 11 served as a great reminder that God is no respecter of persons, and the Gospel is the agent that breaks down walls of racial hostility.

Participant E admitted that his knowledge of biblical application to racial matters has increased tremendously from Phase 1 to now. His heart is primed and ready to see reconciliation take place. He hoped to do all he can to advance the cause of Christ in this area. Many things are questionable about the secular models that penetrate our culture and the church. His desire is to walk in love and allow them to see Jesus in him.

Participant F had developed a greater sensitivity of discernment towards theories, words, and phrases that appeal to sympathetic hearts but can be dangerous if not vetted through scripture and others who you trust. Participant F hoped that more people would dive into this subject without fear of backlash or worry of repercussion. It is an obvious hot topic of our world and has always been an issue since the fall of man. Thankfully the solution to racial disunity has never changed. This project helped make the scriptures plain on this topic. Participant F feels more prepared to go and be the difference maker in her family and in her world.

Participant G is thankful that the thesis project made him search his own heart and find the words to convey how he honestly felt about the topic of race relations in the church, community, and context of his world. Phase 1 began with him throwing answers against the wall. By Phase 4 he was dialed in and thought more intently about his answers and how they play out in the world around him.

The second question was, "Describe the importance of having a biblical view of racial reconciliation."

Participant F knew that the Bible is the supreme authority on matters of love and human interaction. A biblical view and understanding of diversity are required if one desires to see unity and oneness take place in this area. Participant F aspired to teach passages like Luke 10 to her

children to gain a biblical world view of identifying who our neighbor is and how we should treat them.

Participant B also acknowledged this passage as one that is very clear about crossing boundaries of nationality. The Jew versus Gentile narrative clearly points out the disparities and segregationist mentality that exists centuries ago. If anything, this points to the relevance of scripture and how it has contemporary implications for today. The purpose of Jesus telling the story in Luke 10 was to unveil the separatism in the hearts of those who were listening. The unfortunate reality of the story is that Jesus was addressing the self-proclaimed religious leaders. If there was anyone that should have had a godly view towards people, it was the religious leaders. Nevertheless, they were not willing to place their ethnic prestige behind their identity in God.

Participants G and A continued with their belief that reconciliation is impossible to achieve without it being rooted in a scriptural understand and application. The primary reconciliation that needs to take place in the life of an individual is reconciliation unto God. They referenced 2 Corinthians 5:18 which states, *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation”*. Reconciling with others comes as a byproduct of reconciling with God.

Participants C, D, and E accentuated that reconciliation and shame are not the same things. One is supported by scripture while the other is not. Participant D explained that many expect shame and sorrow over racism to result in changed behavior and altered mentalities. The calamitous truth is that guilt, shame, and sorrow do not bear enough theological weight to make someone change. There is nothing that backs the emotion other than the emotion itself. Reconciliation carried the weight because it is backed by the word of God.

The third question was, “What impact on our church and community will be had if we implement an example of love, unity, and oneness within our human interactions?”

Participants C and D expressed a deep love for Life Church and the mission it has been true to. Loving God, loving people, and making disciples is interwoven into everything the church does and is evident, by all who enter. Participants C and D hoped to contribute to the culture of love and acceptance by leading their family according to Deuteronomy 6 and loving their church family and community according to John 17. There is much at stake if we chose to follow our flesh and go for what is comfortable and convenient as opposed to what is biblical and bountiful.

Participant A felt that the impact of love, unity, and oneness on our church and community will reverberate into eternity and break down so many walls that have been put up by Satan. John 13:35 rings in her head which simply conveys that the world will know us (believers) by our love. It is not a complex formula that requires a theological degree to carry out. Love, unity, and oneness is what we live out at the grocery store, on the ball fields, and in our homes. We can accomplish it because Christ taught us how to in his word. Participant E desired to see this lived out in his interactions with fellow classmates at the university. There are many contributing factors and ideologies that govern people’s actions and outlook on Christianity. He hoped to use love, unity, and racial oneness to show secular society how faith in Jesus is meant to be lived out.

Participants F and G believed that Life Church has created a culture that exudes the Christlike definitions of love, unity, and oneness. Christ left instruction for his bride (the church) to prepare herself for his return. Participants F and G knew that Life Church is not perfect, but it

is a great place where people can come and be a part of the bride of Christ without question or concern of acceptance. Participant G worked with a number of people on his job who are not believers and give various reasons as to why they do not frequent church. Participant G desired to be a church of love and unity that impacts the community and is a place where his non-believing coworkers can come and witness something they have possibly never seen before. Love, unity and oneness and what Life Church displays and is all about.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This conclusion will compare the research for the thesis project proposal with the results of the implemented research project. It is here that the reader will understand the relevance and efficacy of the study. The researcher will address how the results of the research project compare to the information gleaned from previous studies and the published work analyzed in the literature review. In addition, the conclusion includes what the researcher learned while implementing the project, and how the results apply in other settings. Finally, there will be an observation of ideas that emerged during the study that merit future research.

Purpose and Brief Overview

The purpose of this thesis project was to help Life Church exemplify racial unity and oneness according to the Scriptures and avoid unhelpful secular methods that threaten racial reconciliation. This desire led the researcher to select seven congregants of Life Church and evaluate their vantage point and perspective on racism. The initial survey questions were intended to capture a raw snapshot of what the participants believed and life experience that shaped their worldview and outlook on race relations. Following the external observation of participants, the researcher then took an internal approach of implementing his process of identifying harmful secular theories that threatened unity and elevated the sole solution that leads to transformative racial reconciliation. An emphasis on biblical unity and oneness was the primary focus. Biblically proving the counterproductive nature of methodologies such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality was necessary to verify their insufficiency as tools of racial unity and oneness. Genesis 1:26 was used to ground racism in sin and show the theological

proof that everyone's life matters because of the creator's divine stamp of worth. Luke 10:25 was exegeted to ascertain the answer to "who is my neighbor?". This highlighted the fact that neighborly identification is not based on who we deem as likable or similar in economic status, ethnicity, or class. It is defined by scripture which classifies everyone in the world as our neighbor. Acts 10 and 11 were observed as an example of cultural separatism that existed in the Bible.

Nonetheless, this scriptural account revealed the sinfulness of that mentality and called on Peter and Christians alike to place the Gospel message above ethnic allegiance. Peter learns the lesson and then returns to his friends in Acts chapter 11. The ultimate thesis statement of chapter 11 is when Peter said, "who was I that I should stand in God's way?". Finally, John 17 was the backdrop of the entire project. Jesus left the Church with a indispensable prayer for unity and oneness. Love for God and love for one another is the ultimate mark that identifies who is a follower of Christ and who is not.

Following the implementation was a series of exit interview questions that were offered to gather insight on what participants learned and seek to exemplify in the context of Life Church and their community.

Relevance and Efficacy of the Study

The researcher grew up in a household that taught him to be intellectual, inquisitive, and unapologetic about following Christ. The conversation about race rarely arose, but there was an undertow of understanding that being black in America meant that the proceeding qualities would have to be polished and pristine. Primarily because skin color had the potential to limit acceptance amongst white people, but qualifications possessed the capability to elevate one to tolerable status. This came because of parents who were reared under the roof of a mother and

father who endured the atrocities of a segregated Jim Crow south. Their experiences created a deep distrust for whites due to the blatant racism that was endured. Stories were told of Ku Klux Klan members invading the 60-acre farm they owned with threats to burn them out. They were the objects of subjugation to degrading hate speech and disrespect because of the color of their skin.

Unfortunately, the hatefulness of the past carries a lingering effect that reverberates into the future if not dealt with. This study is relevant and carries significant weight today because our world is still broken and, in some ways, will always be racially fragmented until Christ returns. The researcher's family history was explained so that the reader can better understand what led to the longing to write a thesis project on this subject. The efficacy of the project comes into play when one can take the reality of racial brokenness from past hurts and turn it into a powerful weapon of strength and reconciliation.

This project brings tremendous value to the body of Christ because there seems to be a genuine desire to find solutions to racial disunity. This project observes what exists in the realm of racial discussion and tests its legitimacy to produce reconciliatory outcomes. Secular models such as Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality were evaluated as well as text and passages throughout the Bible. They enter the ring of philosophical and soteriological battle where one victor will emerge. The researcher proves how secular theories are knocked out in the opening round by the first punch of grounding racism in sin and not social, behavioral mishaps. Since racism is sin, specific biblical instructions deal with sin, which ultimately leads to the solution of unity, oneness, and reconciliation.

Lessons Learned

Russell Moore in his book *The Gospel and Racial Reconciliation* highlights the question of wondering how often followers of Jesus obey the commandment to love one's neighbor¹⁰⁸. The project specifically looked at how this is applied to issues of race and ethnicity. The study garnished information that leads the researcher to believe that the universal Church is lacking in this area. The most segregated hour of the week happens on Sunday mornings. According to Moore, if God's greatest commandment for the Christian (after loving Him) is to love one another, then the Church must begin there as it thinks through racial reconciliation¹⁰⁹. The prevailing action in the westernized American Church is a separation of ethnicities due to the style of worship and denominationalism. Those are two categories that have diluted the biblical call to unity and have placed performance and preference over unity and oneness. The minds of believers have been dulled by secular culturalism to believe that God is okay with his Church liberating themselves from biblical commands to walk in togetherness and love towards one another.

The research project gleaned additional information on the topic of hindrances towards unity in the literary review of Latasha Morrison's *Be the Bridge*. Morrison took a stance that race is constructed by man and all social constructs carry an inherent bias against people of color¹¹⁰. The thesis project revealed that the composition of race was God's idea. He created humanity

¹⁰⁸ Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker, *The Gospel and Racial Reconciliation*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016), 39.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 39

¹¹⁰ Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation*. (NY, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2019): 23.

and designed it in such a way that reflects His glory through diversity. Sin is a part of the equation regarding race and social constructs. Government is a biblical order that warrants respect and Godly influence to enact proper biblical justice.

Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* explained that white people are in the position to oppress people of color collectively and throughout the whole of society.¹¹¹ She also adds that white identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside of the system of white supremacy.¹¹² This was an eye-opening statement for the participants to hear. All rejected the idea and gave evidence as to why this belief is full of fallacies and untruths. As a result of unearthing this ideology, participants were able to see the threat this proposed to achieve racial unity, not only in the Church but in the world. The researcher proved how the acceptance of a White Fragility doctrine could and will result in never-ending hostility and disunity.

The researcher primarily learned that racial unity and oneness are accomplished through biblical intentionality. Scripture written but not applied plays no part in the advancement of personal spiritual or kingdom growth. The Bible does not merely recommend unity but commands it as a part of Christian identification. A lack of racial unity amongst the Church sends a very confusing message to the world that the marching orders and implementation of those instructions do not coincide. Intentionally, all sides of the ethnic coin must be engaged so that unity can be accomplished. All sides must realize their part to play and pursue it with gospel integrity. Those in the majority culture must accept the reality that racism is in existence and understand the lingering effects that 400 years of ungodly mistreatment and segregation still

¹¹¹ Robin J. DiAngelo. *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Race*. (Boston: Beacon, 2016), 79.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 172

have on today's America. Those in the minority culture must cease from condemning an entire Anglo ethnic group of people based on the potential sins of their forefathers. An inability to concede and reconcile sends the issue to future generations.

Outside Implications

These results apply in other settings such as non-profit para-church ministries like Navigators, Young Life, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). These ministries are on the front lines of working with students and athletes who may not regularly attend Church. Implementing the biblical worldview on racial reconciliation to para-church ministries can take the message further faster. Organizations like FCA primarily have a footprint in elementary, middle, high school, and college campuses. Their emphasis is to share the Gospel through the platform of sports.

Sports is one of the greatest tools of unification in the world. Language, skin color, economic class, demographic, and nationality are no longer barriers when a ball is rolled out on a field, and the rules of the sport have been established. The other greatest unifier of people is the Gospel. Language, skin color, economic class, demographics, and nationality are also no longer barriers when it comes to who qualifies for salvation. FCA has a tremendous opportunity to apply the results of this study because of the influence athletes have to create change. Sharing the message of biblical racial reconciliation and warning people about the harmful effects of secular racial models would advance the truth to homes that may never hear it in a church building.

Future Research and Implementation

It could be beneficial to study the harmful effects that arise because of churches that embrace CRT and Intersectionality into their teaching and study curriculum. Observation that

delves into the outcome of leadership who allow their Church to be shaped by unvetted theories that sound helpful but are harmful. Also, further research could explore how relationships have been ethnically reconciled through the biblical application of John 17. There is a great emphasis in the project on the solution that is accomplished through implementing God's commands through scripture. Studying real-life cases that achieve reconciliation through the researcher's implementation could merit further research. Additionally, examining the negative effect of counter racism and how it furthers generational separatism and segregation—looking into how a sense of ethnic pride can lead to racial elitism, if not adequately checked and filtered through a biblical premise.

Words and phrases carry meaning both explicitly and overtly. Some terms that are associated with race carry negative worldly connotations that imply certain leanings and beliefs. The phrase *black lives matter* is a fact, but it carries negative implications due to its association with a particular organization. Further study on how race-related words and phrases carry implied meaning would be worth advance study and research. Additionally, further study is warranted that inspects the benefit of using specific biblical language that flows in concert with biblical application and outcomes. The word *partiality* is a term that can be explicitly linked to a biblical understanding of unity or disunity. Uncovering a list of terminology that unambiguously carries connotations of biblical racial reconciliation merits future research.

There are three specific areas that could greatly benefit from further implementation of this project. Those categories are the home, the Church, and the community. Families are where world views and ideologies are formed. The greatest war against the next generation of sensible and sympathetic people is waged in the home. This project has the potential to be conformed into a curriculum that identifies, highlights, and elevates Christ centered unity. Instructions

to parents on how to train their children in a systematic approach through the prayer Jesus prayed in John chapter 17. It would also be important to explain what Kingdom identity looks like. Many people place their ethnicity out front as the leading identifier, but families and children can be taught on what it looks like to find their identity firstly as an image bearer of God according to Genesis 1:26. Families can also study Matthew 28 which gives them marching orders to go make disciples of all nations. This is intended to open up their westernized perspectives, focusing them on global missions and a heart for the nations.

The bulk of this thesis project was dedicated to the context of the local church. However, there are two ways in which further curriculum can be developed. The first is a simplified version of this thesis project that serves as a roadmap to show how the church can effectively engage in racial reconciliation. It is necessary to explain the biblical mandate of unity and oneness according to John chapter 17. It is also paramount to explain the various harmful methodologies like Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality that offer no real solution to bigotry and racism. The second approach for the Church is to construct a curriculum for pastors and church leaders that lays out the obligation they must properly discern and navigate the topic of racial reconciliation. A biblical approach that highlights passages like Acts chapters 10 and 11 to show how leaders can have preconceived ideologies that hinder unity. Also, to show how repentance is essential when counter biblical actions are discovered within one's heart. In addition, a list of resources that are harmful to advancing the biblical call to unity and a list of resources that endorse the biblical call of unity.

Finally, the place where Christian values and scriptural allegiance are lived out is in the marketplace. It is in cooperate spaces in real life moments. The researcher refers to this as the community. This is the place where racial tension has been visually broadcast and seen the most.

It is also the place where a solid biblical curriculum can be felt the greatest. Developing workshops that allow for honest and open discussion without the spirit of offense will serve an important tool to open honest discussion. Emphasizing scripture that promotes neighborly love such as Luke chapter 10 and First John chapter 2 will be the backdrop for the curriculum. Also, instituting practical ways to celebrate differences, considering God's divine design to intentionally create a diverse world will serve to unify cultures as opposed to separating them. If the home is equipped, the church has been properly taught, and the community is truly unified, the world will then feel the impact of what believers can do when they apply biblical authority and application to their everyday lives.

Recommendations for Ministry Leaders

The desire of this project was to be intensely theological yet immensely practical. Addressing race in our current cultural climate was a risk due to the heightened sensitivity and fragility of our world. It seemed like every day there was a new media story that was replete with racial tension and hostility. Racial lines were being drawn in the sand, and everyone was expected to pick a side, especially the Church. To side against organizations like Black Lives Matter insinuated a lack of compassion and instigated a label of racism and bigotry. In many church circles, joining the conversation about race meant embracing liberalism and socialism. Colin Kaepernick's decision to take a knee at football games during the national anthem insighted riots between nationalists and activists. The death of African Americans at the hands of police prompted street vandalism and looting. Race wars were impending while White House insurrections were happening. Political affiliation led to a lack of association amongst family and friends. Those we claimed to love became enemies. Those we profess to care for were abandoned. Those who are our neighbors became our foe. The Church we were meant to be

caved under pressure, and many shouted with a loud voice, “we have no king but Cesar” (John 19:15).

It sounds like a tragic ending. However, that is not the end of the story. Where many defected and strayed from sound doctrine, a remnant of believers held firm to the blood-stained banner of biblical truth and inerrancy. Since the Bible is infallible, it is also trustworthy of filtering the heap of ideologies that regularly come to deceive the body of Christ. Satan will cause dissension amongst people and try his best to have that disunity creep its way into the Church. This is no different than what plagued the 1st century Corinthian Church. False teachers would come in and try to sway the people away from sound doctrine, but Paul would not allow it to be so.

So, where do we go from here? What indications do we have that give us hope for a racially unified future? There are several suggestions that the researcher would like to offer to key influencers that possess the capability to usher in tremendous change and biblical application in racial unity. Firstly, pastors must understand how vital their role is as a shepherd of the sheep. Ministers have been tasked with the responsibility to guard the sheep against vicious wolves that would seek to destroy and devour the flock. They must stay on watch and feed their sheep a steady diet of proper theological nourishment.

It is also important that pastors remember their position as representatives of God and not representatives of social, economic, or political affiliations. Christian Nationalism is repugnant and makes a mockery of the Gospel. The Church will render itself useless if it places political allegiance over biblical allegiance or causes people to believe that biblical fidelity and political loyalty are one in the same. While there is nothing that biblically prohibits a love for one's

country, there is a clear priority that Christ-followers are ambassadors of the heavenly kingdom first.

Pastors should not only protect the sheep but also empower the sheep to go fellowship with other sheep. Far too long, the Church has segregated itself out of fear and assumption that ethnic difference equals division. Pastors must have the courage to address divisive mentalities and call people to repentance if they harbor racial resentment in their hearts. Then the pastor should be intentional about crossing racial lines and breaking down ethnic walls of hostility to fulfill the prayer Jesus prayed in John 17. Practical steps include adding more ethnically diverse staff and ministry leaders to the team. Also, intentionally fellowshipping with other congregations that look different than the one they pastor. This could take place through holiday services, special community services, and worship nights that display different styles of singing and musical expression. The goal is to breed unity amongst the people of God. Churches have cultures that are formed due to stylistic worship preferences which is okay. One must, however, never use those differences as a reason to remain separated.

The researcher would also provide implications for the universal Church. Every local body (Church) has a culture that is full of subcultures that influence the personality of the fellowship. Some churches are known as the hipster church, while others are branded as the seeker-sensitive Church. Some carry the persona of being super conservative, while others are deemed charismatic or reformed. Either way, all churches have an identity. The prayer is that churches would embrace the desire to become those who carry out the love of God towards all people by following the Word of God to all people. This type of love does not lead to an acceptance of sin. It, however, leads to Luke 11 neighborly love that transcends color, ethnicity, and nationality.

The final desire for the body of Christ is that we embrace a theological balance when it comes to racial unity and oneness. There are extremes on both sides of the biblical conversation about race. One extreme ideology leads to lessened self-worth by both majority and minority people groups. It furthers the divide by making blanket statements of condemnation on entire people groups and details how minorities will never be anything other than oppressed, suppressed, repressed, and depressed. Churches should lament the wrongs of the past by apologizing for being white and embracing black liberation theology.

The other extreme leads to apathy towards issues of injustice and general indifference about the conversation of racial reconciliation. Preaching the Gospel is an excuse to continue to hide behind the lectern and pretend like nothing is happening in the world around you. Following either of these extremes leads to radicalism which is a barrier to unity. It is important that compassion and discernment from all sides be embraced. There should be longing for remnants of Revelation 7:9 to be seen here on earth as we wait for the manifestation and culmination of it in heaven.

Until the day of redemption comes when all things will be made new, let us strive to be ministers of reconciliation to a lost world that needs to see how disciples of Jesus conduct themselves. The world we exist in is broken, but Jesus promised that it would not remain that way. The promise of a new heaven and new earth are impending, and in that redeemed place we have this guarantee: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

February 15, 2021

Nolen Wood
R. Peter Mason

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-616 Biblical Racial Unity and Oneness Dear Nolen Wood and R. Peter Mason,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

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Appendix A

Consent Form

Introduction: My name is Nolen, and I am a member of Life Church conducting a Racial Unity study for my Doctorate of Ministry thesis project. My telephone number is: _____. My professor (or research supervisor) is _____ and his/her phone number is _____. You may contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to help Life Church exemplify racial unity according to the Scriptures and avoid unhelpful secular racial reconciliation methods.

Procedure: If you consent, you will be asked several questions in an oral interview that will take place at Life Church. I will make an audiotape recording of the interview.

Time required: The interview will take approximately 1–2 hours of your time.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks: There are no known risks associated with this interview. However, you might feel distressed in the course of the conversation. If this happens, please inform me promptly.

Benefits: While there is no guaranteed benefit, it is possible that you will enjoy sharing your answers to these questions or that you will find the conversation meaningful. This study is intended to benefit the congregation of Life Church by enlivening our discourse on the theology and practice of biblical racial unity.

Confidentiality/Anonymity: Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person present for the interview and the only person who listens to the tapes. When I write the ethnography, I will use pseudonyms—made up names—for all participants, unless you specify in writing that you wish to be identified by name.

If you wish to choose your own pseudonym for the study, please indicate the first name you would like me to use for you here: _____.

Sharing the results: I plan to construct an ethnography—a written account of what I learn—based on these interviews together with my reading and historical research. This ethnography will be submitted to my professor (or research supervisor) at the end of the term.

I also plan to share what I learn from this study with the congregation of Life Church. Portions of the ethnography may be printed and made available to the members.

Publication: There is the possibility that I will publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above), and I may alter some identifying details to further protect your anonymity.

Before you sign: By signing below, you agree to an audiotaped interview for this research study. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you decide to participate in this study, a copy of this document will be given to you.¹¹³

¹¹³ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011), 236.

Appendix B

Phase One Survey Question

Is racism mostly a problem of the past, not the present? Why or why not?

Do you believe that there is hostility amongst racial groups today? If so, why do you think it exists?

Does mainstream media have a negative impact on race relations? Why or Why not?

Are people of color often put at a social disadvantage because of their race when they enter a majority white culture church like Life Church? Why or why not?

Is reverse racism or prejudicial treatment of white people a problem in our community? If not a problem, explain. If it is a problem, please explain how this is displayed.

Appendix C

Phase Two Survey Question

Do you believe that racism is rooted in Sin, or is it more of a social, behavioral defect? Please explain your answer.

Appendix D

Phase Three Survey Questions and Definitions

In your opinion, is Life Church contributing to racial unity or racial disunity? Explain

Definitions:

Critical Race Theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, emotions, and the unconscious.¹¹⁴

Intersectionality is an analytical tool used to examine the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender. They apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.¹¹⁵

Should Life Church embrace social/secular models like Critical Race Theory to address racial unity? Please explain your answer.

Is Intersectionality an analytical tool that can be supported by scripture? Why or why not?

Do you believe that Guilt and Shame should be used as tools to address racism towards minority cultures and create repentance in majority cultures? Why or why not? What biblical implications support your answer?

¹¹⁴ Stefancic J., Delgado, R., and A. Harris, 3.

¹¹⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, 22.

Appendix E

Phase Four Implementation

How we Biblically Ground Racism in Sin.

Biblical support for how all of humanity is created in the image of God.

Detail and description of threats to unity.

How we achieve Biblical racial unity and oneness.

Appendix F

Phase Five Exit Interview Questions

How would you say your perspective has changed from the phase 1 intervention to now?

Describe the importance of having a biblical view of racial reconciliation.

What impact on our church and community will be had if we implement and exemplify biblically center love and human interaction?