

Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian

John Piper

Wheaton: Crossway, 2011

304 pp. \$22.99 hardback

Reviewed by: M. Sydney Park

This recent volume by John Piper (foreword by Tim Keller), is a strong argument for the gospel message as the solution for one of the most unrelenting problems of humanity—racism. As any reader familiar with Piper’s work would expect, *Bloodlines* ultimately seeks to glorify God in the pursuit of racial reconciliation in 21st century America. For Piper, the past and present sins of racial discrimination can only be effectively resolved through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, racial reconciliation is, ultimately, inseparable from the gospel message of Jesus Christ preached by the New Testament writers.

The book has two main sections. The first section provides the necessary foundation: a description and assessment of the relevant issues in racial relations. Piper’s testimony (31ff.) of his own conversion from the quiet yet active racism of his youth is not only touching but profound, since he lived through an era of blatant racism in the Deep South (1960s, Greenville, SC). His transparency enhances the rest of the first section as he explores the labyrinthine issues and nuances of modern day racism, particularly in America. He gives a rationale for his exclusive focus on black-white relations in America (59ff.), but one wonders if further attention to other ethnic groups (Asians, Hispanics, etc.) would have been more helpful, especially in light of U.S. population increases among non-Caucasian and non-African

ethnic groups. Nevertheless, his examination of the past and current racial tensions between blacks and whites is informative and insightful. And his division of personal responsibility and systemic intervention bluntly addresses the need to reevaluate and reformulate solutions. Yet, it was unclear whether the book aimed to address the problem of racism within the church or in the public forum. While Christian faith and convictions should be evident within and without the church (as courageously modeled by Wilberforce), it seems necessary to clarify the beginning point. That America, as well as other nations, suffers from the disease of racism is clear. That Christians should have a sanctifying effect in the world is also clear. But can the church address racism in the secular dimension when clearly the issue still plagues the church? Perhaps, Christians need to get their own house in order before trying their hand in the political realm.

The second section delivers the theological bases for racial reconciliation for Christians. Delivered in what is now customary fashion by Piper, the section not only articulates the inevitable implications of the gospel message for racial reconciliation, but does so with explicit intent to glorify God each step of the way. It will be impossible for any believer to read this section and continue to maintain their racist convictions, at least not without some discomfort. His assessment takes the reader from the basic meaning of salvation in Jesus Christ, through sanctification and finally the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21. But his use of reformed theology and the five points of Calvinism to structure the entire theological analysis are, if not wholly unanticipated, disjunctive. In spite of the fact that his presentation of the centrality of Calvinist theology in the dissolution of racism is persuasively argued, one wonders whether racial reconciliation can only be achieved by proponents of reformed theology? And if so, are the reformed churches leading the charge for racial reconciliation? Theological differences notwithstanding, Piper's primary message is clear; the gospel cannot be severed from its multi-ethnic (or "all nations") implications; if one is to claim salvation in Jesus' name, one cannot cling to racial pride or bias.

The book ends with a significant emphasis on interracial marriage and a brief analysis of universal biases (203ff.). These are two issues that all will confront at some point in their lives. The growing statistics on interracial marriage suggest that it is a pervasive trend throughout American life. And of course, each person will necessarily deal with personal biases based on generalizations. Both subjects are admirably addressed from a biblical perspective. And the concluding 4 appendices are informative and inspiring, particularly appendices 2 and 3 which shed some light on Piper's personal beliefs and practices as communicated in the volume.

In conclusion, despite some minor disagreements, Piper's *Bloodlines* resoundingly communicates the need for *believers* to promote racial reconciliation. To champion Christ and to effectively proclaim him as Lord is to advocate and to practice racial reconciliation.

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