



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH LAUREL, MARYLAND

Racial Reconciliation

Preamble: The following statement has been written and approved by the Elders of First Baptist church of Laurel, MD and is both supported and taught in the pulpit ministry.

Introduction:

FBCL must create a gospel community that values the image of God in all people. Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female." We affirm that all people are wonderfully created (Psalm 139:14), and each person bears the image of God (Gen. 1:27). As image bearers, mankind was commissioned by God to watch and work within the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). This is often referred to as the Cultural Mandate. This individual command to cultivate a culture resulted in a flourishing society, because Adam and Eve were without sin; however, in Genesis 3, the Fall of mankind and the introduction of sin changed everything. Now, the individual sins of Adam and Eve have implications of bias, prejudice, and partiality because the individuals who were creating the policies, procedures, and practices for the land and people were broken. Broken individuals create broken structures. Likewise, all humans bear the same sin nature as Adam (Rom. 5:12) and apart from Christ are incapable of producing policies, procedures, or practices that are unstained by sin.

FBCL Stands Against Individual and Structural Racism:

Unfortunately, racial prejudice has a long history in the United States. We do not want to ignore this fact. Further compounding the issue, the Southern Baptist Convention, to which FBCL belongs, was birthed out of a denominational split over the issue of slavery. We wish these facts were not true, but they are, and we must be willing to admit them. While our country has made great strides over the last century to rid itself of segregation, partiality, and racial bias, we acknowledge there is still a structural problem of racism that must be confronted. We ultimately believe that individual and structural racism can be manifested both intentionally or unintentionally and is a sin. The only cure is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Structural racism in the United States is the sum total of the repetition of the various societal structures that began during the slavery era and evolved/expanded through slave codes and Jim Crow laws. It aims to ensure inequality in the balance and distribution of land, power, resources, and equity.

In Scripture, the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the people in Jeremiah 7:5-7 exhorting them toward living justly with the oppressed. In the New Testament, Jesus took pity upon the Samaritan woman in John 4. Culturally, scrupulous Jews would always avoid Samaria. They would have preferred to take a longer detour by crossing the Jordan river and avoid contaminating themselves with the people of Samaria. Sadly, this attitude of racial elitism continues today and manifests itself in new ways. While racial prejudice is both an individual and structural problem rooted in sin, we affirm there is a complete solution rooted in the grace of Jesus. Romans 5:20 states, "but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (ESV).

FBCL will not be silent or complicit with racist ideologies, beliefs, or acts:

- Galatians 3:28 – "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" (ESV).
- Proverbs 31:8-9 – "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" (ESV).
- Micah 6:8 tells us that the Lord requires us: (1) to act justly, (2) to love kindness, and (3) to walk humbly with our God.

The invisible, universal church must not be silent when it comes to racial oppression. Similarly, FBCL must not be silent on this issue. We reject any notion that this is a political issue and embrace the truth that this is a gospel-centered issue. Scripture urges the people of God to speak out against injustice and proclaim the truth wherever they go. Believers bear the responsibility to address all things that impact God's creation, namely, humanity.

FBCL commits to bearing one another's burdens through cultural awareness:

Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (ESV). Carrying each other's burdens is one of the most important responses in situations of racial tension. We need to make every effort to bear the burdens that many of our brothers and sisters of color are carrying. These are burdens that most white/Caucasian people or people of some level of privilege have never had to experience. And often, sadly, our brothers and sisters of color are carrying the

weight of these heavy burdens by themselves. Racial reconciliation involves quite a bit more than simply sharing burdens, but it never involves less than this.

It is often easier to avoid thinking about things that do not affect us, but if we are gospel people, we must be aware of the pain that others are going through (Rom 12:12). For those of us who are not people of color, we should also be aware of the privileges we experience that others do not. Likewise, we should use any position of privilege or strength that we enjoy as a means of leverage toward racial reconciliation for the glory of God. We are called to share the burdens that our brothers and sisters of color live with as if those burdens were our own.

When it comes to things like protesting after a viral racially motivated incident, some people may feel like they need to express themselves because of the experiences they have had. We grieve, mourn, and lament over racial injustice. FBCL commits to listen to others within our community and try to learn from their perspective. All of us can—and should—do this. In order to listen to someone else, we must know them first. We cannot listen to people that we are not in community with. Our first step should be to get in community with people of color and listen.

FBCL affirms racial reconciliation as a gospel issue:

The race issue fundamentally exists because of Adam's transgression in the Garden of Eden. As a result of this transgression, a universal curse was placed upon the entirety of creation. This curse affected every part of mankind and has been referred to as the noetic effects of the fall. The curse shows itself in how we approach God or flee from Him, and it also shows itself in how we relate to each other rightly. In Genesis 1 and 2 everything God created was perfect and beautiful, but sin quickly entered the picture in Genesis 3. Shortly after, Scripture records the first murder. The first hostile act between human beings takes place almost immediately after sin entered creation.

The solution to the sin of racism can be found in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God begins to work after Adam's transgression in His promise of a coming redeemer in Genesis 3:15. The greatest work God does is reconciling sinners to Himself and sinners to one another through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:13-14 states, "But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (ESV). The Apostle Paul said Jesus died to kill the dividing wall between

Jews and Gentiles. Jesus reconciled Jews and Gentiles both to God and one another by means of the cross.

Racial reconciliation is more than an implication of the gospel. Racial reconciliation is within the gospel itself. An implication of the gospel sounds as though maybe it is important, but it's not explicitly stated. We believe the Bible explicitly states: God is going to crush the head of the serpent by means of the seed of the woman. God is going to bless the nations through Abraham and God does that by sending Jesus, a Jewish Messiah, to die on the cross for Jews and Gentiles. God the Father also then raised him up from the dead for both Jews and Gentiles. We believe that racism is not a mere social issue. We affirm that racism is a gospel issue. It is a social issue insofar as the gospel speaks to people in societies in the real world, yet it is ultimately a gospel issue insofar as the gospel of Jesus Christ alone can bridge the gap of racial divide.

Action Steps by FBCL

1. We **affirm** a commitment to the Gospel.
2. We **affirm** racial reconciliation is a necessary implication of the gospel. It is not primarily a sociologically or politically motivated issue. Heart transformation through Christ is the answer.
3. We **affirm** racism is a sin. Comments, actions, or behaviors from FBCL members that are intentionally or unintentionally racist in nature will be biblically confronted according to Matthew 18. Repentance is the goal, but church discipline may be the consequence.
4. We **repent** and continue to live our repentance of individual and/or corporate bias or prejudice that has been present in our church.
5. We **lament** the horrors of racism toward people of color.
6. We **commit** to listen to brothers and sisters in Christ who are from different cultures, races, and ethnicities. We will accomplish this by elevating these voices through forums, workshops, leadership positions, etc.
7. We **commit** to build relationships and community with those from different backgrounds. We can accomplish this within our FBCL family, our workplace, our neighborhood, our workout facility, other hobbies, etc.
8. We **commit** to rise above the narrative and be the change that we desire.