

You are probably getting tired of these comments and articles. Yet at the same time, for the church to be a witness, we have to keep examining ourselves as well as the society and world around us. Racism and the attitudes and actions that go with it – don't go away automatically. In one sense they are natural because of sin. In another sense they are learned. And in yet another sense, history tells us any group with some power is very hesitant and unwilling to relinquish it. Especially when they find they have advantages of any kind.

And over time it gets so built in to our system and way of living, that we don't even notice it. One time I noticed it was when a black man, who was not threatening the police, was filled with 18 holes. So I began saying, the police are putting too many holes into people of color. And then I began noticing, even when police were resisted, and were protecting themselves, the number of shots they made. This was / is usually way more than necessary. Even by this measure, enough is enough.

And then later I noticed the number of persons shot in the back – because of what I began calling – lazy policing. Instead of chasing the suspect, it's easier to pull out a gun and use it. Makes me ask the question – how many police officers are out of shape? I know it's hard to chase a young person, but using lethal force – especially when you have the person's vehicle and driver's license in your hand?

So as much as I appreciate the police and the difficult role they have, and dislike the disrespect that is often shown them, we know there is a better way. For the police and for all citizens. So this reminder about human depravity and that Jesus loves everyone as an example for us, may help us reflect some more about our own attitudes as well as the society we live in. And how we understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way to find peace as well as societal solutions to being equal under the law.

In This Fraught Racial Moment, We Need a Refresher on Human Depravity

We also need a reminder of God's radical grace.

TISH HARRISON WARREN

| **SEPTEMBER 10, 2020** **CHRISTIANITY TODAY**

As a renewed focus on race and justice have dominated the national conversation over the past few months, I've watched with sadness as the response among some white Christians has fallen along ideological and political lines. Some conservatives belittle the reality of racism. They acknowledge that racism is a sin, but they see it as mostly a relic of the past or merely the wrong actions of a small, dwindling group of people. On the other hand, some moderate or progressive Christians are overcome with guilt and shame, quick to condemn others, and often unsure of how the gospel of Jesus should impact conversations about our own racial bias and sin.

The failure of white Christians on the Left and the Right to grapple with the sin of racism is rooted in our broader failure to understand the profundity and complexity of human depravity. We fail to acknowledge our depth of sin, so we fail to see the dizzying heights of grace.

Over these past few months, I have frequently thought of an [oft-quoted line](#) from the late pastor Jack Miller: "You're a lot worse than you think you are, but in Jesus you're far more loved than you could

ever imagine.” If we want to come to terms with the horror of white supremacy and racial bias in our country and in ourselves, we must hold to *both* of these realities simultaneously.

American evangelicals often view sin primarily as the sum of individual, conscious, immoral choices. Historically, however, the church has viewed sin not merely in terms of volitional decisions but also as the disordered state of our hearts: the subtle idolatry that we bear often without noticing it, the way we love the wrong things and fail to love what is most lovely, and the way we worship ourselves and set ourselves up as God. Like all sin, racism is fundamentally a disordered orientation toward the world. In this way, it isn't chiefly *chosen* but is habituated and practiced in ways that are as subtle as they are destructive.

In a [recent article](#) for the Religion News Service, James K.A. Smith writes that racial bias “is absorbed through practices we never think about.” He notes that, although white evangelicals may recognize racism as a “false doctrine,” they miss how racism functions “as perceptual vice: a disordered habit of seeing others. Such vice is carried in our bodies more than it is articulated by our intellect.”

When white Christians react to the accusation of racism and racial injustice with self-defensiveness and denial of our culpability and complicity, we are not simply failing to be “woke”; we are failing to take sin as seriously as God does. When we reduce sin to a merely conscious, rational, or cognitive choice, we fail to understand what all sin (including racism) actually is. We fail to see how sin—inherent disorder—is endemic not only in certain individuals but also in cultures, societal structures, and institutions. And we fail to see that our own quest for righteousness is hopeless.

If we have a diminished notion of sin, we inevitably have a diminished vision of the redemption of Jesus. But if as white Christians our sin of racism is worse than we think, then redemption is also bigger than we think. Racial bias and white supremacy are not more powerful than the death and resurrection of Jesus. Grace allows us to give up the mad task of justifying ourselves.

White Christians cannot confront the horror of racism in America (Canada or anywhere) unless we believe ourselves to be beloved and forgiven in Jesus. We bear the individual and cultural disorder caused by 400 years of oppression through slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, redlining, and inequality. We continue to reap what our history and idolatry have sown in our institutions, churches, cultures, habits, and dispositions. That burden of guilt and shame is frankly too much for a human being to carry without being crushed. We have only one hope: that in Christ, we are far more loved than we could ever imagine.