

Seg. 4a: Racing to a BOLDER Faith – Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together

Slide 1



Racing to a BOLDER Faith
Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together

Segment 4 of 5

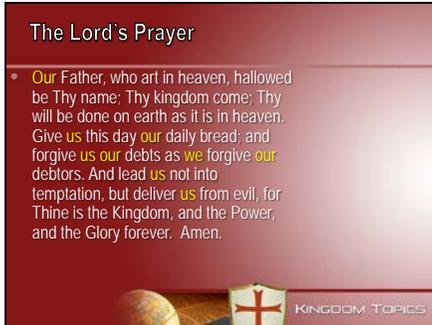
Heb 12:1b ...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

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Once again, thanks for the opportunity to be with you, and welcome to Segment 4 of "Racing to a BOLDER Faith" entitled "Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together". In this Segment we will explore some ways to help us work together as a team within the body of Christ to put all of the pieces of our bolder faith together.

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The Lord's Prayer

- Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory forever. Amen.

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Before we pray the Lord's prayer together as has been our custom, let's pause to reflect on the dramatic corporate dimension of this prayer. Notice:

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory forever. Amen.**

You know, as individualistic westerners, this corporate dimension to our faith is not in our cultural DNA, and as a result, we have developed a more individualistic faith than God may have intended. This individualistic tendency is easily seen in many of the worship song lyrics that we sing today. I'm not saying that contemporary worship songs are not good, but I would suggest that it is harder for us to think corporately if we are singing songs with the pronouns "I and me" more often than "we and us"! Something for us to think about.

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The Lord's Prayer

- Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory forever. Amen.

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So then, let's pray the Lord's Prayer together as we start our class this morning.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory forever. Amen.

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Briefly returning once again to our analogy of marathon running, I have found over the years that nothing helps you get through the long miles of running a marathon – whether during the long, cold training months or during the actual day of the race – better than the companionship of a team running with you. Not only does it provide accountability, advice, and assistance – like pacing – the running conversations also provide a very welcome distraction from the constant complaints that you receive from your body! Similarly, as we race to a bolder faith, I would suggest that we need to develop a strong corporate dimension to our daily walk with Christ – particularly in the area of having a good spiritual team around us.

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In this fourth Segment of Racing to a Bolder Faith, our acronym is the word R.A.C.E. that represents 3 verbs and 1 noun:

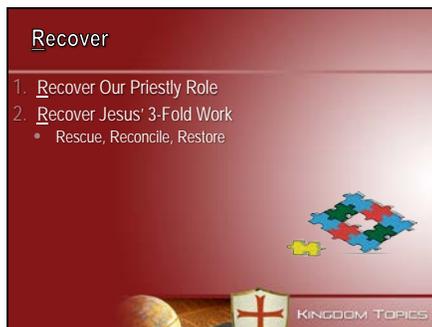
*Recover

*Agree

*Cleanse

*Ekklesia – the Greek word Ekklesia as you may know translates into English as the word “church”.

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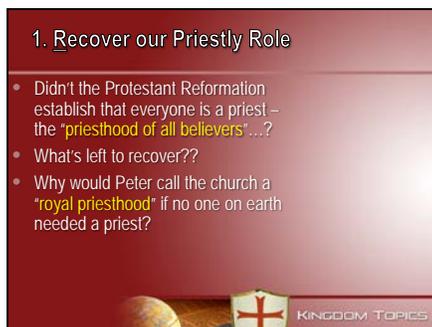
First, let's talk about the “R” in our R.A.C.E acronym which represents the word Recover. In order for us to be running a good RACE together I would suggest it is essential that we:

*Recover our priestly role, and

*Recover Jesus' 3-Fold Work, which as you may recall we discussed in the preface to Segment 1 and again in Segment 3 -

*the 3 R's – Rescue, Reconcile, Restore.

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So, let's begin with Recover Our Priestly Role.

Now, some of you might be thinking, “Eric, didn't we already do something like this about 500 years ago?”

*Didn't the Protestant Reformation establish that everyone is a priest - the “**priesthood of all believers**” - so there is no special class of people who should mediate the knowledge, presence, and forgiveness of Christ to the rest of believers?

*So then, what's left to recover?” Well, once again, you ask an excellent question, and as I've said before, you are a very sharp group!

*Please let me offer a question in response to help us find the answer. The question is,

*Why would Peter call the church a “**royal priesthood**” if no one on earth needed a priest??

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A Royal Priesthood

- 1 Peter 2:9a **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...** NIV
- Who are we supposed to be "priests" for?
- What are we supposed to be doing for them as priests?



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1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. NIV Since we Christians don't need a human priest because we can go directly to Jesus, then the logical questions are:

*who are we supposed to be priests for? And,
*what, exactly, are we supposed to be doing for them as priests? To get some insight on these questions, let's look back into the book of Exodus to what I would suggest was "The Great Commission" of the Old Testament.

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The Great Commission of the O.T.

- Ex 19:5-6 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** NIV



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Ex 19:5-6 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, **6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** NIV
So what did that mean? Let's take a look at what Warren Wiersbe says about this.

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The Great Commission of the O.T.

- "It was God's intent that all Israel live as priests, manifesting His truth and sharing His blessings with the world. Israel was to be God's "showcase" to the Gentiles, proving to them that there is but one true and living God and that serving Him is the way to fullness of blessing (Isa 42:6; 49:6)."
- (The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament © 2001-2004 by Warren W. Wiersbe. All rights reserved.)



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"It was God's intent that all Israel live as priests, manifesting His truth and sharing His blessings with the world. Israel was to be God's "showcase" to the Gentiles, proving to them that there is but one true and living God and that serving Him is the way to fullness of blessing (Isa 42:6; 49:6)." (The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament © 2001-2004 by Warren W. Wiersbe. All rights reserved.)

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Good Stewards of God's Kingdom?

- Mark 11:17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" NIV
- The Temple market was in the "Court of the Gentiles" – the only place that Gentiles were allowed to come to pray and worship God!



So, were the Israelites good stewards of God's Kingdom? Did they manifest God's truth and share God's blessings with the world? Well, let's see what Jesus had to say! Recall when Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers in the temple. He said

*Mark 11:17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" NIV Curiously, we can sometimes get distracted as we read this account and miss the main point that Jesus was making.

*The Temple market was in the Court of the Gentiles – the only place in the temple that Gentiles were allowed to come to pray and worship God. These Courts were far away from the inner courts because only Israel could come close to God. Like "robbers", the Israelites had stolen this precious Gentile worship space and had turned it into a market selling merchandise. There was nothing wrong with selling animals for sacrifice – in fact God had told them to do this. The central problem was where they set up the market. This "theft" of the Gentile worship space by the Israelites for their own enrichment demonstrated a complete disregard for the Gentile nations – the very people that God had commissioned Israel as a corporate group to serve in their role as priests. But there are two more curious aspects to this event.

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Temple "Cast-out" Event

- Nowhere does the Bible use the word "cleansed" to describe this event!
- In all 3 accounts (Matt. 21:12-13, Mk. 11:15-18, Luke 19:45-48) Jesus "cast out" those who were buying and selling.
- "Cast out" (ekballo) is the same Greek word used in the Bible when Jesus cast out demons.



When we describe this event we often say that Jesus "cleansed" the Temple, but I think this word subtly misleads leads our thinking –

*nowhere does the Bible ever use the word "cleansed" to describe this event. Rather,

*in all three accounts of this event (Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-18, Luke 19:45-48) what the Bible says is that Jesus "cast out" those who were buying and selling.

*This word "cast out" (ekballo) is the same Greek word used in the Bible when Jesus cast out demons. I believe this biblical word choice might be significant because this kind of "worship space thievery" looks very much like satan's work. But even if not, the point was that Jesus was "casting out" everything and anything (whether physical or spiritual) that was occupying the Court of the Gentiles in order to provide the Gentiles with the Temple worship space that God had directed the Israelites to provide for them. But there's an even more curious aspect to all this.

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Two Temple "Cast-out" Events

- Jesus casting money changers out of the Temple near the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13-17).
- Jesus cleared the Court of the Gentiles twice – once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the end – like bookends!
- Deut 19:15b "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." NIV
- Fig tree curse? (Matt 21:18-19, Mk 11:12-14)



It is hard to read the second chapter of the Gospel of John (John 2:13-17) without wondering why John tells us about *Jesus casting money changers out of the Temple near the beginning of His ministry - just before He met with Nicodemus. I don't know about you, but I have heard very few sermons on this subject over the years and that in itself seems really curious. Biblically speaking, of course, recording that Jesus did the same thing twice is significant. Some theologians have tried to explain this event as being recorded out of sequence, but there's really no way of defending this view without doing violence to John's text in other ways. So, simply stated, *Jesus cleared the Court of the Gentiles twice – once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the end – like bookends - and I would suggest that this is consistent with scripture when people or nations were being judged. Recall that God had said in the Old Testament:
*Deut 19:15b "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." NIV By the way, as an interesting speculation, a third witness may very well have been the odd story of
*the fig tree being cursed for having no fruit (the fig tree being a biblical symbol of Israel) as Jesus was going to Jerusalem prior to the second Temple cast-out event (Matt 21:18-19, Mark 11:12-14).

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Two Temple "Cast-out" Events

- Jesus was emphatically warning Israel that it was not fulfilling its "great commission" as a Kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6).
- Israel was not being "a light to the Gentiles" as stated in Isaiah 49:6, and the nation was not producing "fruit" for the Kingdom of God.
- Matt 21:43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." NIV.



In these two Temple events, then, about 3 years apart *Jesus appears to have been emphatically warning Israel that it was **not fulfilling its "great commission" of being a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:6)**.
*Israel was not being "a light to the Gentiles" as stated in Is. 49:6, and the nation was not producing "fruit" for the Kingdom of God. Tragically, Jesus had to tell them shortly thereafter that the clock had run out on their Kingdom privilege
*in Matt 21:43 "Therefore I tell you that **the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.**" NIV.

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What does this have to do with us?

- 1 Peter 2:9a But you are a **chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God** that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. NIV
- Rev 5:10 "You have made them to be a **kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.**" NIV



OK. So what does all this have to do with us? Well, we've already seen what Peter tells us as Christians about this
*1 Peter 2:9 But **you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. NIV Here is a similarly important verse.
*Rev 5:10 "You have made them to be **a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.**" NIV

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What does this have to do with us?

- Rev 1:5-6 To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and **has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father** — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. NIV
- This is a restatement of Exodus 19:6 - God's purpose for Israel and for us!

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Here's another one:

*Rev 1:5-6 To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and **has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father** — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. NIV

*Clearly, the torch of priesthood has been passed to us. According to Derek Prince (4124 Kingdom of Priests CD, Trk 2 2:51) this is a restatement of Exodus 19:6 - God's purpose for Israel, and for us!

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What kind of priests are we?

- Christians **are not** priests after the Old Testament order of Levi.
- We **are priests after the order of Melchizedek.**
- The Bible says that Jesus is High Priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:10, Ps 110:4)
- Paul tells us over and over again that as Christians we are **IN** Christ (Rom 6:11, 12:5, etc.).

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Well, OK then, clearly we are priests, but what kind of priests are we? Once again, an excellent question!

*Christians are **not** priests after the Old Testament order of Levi of course, rather,

*we **are** priests after the order of Melchizedek. Why? Well, for at least two reasons.

*First because the Bible says that Jesus is High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, and second, because

*Paul tells us over and over again that as Christians we are **IN** Christ (Rom 6:11, 12:5, etc.) – making us priests of the same order.

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Melchi...who?

- Gen 14:18-20 Then Melchizedek king of Salem **brought out bread and wine.** He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20 And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. NIV

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Perhaps some of you may be saying "Melchi-who?" Well, Melchizedek was a very, very important character in the history of our Lord who pops up in one short cameo appearance in the book of Genesis. Melchizedek was the Gentile King of Salem (probably Jeru-Salem) and he was also a Priest of the Most High God. He was living at the time of Abraham – perhaps also during the time of Job - and we read about him in

*Gen 14:18-20 Then Melchizedek king of Salem **brought out bread and wine.** (Sound familiar?) He was priest of God Most High, 19 and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. 20 And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. NIV The bottom line, as you may well know, is that the Mosaic law is a subset of this higher law, and the priesthood of Melchizedek is a greater priesthood than that of Levi.

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A “greater” priesthood than Levi

- Heb 7:7 “And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater.” ...since Abraham paid a 10% tithe to Melchizedek while Levi was still in the loins of his father, the Priesthood of Melchizedek was clearly a greater priesthood than that of Levi.
- Mormons make a great deal of the priesthood of Melchizedek. Satan knows that by having a cult focus on Melchizedek he can dump cold water on evangelical knowledge of this truth.
- **Don't let this bother you!**



The book of Hebrews goes into more detail on all this, and I wish we had the time to go through it, but let me just show you one key verse to make the point:

*Heb 7:7 And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. The writer of Hebrews is saying that since Abraham paid a 10% tithe to Melchizedek while Levi was still in the loins of his father, the Priesthood of Melchizedek was clearly a greater priesthood than that of Levi. By the way, as a quick “heads up” to those who may not already know, *the Mormons make a great deal of the priesthood of Melchizedek. Clearly Satan knows that by having a cult focus on Melchizedek he can dump cold water on evangelical knowledge of this biblical truth.

*In any case, don't let this bother you - just be aware of it.

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We are “Melchizedek” Priests

- Who are we supposed to be “priests” for?
- What are we supposed to be doing for them as “priests”?



OK, since we are “Melchizedek” Priests, let's return to the questions that we raised at the beginning of this section

*who, then, are we supposed to be “priests” for? And *what, exactly, are we supposed to be doing for them as “priests”?

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Who are we to be priests for?

- **Unbelievers!**
- “It was God's intent that **all Israel live as priests**, manifesting His truth and sharing His blessings with the [Gentile] world.” - Warren Wiersbe.
- Do we evangelicals usually **think of ourselves as priests** to the unbelievers around us?
- Perhaps we should!



Well, the Protestant Reformation made it clear that believers didn't need a priest because each of us is a priest, right? So that would seem to leave just one other group that we are supposed to be priests for:

*Unbelievers! And that answer is consistent with what we've just been talking about with respect to Israel and the Gentiles. *As Warren Wiersbe said: “It was God's intent that **all Israel live as priests**, manifesting His truth and sharing His blessings with the [Gentile] world.”

*So, do we evangelicals usually think of ourselves as priests to the unbelievers around us?

*Well, perhaps we should! Our second question then is: what are we to be doing as priests?

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What are we to be doing as priests?

- Heb 5:1 Every high priest is selected from among men and is **appointed to represent them** in matters related to God, **to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.** NIV
- Anyone who is called a "priest" is coming before God in some way to represent others and to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins on their behalf.



First, let's take a quick look at a biblical definition of a priest. Perhaps the best verse we could look at would be Hebrews 5:1.

*Heb 5:1 Every high priest is selected from among men and is **appointed to represent them** in matters related to God, **to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.** NIV. Now wait a minute Eric, some of you might be saying, this verse is talking about the High Priest, right? Well, once again, you are absolutely correct, but I would suggest that consistently throughout the Bible

*anyone who is called a "priest" is coming before God in some way to represent others and to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins on their behalf. So I would suggest that Hebrews 5:1 in some measure describes all priests – not just high priests.

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What are we to be doing as priests?

- Melchizedek **gave bread and wine** to Abraham, and then he **blessed him.**
- Since Jesus is a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek who also gave bread, wine, and blessing, it would make sense for us to do **exactly the same things that Jesus and His disciples did.**
- John 14:12 "I tell you the truth, **anyone** who has faith in me **will do what I have been doing.** He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." NIV



So then, what are we to be doing as "Melchizedek" priests?

*Well, we know that Melchizedek **gave bread and wine** to Abraham, and then he **blessed him**, which obviously sounds familiar to us - right?

*And since Jesus, a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek, also gave bread, wine, and blessing, it would make sense for us to do **exactly the same things that Jesus and His disciples did.** If we are in any way are unsure about this,

*Recall John 14:12 when Jesus said "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me **will do what I have been doing.** He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." NIV

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What should we be doing as priests?

1. **Share our blessing.**
 - Gal 3:14 He redeemed us in order that the **blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles** through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. NIV



OK. So let's try to outline what we should be doing as Melchizedek priests as simply as possible. First, we should:

*Share our blessing. What blessing is that? Well, Paul tells us that it is the blessing of Abraham – and this would logically include the various blessings of God directly given to Abraham as well as the blessing of the High Priest of God - Melchizedek!

*Gal 3:14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. NIV How can we share our blessing in Abraham with others? Let me give you one way that you may not have thought of before.

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One way we can bless...☺

- "Two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions, on a sesame-seed bun."
- Millions of people, with all their personal details, struggles, and spiritual needs known only by God, have contributed in some way to this food.



Do you remember the TV ad jingle for a McDonald's Big Mac hamburger years ago?

*"Two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions, on a sesame-seed bun." Well, years ago, as I was running in the woods training for a marathon, I thought of a McDonald's Big Mac. I was probably hungry – not real sure. But in any event, as I was praying, God powerfully brought to mind the thought that when we bless our food before we eat it we also have the great privilege of praying for all those who participated in bringing that food to our table. Someday, I said at the time, I would write a sermon with a title something like

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"Hamburger Christianity". Well, that sermon hasn't been written as yet – but this is the first time that I have shared publicly that whenever I have food in my hands I think of the physical connection that God has given me to those around the world who have contributed in some way. And at just about every meal – not just Big Macs – I pray a blessing upon everyone who was involved with getting the food to my table. But if I am eating a Big Mac, I wonder, who raised the beef? Who grew the grain to feed the beef? Who brought the beef to market? Who made it into a patty? Who cooked it? Who transported it to the store? Who drilled for oil to get the gas or diesel fuel to transport the food from place to place? Who grew the lettuce? Who picked it – an undocumented worker from Mexico? Who milked the cow to get the cream to make the cheese – a farmer in Wisconsin who has a special-needs child? Who made the vinegar for the brine to soak the cucumbers in? Who cut the onions and perhaps shed a tear in the process – hopefully, of course, not on the onions? Who dug the hole for the plants that each of my hundred sesame seeds came from? Who grew and harvested the wheat for each bun? Who baked it? And on and on I go. But this ad jingle doesn't even come close to helping us search for all the hands that have gone into making this burger. As you know, it says nothing about the salt, or the pepper, or the vegetable oil, or the mayonnaise that started somewhere with a chicken farmer who raised the chickens who laid the eggs to make the mayonnaise, or what part of the world the spices came from that are used in the special sauce, or what trees that the paper burger wrappings came from. Hey, we could spend a lifetime just trying to imagine all the people who may have helped to bring this tiny burger into our hands - and still we would not even come close to grasping it all. The bottom line is that *Literally millions of people, from around the world, have contributed in some way to our food, and astoundingly, when we pray God's blessing upon them, God in His omniscience knows each one of them INTIMATELY – every person – every detail of their lives - every spiritual or physical need – not only their needs but also the needs of their families. Think about it – what an awesome privilege we have to be able to bless them with a priestly blessing! Someday in heaven we will know how our prayers have contributed to God's work – and we will have an eternity to listen to all the wonderful testimonies about what our blessings have accomplished. My prayer is that we will start saying "God bless you" to everybody right away – not just because they might sneeze - and never forget this lesson on blessing others even if some of us may not be fans of Big Mac hamburgers!

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What should we be doing as priests?

1. Share our blessing.
2. **Share our bread.**
 - Kingdom bread, the bread of restoration, healing, and deliverance, the bread of tomorrow, the bread that Jesus fed the 5000 and 4000 with, the bread that Jesus told us to ask the Father for each day, the bread that the persistent man knocked on his neighbors door at midnight for, the manna from heaven in the desert, and the bread that Jesus shared with His disciples - His body broken for them.



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Secondly, let's

*Share Our Bread. Now, after all we've taught so far in this series, let me suggest that this bread *is Kingdom bread, the bread of restoration, healing, and deliverance, the bread of tomorrow, the bread that Jesus fed the 5000 and 4000 with, the bread that Jesus told us to ask the Father for each day, the bread that the persistent man knocked on his neighbor's door at midnight for, the manna from heaven in the desert, and the bread that Jesus shared with His disciples that He said was His body broken for them.

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What should we be doing as priests?

1. Share our blessing.
2. Share our bread.
3. **Share our wine.**
 - The blood of Jesus that releases from satan's bondage, protects from satan's accusations, erases sins, cancels curses, and reconciles with the Father.



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Thirdly, we should

*Share our wine – the blood of Jesus that releases from satan's bondage, protects from satan's accusations, erases sins, cancels curses, and reconciles with the Father. The old hymns about the blood of Christ are not in fashion today, of course, but the fact is, the cleansing blood of Christ is deeply feared by the forces of darkness. Simply stated, if we are expecting to win our spiritual battles as we run a good race together to a bolder faith, we must learn how to share the blood of Christ with others and wield the blood of Jesus against the evil around us.

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Freely share!

- Matt 10:7-8 "As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. **Freely you have received, freely give.**" NIV



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Above all, we are told to **freely** share these things. Recall what Jesus told His disciples when He sent them out:

*Matt 10:7-8 "As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. **Freely you have received, freely give.**" NIV

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Intro to a very curious statement...

- John 20:19-22 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."



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Before we leave this teaching about doing the same things that Jesus did as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, let's quickly recall a very curious statement that Jesus made when he suddenly appeared to the 10 disciples on Easter Sunday evening. We pick up the intro to His statement in John 20:19-22.

*John 20:19-22 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. 21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." 22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." OK, so, do you recall the **very next thing** that Jesus said after He breathed the Holy Spirit on them? If not, it would be natural to think that He told them something about His painful death, or

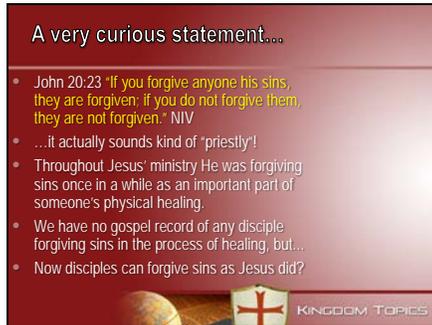
Seg. 4a: Racing to a BOLDER Faith – Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together

His amazing resurrection, right? I mean, think of all the questions in the minds of the disciples! Wouldn't it be likely that He would answer one of their many questions?

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A very curious statement...

- John 20:23 "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." NIV
- ...it actually sounds kind of "priestly"!
- Throughout Jesus' ministry He was forgiving sins once in a while as an important part of someone's physical healing.
- We have no gospel record of any disciple forgiving sins in the process of healing, but...
- Now disciples can forgive sins as Jesus did?



Well, no, actually! Rather, Jesus made a very curious statement – and apparently, given the context, an urgently important statement - to the disciples about a topic that you would think was the very last thing on everyone's mind at that moment. Jesus said,

*John 20:23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." NIV.

Seriously? Forgive sins? Where did that one come from? Well, I suppose that after you get over the shock,

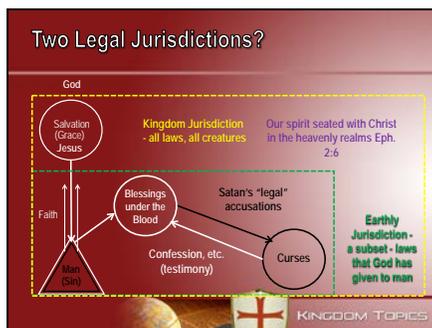
*it actually sounds kind of "priestly" – doesn't it?

*As we recall, throughout Jesus' ministry He was forgiving sins once in a while as an important part of someone's physical healing. Curiously, even though the disciples were sent out on their own to heal and deliver,

*we have no gospel record of any disciple forgiving sins while healing people. But here, on Jesus' Resurrection Day, one of the first things that Jesus says is that

*now the disciples can forgive sins as Jesus did? Very curious! Is this curious to you too? Well, I probably don't have to say that John 20:23 causes conniptions for some theologians - Protestant theologians anyway. Once again, most commentaries say that Jesus is not really saying what He appears to be saying here, and perhaps they are right – they are, after all, the experts. However, if Jesus somehow meant His statement to be understood the way that it sounds, there may be a dimension to the "priesthood of all believers" that we are leaving out! Unfortunately, time limitations will not allow further discussion of this topic, but I would be happy to dialog with you personally if you are interested.

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I will only share here that when I speculate on what Jesus may have meant, I keep coming back to the spiritual warfare model that we spoke about in Segment 3 postulating that there might be two legal jurisdictions to consider here – one vertical and one horizontal. In any case, although John 20:23 is an intriguing mystery, we must move on.

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1. Recover our Priestly Role

- God corporately charged Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6)
- God corporately charged Christians to be “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (2 Peter 2:9).
- Are we Christians now corporately working together as priests?
- If not, let's do our part right away to recover our priestly role!



KINGDOM TOPICS

To conclude this section, then, let's review and ask ourselves a bottom-line question:

*Given that God corporately charged Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6), and given that *God corporately charged Christians to be “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (2 Peter 2:9), the bottom line question that we should probably be asking ourselves is
*are we Christians now corporately working together as priests?
*If not, let's do our part right away to recover our priestly role!

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Recover

1. Recover Our Priestly Role
2. Recover Jesus' 3-Fold Work
 - Rescue, Reconcile, Restore



KINGDOM TOPICS

Next, we turn our attention to the second area of recovery in order to run a good race together, and that is to *to recover Jesus' 3-fold work - the 3 R's – Rescue, Reconcile, Restore.

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2. Recover Jesus' 3-Fold Work



KINGDOM TOPICS

As you may recall, when we've discussed this topic in earlier Segments we have suggested that our modern theological models mostly reflect a **two-fold** work of Jesus – to Reconcile and to Restore. Unlike the early church, theologians of the last 1000 years minimized, if not ignored, Jesus' work of rescuing us, or ransoming us, or redeeming us from Satan. History tells us that the thought of God having to “purchase us” in some way from Satan was very distasteful to them – which also led to a minimization of the reality of spiritual warfare.

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2. Recover Jesus' 3-Fold Work



KINGDOM TOPICS

I would suggest that we must corporately recover the balanced three-fold work of Jesus in the church today – to **Rescue**, Reconcile, and Restore – if we are hoping to rescue lost souls in our generation. Satan knows his time is short, and as we all know too well, he is eating our Judeo-Christian heritage, and our country as a whole, for lunch!

*We must recover the spiritual warfare worldview of the early church and the knowledge that God has given us in the Bible of how we are to minister deliverance from demonic forces in these End Times. At some point, people are going to come to our church doors begging for help to get rid of the voices in their heads telling them to do awful things, and we need to know what to do. We know full well how to deal with sin – we crucify the flesh, but we are not exactly sure how to handle a demon - or two - or three - or four. Demons can't be crucified – they have to be cast out, and that's exactly what Jesus, His disciples, and the early church did!

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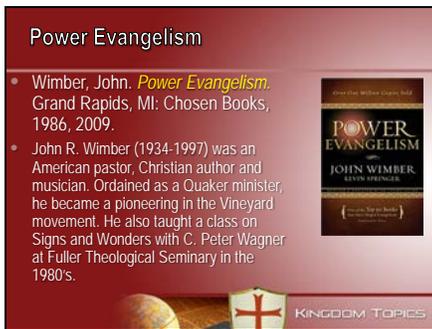
2. Recover Jesus' 3-Fold Work

1. We must also corporately recover Jesus' ministry of Restoration – physical healing as well as spiritual healing.
2. "Power ministry" is 100% biblical and probably the only way that deeply cynical moderns are ever going to consider that there is a God somewhere who cares about them.
3. Our current soul-winning strategies of being "a quiet example" or "a winsome friend" may not be working too well.

KINGDOM TOPICS

Along with Rescue from Satan and deliverance from all the forces of darkness, I would suggest that *we must also corporately recover Jesus' ministry of Restoration – physical healing as well as spiritual healing – and all learn how to heal in Jesus' Name. Physical healing – including the deliverance from addictions, spiritual bondage, etc. - what we might call *"power ministry" is 100% biblical and probably the only way that deeply cynical moderns are ever going to consider that there is a God somewhere who cares about them. Whatever we might think about this idea, evangelism statistics would seem to indicate *that our current soul-winning strategies of being "a quiet example" or "a winsome friend" may not be working too well!

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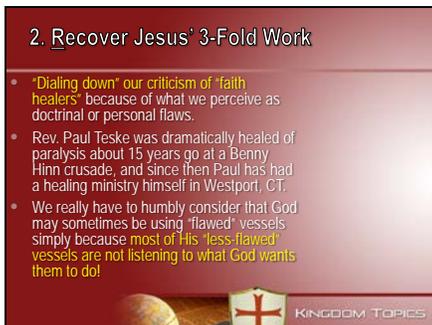
Power Evangelism

- Wimber, John. *Power Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1986, 2009.
- John R. Wimber (1934-1997) was an American pastor, Christian author and musician. Ordained as a Quaker minister, he became a pioneering in the Vineyard movement. He also taught a class on Signs and Wonders with C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1980's.

KINGDOM TOPICS

A classic book on the topic of Power Evangelism is by John Wimber and Kevin Springer *entitled *Power Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1986, 2009. *John R. Wimber (1934-1997) was an American pastor, Christian author and musician. Ordained as a Quaker minister, he became a pioneering pastor in the Vineyard movement. He also taught a class on Signs and Wonders with C. Peter Wagner at Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1980's. As you may recall, it created quite a stir in the evangelical world.

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2. Recover Jesus' 3-Fold Work

- "Dialing down" our criticism of "faith healers" because of what we perceive as doctrinal or personal flaws.
- Rev. Paul Teske was dramatically healed of paralysis about 15 years ago at a Benny Hinn crusade, and since then Paul has had a healing ministry himself in Westport, CT.
- We really have to humbly consider that God may sometimes be using "flawed" vessels simply because most of His "less-flawed" vessels are not listening to what God wants them to do!

KINGDOM TOPICS

Before leaving the topic of healing ministry, I would also suggest that we consider *"Dialing down" our criticism of "faith healers" because of what we perceive as doctrinal or personal flaws. I know of a Lutheran pastor - Rev. Paul Teske - who was dramatically healed of paralysis about 15 years ago at a Benny Hinn crusade – you know, the Israel-born tele-evangelist that some evangelicals love to hate - and since then Paul has had a healing ministry himself in Westport, Connecticut. If you'd like to know more about Rev. Paul Teske, by the way, his MP3 audio testimony is on the KingdomTopics website CCCC page and it's very dramatic. You know, we really have to humbly consider that God may sometimes be using "flawed" vessels simply because most of His "less-flawed" vessels are not listening to what God wants them to do!

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2. Recover Jesus' 3-Fold Work

- John 14:12 "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." NIV
- Jesus is talking to His disciples about the **Gospel of the Kingdom** – not just the good news of salvation.
- In fact, it's the only "gospel" that Jesus ever talked about...
- ...and we need to corporately recover it.



Let's conclude this section by once again recalling what Jesus said at the end of His ministry

*John 14:12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. NIV

*Here, Jesus is talking to His disciples about the Gospel of the Kingdom – not just the good news of salvation.

*In fact, it's the only "gospel" that Jesus ever talked about...

*...and we need to corporately recover it.

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Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together

- Recover
- Agree



Now, let's take a look at the second letter in our RACE acronym – "A" that represents the verb

Agree. If we were being perfectly honest, we would at least have to agree that the very last word that we would ever use to describe the Christian church right now would be the word "unity".

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As One...

- John 17:20-21a "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you..." NIV.
- God the Father will not let any of the words of His Son fall to the ground!



However, as we all know, in John chapter 17 Jesus prayed in His High Priestly prayer that His disciples would be "one" just as the Father and the Son were one.

*John 17:20-21a "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you..." NIV. Obviously, this last prayer request by Jesus has not been fulfilled by the Father as yet! Looking back over the last 2000 years of church history, and the amount of wreckage that has been caused by the disunity of the church, it's kind of hard for us to imagine how this prayer could EVER be answered – but we know that it will be!

*God the Father will not let any of the words of His Son fall to the ground - and since this was Jesus' last recorded prayer for His disciples, I suspect that the need for Christian unity will become increasingly important - and more evident - as we draw close to the end times.

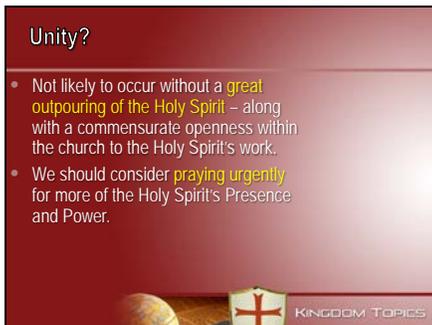
So, what has to change for unity to happen in the body of Christ? Well, we would probably agree that unity *is not likely to occur without a **great outpouring of the Holy Spirit** – along with a commensurate openness within the church to the Holy Spirit's work – right? We spoke about this a little bit in Segment 2, and as you may recall, we mentioned some possible hindrances to the Holy Spirit's work in our churches today. We concluded that discussion by suggesting that,

*we should consider praying urgently for more of the Holy Spirit's Presence and Power.

Slide
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Unity?

- Not likely to occur without a **great outpouring of the Holy Spirit** – along with a commensurate openness within the church to the Holy Spirit's work.
- We should consider **praying urgently** for more of the Holy Spirit's Presence and Power.



Seg. 4a: Racing to a BOLDER Faith – Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together

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Begin by...

- Agreeing that satan is our enemy and that his forces of darkness must be expelled from the church.
- In order for us to agree on who the real enemy is and what to do about him, we would already have to be in full agreement with Jesus!
- If we can't agree on who the real enemy is and what to do about him, it is likely that we are not in full agreement with Jesus!

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In addition to urgent prayer, I believe there is something more we can do. Recall that much time and effort has been invested over the years trying to unify the body of Christ, and that the disappointing results have usually involved “watering down” doctrines about Jesus and the rejection of portions of God’s Word. So I would suggest that we begin, this time around, by corporately

*agreeing that satan is our enemy and that his forces of darkness must be expelled from the church. Perhaps someone might say; “Wow, Eric! Shouldn’t we focus on Jesus?” And the answer, of course, is “Yes”. However, I would also humbly suggest that

*In order for us to agree on who the real enemy is and what to do about him, we would already have to be in full agreement with Jesus!

*Stated another way, **if we can’t agree on who the real enemy is and what to do about him, it is likely that we are not in full agreement with Jesus.**

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Expelling the darkness from the church?

- Whenever Israel’s leadership **agreed with God about their real enemy**, expelled all of the demon idols that they had brought into the temple, destroyed all the demonic high places around the nation, and cleansed themselves of idolatrous demon worship, **God miraculously delivered them and greatly blessed the nation.**
- Most of the time there was only partial agreement (if any), and at best they received only partial protection and blessing.

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Some of you may be thinking “OK, Eric, I think I get your point about agreeing on the enemy, but what’s this about expelling the forces of darkness from the church?” Well, once again, thanks for keeping me on my toes! I was just about to back up my suggestion here with scripture. Recall the checkered history of Israel.

*Whenever Israel’s leadership **agreed with God about their real enemy**, expelled all of the demon idols that they had brought into the temple, destroyed all the demonic high places around the nation, and cleansed themselves of idolatrous demon worship, God miraculously delivered them from their enemies and greatly blessed the nation. Right? Unfortunately, full agreement with God about their real enemy happened only under a few Kings.

*Most of the time there was only partial agreement (if any), and at best they received only partial protection and blessing. Agreed?

Seg. 4a: Racing to a BOLDER Faith – Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together

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Expelling the darkness from the church?

- Jesus expelled the forces of darkness out of the synagogues - the churches of His day!
- The Bible doesn't tell us that Jesus ever cast demons out of bordellos – or bars – or the pagan temples in the area.
- Mark 1:39 And He went **into their synagogues throughout all Galilee**, preaching and casting out the demons. NASU
- **What were demons doing inside of the synagogues????**



Well, then, what about Jesus – what did He do? Clearly, the Bible tells us that

*Jesus expelled the forces of darkness out of the synagogues – the churches of His day. Did you ever wonder about that?

*The Bible doesn't tell us that Jesus ever cast demons out of bordellos – or bars – or the pagan temples in the area - all logical places, it would seem, to do that sort of thing. Rather, Jesus did it in the synagogues – at least up until the time that He was no longer welcome in the synagogues and had to teach outside.

*Mark 1:39 And He went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out the demons. NASU. BY the way, if we had time, we might want to try to wrestle with the question

***what were demons doing inside of the synagogues?** – specifically, inside of the people who were evidently worshipping the God of Abraham and reading the Old Testament scriptures? It's a really sobering question when you think about it, a question, I would suggest, that is no less important today than it was in Jesus' day.

Slide
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The bottom line...?

- The very opposite of "unity" is occurring in the body of Christ right now.
- Even traditionally solid evangelical denominations have been – or will be - splitting apart.
- We may have taken our eyes off the ball as to **who the real enemy is and what to do about him!**



So what's the bottom line to all this? Well, as we all know, *the very opposite of "unity" is occurring in the body of Christ right now.

*Even traditionally solid evangelical denominations have been - or will be - splitting apart. Why? Well, I would suggest that

*we may have taken our eyes off the ball as to **who the real enemy is and what to do about him!**

Slide
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Agree about the enemy – an example

- If a person or group thinks that "social injustice" is the enemy – rather than seeing the real enemy as satan's Kingdom behind the occurrences of social injustice – they will likely "remedy" one type of injustice by creating an injustice for someone else.
- They are fighting **only a reflection of the enemy** - rather than fighting the real enemy with the right spiritual weapons.
- Jesus doesn't agree with injustice of any kind, **so we have to fight injustice the right way!**



Before we move on, let me offer you a very practical example of why I believe it is essential to agree about the enemy. As you know, some churches are very focused on fighting "social injustice" right now, and that's obviously commendable.

*However, if a person or group thinks that "social injustice" is the enemy – rather than seeing the real enemy as satan's kingdom behind the human occurrences of social injustice – they will likely "remedy" one type of injustice by creating an injustice for someone else. Why?

*Because they are fighting **only a reflection of the enemy** rather than fighting the real enemy with the right spiritual weapons. As we know,

*Jesus doesn't agree with injustice of any kind, **so we have to fight injustice the right way – His way!**

Seg. 4a: Racing to a BOLDER Faith – Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together

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Fight the “real” enemy, not reflections...

- 2 Cor 10:3-4 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. **The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.** On the contrary, they have **divine power** to demolish strongholds. NIV
- We can't allow ourselves to be distracted by any corporate activities that are focused on fighting **reflections of the enemy** rather than the real enemy!

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Paul tells us

*2 Cor 10:3-4 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. **4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.** On the contrary, they have **divine power** to demolish strongholds. NIV The proper use of these spiritual weapons will succeed in reducing injustice because they will be attacking the demonic forces that are behind all human injustice. Because our time on this earth is short - and valuable to God,

*we can't allow ourselves to be distracted by any corporate activities that are focused on fighting **reflections of the enemy** rather than the real enemy.

Slide
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A common enemy...

- Having a common enemy has historically been **one of the most powerful forces of unification that humans have ever known.**
- Agreement about our common enemy is probably not a bad place for the unification of the body of Christ to start.

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In conclusion, if we don't agree on anything else that I have suggested here, I hope that we can at least agree on this:

*having a common enemy has historically been **one of the most powerful forces of unification that humans have ever known.**

*So, agreement about our common enemy is probably not a bad place for the unification of the body of Christ to start.

Slide
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Racing “Tip” on Unity

- Seeking agreement about the enemy may be a helpful way for us to discern who is actually in agreement with Jesus – the One who we all should be seeking to agree with.
- The sooner we can agree to kick satan - and everything he stands for - out of our midst, the sooner we can minimize satan's ability to create disunity among us.

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And finally, here's a suggested Racing Tip on unity.

*Seeking agreement about the enemy may be a helpful way for us to discern who is actually in agreement with Jesus – the one who we should all be seeking to agree with. And secondly, *the sooner we can agree to kick satan - and everything he stands for - out of our midst, the sooner we can minimize satan's ability to create disunity among us. If we are not in agreement about the enemy, then even if we seem to be making progress in our efforts towards corporate unity, the enemy will remain in our midst and continue to cause trouble in one way or another.

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Running a Good R.A.C.E. Together

- Recover
- Agree
- Cleanse

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Pick up at this point next session.