

Addressing Barriers to Beyond Colorblind

Your students may express (explicitly or implicitly) concerns and reservations as you lead them into a biblical consideration of race and ethnicity in the Beyond Colorblind campaign.

This resource explores three common barriers and some different suggestions on how to engage them: 1) American colorblindness, 2) international barriers, and 3) fear of secular or partisan influences.

It's important to remember that the goal isn't to win an argument or to pound them into submission. Pray for wisdom, sensitivity, love, grace, and courage as you seek to lead your students into challenging topics.

American Colorblindness

Students, particularly American students, may hold the view that a colorblind approach is best or even biblical. For some students, any discussion of race and ethnicity is not only unbiblical, but also actively divisive.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

1. **Ask them to share about past experiences and conversations that may have given them this belief.** For some students, the concept of colorblindness may have been deeply ingrained in them through culture, church, and family from a young age. They may not even know how and why they developed this position. Some may have very specific experiences, perhaps even painful ones, that contribute to their current views. By asking good questions that help them reflect on their experiences, you may not only help them develop a deeper sense of self-awareness, but also gain insight on how best to proceed.
2. **Point them to Scripture that demonstrates God's passion for the nations (*ethnos*)** and the presence of ethnicity in heaven (Genesis 12:1–3; Psalm 67; Matthew 28:17–20; Acts 1:1–8; 2:1–13; Revelation 5:9; 7:9–10; 21:22–27).
3. **Affirm what is good and true about a colorblind approach.** It may help to affirm that there is some truth in a colorblind approach. It is true that in Christ we are all children of God through faith, regardless of our social, gender, or cultural distinctions (Galatians 3:26–28). It is true that God shows no favoritism, but he accepts all from every nation who fear him (Acts 10:34–35). Acknowledging this truth upfront can open people to consider the limits of a colorblind ideology.

4. **Acknowledge that ethnicity is both relativized and affirmed in the Bible.**
Certainly, we are most defined by our identity in Christ, but our ethnic identities continue to be affirmed by God. To illustrate this tension, compare Galatians 2:10 with 3:26–29, where Paul affirms ethnic-focused ministry while also acknowledging that all, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or class, are in Christ Jesus. Or consider Revelation 7:9–10 and 21:22–27, where all God’s people are united in worshipping God but remain distinct in their language and nation.
5. **Explain how American colorblindness can be an unhelpful excess of American individualism that can cause us to hurt and marginalize others.**
The sentiment, “I don’t see you as Asian, but just as Fred,” may be well-intentioned but may erase an important part of someone’s ethnic story, cultural heritage, and family of origin. Invite them to consider how individualism can prevent them from seeing the perspectives of others (point to [studies that show Americans’ inability to consider other perspectives](#) due to individualism).
6. **Explain that for many ethnic minorities in the United States, the term “colorblindness” is a loaded term** that has been used at times to ignore or erase our national history of ethnic discrimination. Encourage students who want to espouse colorblindness that they should be aware of the connotations and consider how they can exhibit Christ-like love and sensitivity. Consider how pastor Thabiti Anyabwile describes what it may feel like when they hear the term “colorblind”: *“That’s not a helpful thing to say to a person who in all likelihood has a lifetime of experiences (good, bad, happy, and painful) and identity bound up with the skin she/he is in. It’s like saying, ‘You don’t exist and all that’s gone on with you didn’t happen.’ Not a good start to a conversation.”*¹
7. **American colorblindness serves as a cultural blinder that causes us to miss out on the fullness of Scripture.** For example, in the story of Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10, a colorblind perspective may cause us to miss the supremely important issue of ethnic division between Jews and Gentiles.
8. **Share your own story** and how your view of God, the gospel, Jesus, and the Bible have expanded to address issues of ethnicity and race.
9. **Cast a vision for discipleship** where the gospel impacts everything, even (and especially) issues of race and ethnicity.

¹ <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/thabitianyabwile/2007/04/16/thabitis-top-ten-tips-for-talking-about/>

You may want to read articles together that explore Christian perspectives on colorblindness. Here are five articles representing different theological and cultural perspectives:

- **John Piper, "Should we be 'colorblind' about race?"** Piper offers a concise and compelling case for Christians considering race and culture in worship, justice, and friendship, while also affirming appropriate places for colorblindness. [LINK](#) (5 min video)
- **David Prince, "Jesus is not colorblind"** Prince explores some of the historical development of colorblindness, articulates the limits of tolerance, and gives a compelling case for why ethnicity is fundamental to the gospel unfolding in redemptive history. [LINK](#)
- **Katelin Hanson, "Is God colorblind?"** Hanson unpacks the limits of colorblindness in light of the diverse body of Christ and points to some of the social justice implications of a colorblind ideology. [LINK](#)
- **D.A. Horton, "God is not colorblind, so why are we?"** Horton offers a personal perspective, as an ethnic minority, of the "Jesus Juke" of Christian colorblindness. He then goes on to situate colorblindness within the context of American Evangelicalism and offers some suggestions on ways forward. [LINK](#)
- **Isaac Adams, "Don't be color-blind at church"** Adams articulates what can be good about colorblindness, and how that can be taken to destructive and unhelpful extremes. He advocates for both colorblindness and color-consciousness. [LINK](#)

International Barriers

International students may be confused about the American concept of race, which may in turn lead to confusion about the concept of colorblindness. They may express frustration that Americans are preoccupied with race and color. They may even go so far as to say that, in their home countries, race is not an issue.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

1. **Ask them about other issues of ethnic, religious, tribal, or class tension in their home countries.** Help them to see that, while America may have a distinct way of talking about race and color, there will undoubtedly be issues of division, power, and prejudice in every nation. Ask them to consider how this curriculum may apply to the unique issues in their home country and invite them to share their insights to enrich and enlarge your community's conversation.
2. **Explain the American concepts of race and colorblindness in historical and contemporary context.** For many internationals, there may be a simple learning curve for understanding American history and connecting the dots of what they've experienced about American culture.

3. **Invite your students to consider that, as students in America, it is important to understand issues of race and color.** Even if they don't come from a nation where these particular racial categories are significant, it is a reality they must reckon with while they are here. Even if they came from a country or cultural context where race and skin color were not major issues, help them to understand how it might impact them here. If they are Christians, invite them to have a gospel perspective so they can be effective servants and witnesses while they are in America.

Fear of Secular or Partisan Influences

For some students, any conversation about race and ethnicity are equated with secular or partisan influence such as political correctness, white guilt, partisan propaganda, etc. They may be convinced that rather than talk about these divisive issues, Christians should remain neutral, impartial, and focus on “spiritual” issues.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

1. **Ask them to share about past experiences and conversations that may have given them these concerns.** Many students have never had healthy, productive conversations about race or ethnicity in person, let alone in an online space. Many students may have never discussed these issues in a Christian context. Some fears may come from a legitimate place of uncertainty or previous experiences. Explore these fears so you can address them effectively.
2. **Remind them that the focus of this curriculum is on personal stories, not theoretical political concepts.** The focus of this curriculum is on real people's personal ethnic stories. While these will certainly involve broader social issues, invite them to truly listen well and receive the stories of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Rather than thinking about race and ethnicity in purely theoretical, national, or global terms, we are choosing to humbly enter into the stories of individuals. Even if they have fears and concerns, encourage them to enter into the stories of their friends.
3. **Distinguish between what we are doing and “political correctness.”** Our goal is not to try to be as politically correct (PC) as possible. In following Jesus across cultures, the goal is not trying to be PC. Colorblindness's aim is PC. We are trying to become more Kingdom-minded. PC edits my words and tells me what I can and cannot say on the outside. There's no real change of the heart. We are talking about our hearts—what's on the inside: being grateful for how God has made us, repenting for places of brokenness, and courageously going in the name of Jesus to where he leads us.

4. **Distinguish between what we are doing and “white guilt.”** Our goal is never to motivate anyone or any group by guilt and shame. That is what the devil does. The example of Jesus is to motivate through grace and kindness. At the same time, an essential aspect of the gospel is the conviction of sin. Not only should the gospel convict us of our individual sin, but also our corporate sin—where our communities or nations have fallen short of God’s intentions. As the people of God, we must have the courage and moral clarity to call out sin, evil, and injustice. We must also have humility to look within as well (Matthew 7:5).
5. **Challenge the notion of “neutrality” and “impartiality.”** Christians who have a fear of partisanship will attempt use the concepts of “neutrality” or “impartiality” to stifle concrete conversations about justice and reconciliation. Directly challenge these notions: God is never neutral or impartial when it comes to issues of injustice, neither should we be (Deuteronomy 15:7–8; Jeremiah 22:3; Micah 6:8; James 2:15–16; Luke 4:18–19; Romans 12:13; Proverbs 22:22–23). A neutral or impartial stance towards justice is not only unloving, but also it goes against the way of Jesus. It makes us complicit with the oppressors, as Desmond Tutu said: *“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”* In this series, we are not advocating for a specific partisan agenda nor are we hiding behind neutrality or impartiality, but rather, seeking God’s heart for the world as articulated by Jesus in the Scriptures.

You may want to invite them to read and discuss the following blog posts from InterVarsity staff:

- **Jazzy Johnson, “It’s not our job to be neutral or impartial in the face of injustice”** <http://mem.intervarsity.org/blog/it-not-our-job-be-neutral-or-impartial-face-injustice>
- **Chris Nichols, “Reconciliation is not an optional seminar”** <http://mem.intervarsity.org/blog/racial-reconciliation-not-optional-seminar>
- **Sean Watkins, “How silence destroys cross cultural trust”** <http://mem.intervarsity.org/blog/how-silence-destroys-cross-cultural-trust>