What is the Biblical Response to Racism?

1. Supplies and Preparation
   a. Supplies
      i. Several cards of one suit with one of another suit tied together with a rubber band or placed in an envelope (works best with diamonds and hearts) X3
      ii. Several small pieces of paper with a consonant on each and one piece with a vowel all contained in a bag X3
      iii. Several “memorial” pennies and one “union shield” penny put in a cup with water covering them and a tissue fastened to the top to keep out curious eyes X3
      iv. 3 pieces of paper with Colossians 3:11-15 typed on them several times (make a slight and almost unnoticeable alteration to one of the passages on each paper)
      v. Duct Tape
      vi. 3 Pieces of printer paper labeled 1, 2, and 3
      vii. A list of absurd questions (these could be “Would You Rather” questions with three options to avoid suspicion, but two should work fine)
   b. Preparation
      i. Take away all the chairs in the room.
      ii. Partition what used to be the seating area into three areas with duct tape. Make each area different in size.
      iii. Label the largest area with the printer paper labeled 1. Label the smallest area with the printer paper labeled 3.
      iv. Place several chairs in area one and a few in area two. Be sure that there are no chairs in area three.
      v. Have the first four objects on the supplies list ready. You should have 12 things in total (3 card sets, 3 bags of letter tiles, 3 cups of pennies in water, and three verse sheets). Be ready to distribute each of the categories to each “team”.

2. Pre-class “Segregating”
   a. As students walk in, ask them a random question from your list of absurd questions. As you ask, notice what color their eyes are.
   b. When they answer, act as if the answer is what gets them into a certain area (1, 2, or 3). You could say, “It looks like that answer puts you in area two!”
c. In reality, place them in an area according to their eye color (e.g. dark eyes go in area one, blue eyes go in area three, and middle colored eyes go in area two).

d. Ask each student a different question in order to avoid suspicion.

3. Beginning Class
   a. Open in Prayer
      i. Pray that the Lord will strip you and your students of all pride, especially racial pride, so that your only boast is in Him.
      ii. Ask the Lord to forgive any of your past racism in a humble and sincere way.
      iii. Thank the Lord that He has redeemed people from all tongues and tribes and nations. Thank Him that He has brought near those who were once far off, not only nearer to Himself, but nearer to each other as well.
      iv. Thank Him that He does not look on outward appearance, but rather on the heart.

   b. Activity
      i. Hand out a stack of cards to each group. Be clear that they are not to look at the cards until you give them permission to.
      ii. Explain that they will be trying to find the item that “does not belong” in each category. They cannot receive the next category until they bring you the item that “does not belong” in the last category. Be clear that this is a race, and the winning team will be rewarded.
      iii. Have each of the teams begin at the same time. As each team brings you the item that “does not belong”, hand them the next category. Category order: cards, letter tiles, pennies, passage sheet. Be ready to hand out categories to multiple teams quickly, and be sure that they are in order so that there is no confusion.
      iv. The first team to show you the changed part of the passage wins. The winning team will receive a chair or two for their area. If area one wins, they can “donate” the extra chair(s) to another area.

4. Transition
   a. “Ever since we were young, we have been taught that things that are different ‘do not belong’. While this may seem innocent at first, it plants subtle ideas that only require a little watering to turn into racism. Soon we connect the dots, and we figure that since whites are the majority in America, the other races really don’t belong. That worldview is extremely prevalent, even if we don’t realize it, and it is by no means Biblical.”
5. Lesson

a. Define
   i. Ask the students to define racism.
   ii. Push into each answer. Ask if racism is more than that. Ask for examples.
   iii. Have a definition ready for when they exhaust their answers.

b. Shape the Talk
   i. “In talks about racism, we are often too quick to point out the flaws in others, to ‘point the finger’. While this may seem like the ‘logical thing to do’, it is not the right thing to do.”
   ii. Have the students read Matthew 7:1-5. Point out that there is a time for speck removing, but that time is not while you have a log in your own eye. Show pictures or describe how things turn out when neither side will remove their logs, but are trying to remove specks from others.

c. Detour to Genesis 1:26-28
   i. Have the students read the passage and talk about what it means to be made in the Image of God. Make it clear that man was commanded to reproduce after his own kind. Then turn to Acts 17:26. The Greek word translated “nations” is “ethnos”. This is the word that we get “ethnic” from, so read “ethnicities” instead of “nations”. If the first man was made in the image of God, reproduced after his own kind, and fathered all ethnic groups, then all ethnic groups are in the Image of God.
   ii. This differentiates man from animals. Direct the students’ attention to Matthew 10:29-31 and Matthew 12:10-12. Man is much more precious than animals. John Piper, speaking of other ethnicities in his book Bloodlines, says, “Being nice to, and having strong affections for, and including in our lives is what we do for our dogs too. It does not say much about honor and respect and equality before God.” We must do more than this. We must not simply tolerate minorities, we must treat them as equals.

d. Focus Passage
   i. Have your students turn to Colossians 3:1-17. This is the focus passage, so have them read through it verse by verse. This may be hard while they are scattered about in different areas, but try to have some sort of an order.
   ii. Focus in on verse 11. Point out each racial division (Greek or Jew, Barbarian or Scythian).
1. Use 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 to show the difference between Greeks and Jews. The Jews, although studious, were a very emotional people. They expressed themselves with song and dance and worshipful exuberance. They wanted to see and experience the power of God. The Greeks were more studious and reserved. The cultured among them avoided most emotions and were known as Stoics. Paul was able to reach out to multiple cultures by “becoming all things to all people”. For more information on Paul’s cross-cultural ministry, see 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

2. Barbarians were people whose language was considered rude, rough, and harsh. They were not all blood-thirsty savages, as we sometimes think. Rather, many of them were extremely kind. In Acts 28:2, Luke speaks of how barbarians showed him and Paul kindness.

3. Scythia was an area north of the Black Sea that was home to people known as Scythians. They are described to have had fair-skin and blonde hair, although this may only be referring to Western Scythians. Picture people with Western European traits. The Scythians were not spoken highly of and were often mentioned in a derogatory way, yet Paul considered them equal in Christ.

4. Point out that none of these distinctions matter in the body of Christ. We are all one in Christ Jesus. This does not mean we should shun cultural diversity, for it is a wonderful thing. Rather, we should detest racial conflict and cultural conformity and love racial harmony and cultural diversity.

iii. In light of this fact, Paul says what he says in verse 12. Reread the verse and go through each attitude we are to have toward each other.

1. We are to have compassionate hearts. When our brothers and sisters are suffering, we suffer with them. It doesn’t matter what happened or what ethnic group they come from, we are commanded to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). Matt Chandler, in a sermon on racial reconciliation, made the point that facts matter, but the timing of those facts also matters. He gives the example of a young couple who didn’t childproof their house. Their nine-month old gets a hold of a
paper clip and jams it into an electrical socket and dies. What do you do? Do you go tell them how to childproof their house while the EMTs are taking the body? Do you say, “Well if you hadn’t done this… If you’d only done this… If you only had…”? No! You mourn with those who mourn. We know this, but for some reason when ethnic tensions flare up, we throw this out the window and start screaming “the facts” at people who are hurting. Facts matter, but the timing of those facts also matters. Over the past few years the Church has had the opportunity to shine Christ’s light in a unique way, and for the most part, we blew it.

2. We are also supposed to have kindness. This would include avoiding derogatory terms and racial slurs. If you’re brave enough, ask the students for examples of racial slurs and how they’re offensive. If they act like they don’t know any, they’re lying. Racial slurs are so prominent that even children know many.

3. We are also to have humility. At this point, go through several racial statistics. White people won’t always be in the majority in America. This should bring on intense humility. You may also want to point out that white people have done terrible things in the past (e.g. Hitler and Stalin), but we all too often judge entire races on the actions of a few. Let’s not stereotype.

4. We are also commanded to be meek. Ask the students what the word meek means. After they have exhausted their answers, go to the Greek word. The Greek word for meek means “mildness of disposition or gentleness of spirit”. How can we be meek toward people who do not share our ethnicity and culture.

5. Finally, we are commanded to be patient. In our interactions with people of other ethnicities, we will encounter many things that we don’t “like”. These things will often be in conflict with what we have grown up with and are used to. We should be patient during these times and attempt to learn more about their culture rather than demonizing it based on something we heard or for a mere distaste of style.
6. Skim over verses 13-17 after diving into verse 12. Ask the students what effect these commands should have on their relations with other ethnicities.

6. Final concerns
   a. Interracial marriage
      i. Have the students look up Numbers 12. In this chapter, Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses for marrying a Cushite woman. Cushites are mentioned in Jeremiah 13:23, “Can the Cushite change his skin?” They are most likely a Nubian people, rather than Ethiopian (as the Septuagint translates). In response, God strikes Miriam with leprosy. It is as if to say, “You think lighter skin is better? I’ll give you lighter skin!” Leprosy also results in uncleanness, which may also be symbolic. It is as if to say, “You think having black skin makes someone lower? I will make you unclean.”
      ii. Then have the students look up Genesis 41:45. In this verse, Joseph is given Asenath, an Egyptian, to marry. Through her, Joseph fathered two children. They would go on to father two tribes of Israel (Ephraim and Manasseh).
      iii. Finally, have the students turn to 1 Corinthians 7 and go over the qualifications for marriage. This chapter never makes race a qualification for marriage. Rather, its highest concern is with believers marrying unbelievers. In light of Colossians 3:11 and other passages, it is clear that interracial marriage is not wrong. Warren Webster, who at the time was the General Director of the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society, was asked in 1967 about what he would do if his daughter fell in love with a Pakistani while they were on the mission field. His response has become iconic, “Better a Christian Pakistani than a godless white American!”
   b. Secular rap and the degradation of black culture
      i. The following is a quote found in Bloodlines by John Piper and is taken from Enough by Juan Williams: “The emergence of the black gangster as a common hero in music and movies is more poison being injected into young black minds. Here is an open sewer throwing up the idea that black men are most genuine, most in touch with their power, when they are getting vengeance with a gun
in hand. Yet no leader says anything.” Piper points out that one of the milder lines listed in the book is on page 132, “*Can you control your h*?... Listen you’ve got to put that b**** in her place, even if it is slapping her in her face.” Not only does this degrade African Americans, but it encourages domestic violence in all settings.

ii. The objection will be in the minds of many students that black rappers are the ones saying it, therefore it’s okay. Ask them why they think African Americans rap like that rather than white Americans. Here’s another quote from *Enough*: “There are similarities between the economics of slavery and the modern rap industry. Cheap labor, slaves, made it possible for the Southern plantations to make money... In today’s rap business, young musicians hungry for stardom are cheap labor, able to satisfy the white America’s continuing desire to see Jim Crow jump in the black face minstrel shows. The problem is the white-owned corporations making big money off the music have to get past the risk of facing charges of promoting racial stereotypes.”

iii. In 2001, rap became the most popular music genre in America, surpassing country. The largest consumers of rap are “white men, mostly high-school and college-age boys”. Another quote from Williams: “The rappers reinforce in the minds of those wild white frat boys - later to become our corporate captains and managers - that black women are sexually indiscriminate, stupid, greedy, and lazy. Young black men are thugs, and, in the words of music critic Stanley Crouch, ‘monkey-moving, gold-chain-wearing, illiteracy-spouting, {description not appropriate for Sunday School}, sullen, combative buffoons.”

iv. The result: “Violence, murder, and self-hatred were marketed as true blackness - authentic black identity.” My conclusion: it is an act of racism to help fund these corporate giants that destroy the image and character of young black men. An alternative that does not perpetuate racism must be sought.

c. The political question
i. “Is the main problem today structural (or systemic) racism or is the main problem personal responsibility?” (Bloodlines p. 64)

ii. Be clear to your students that you are not here to discuss politics, but spiritual truths. Ask for some input, then quickly move on.

7. Application
   a. “He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.” (MLK)
   b. Wrap-up Questions
      i. How can we, as individuals, help fight against racism and cultural intolerance?
      ii. How can we, as a Church, fight racism and embrace the magnificence of cultural diversity?
         1. “Some churches have never taken the first steps in thinking biblically about race and ethnicity. Others devote so much focus to it that people get sick of the issue, and backlash sets in.” (Dr. John Piper in Bloodlines page 43)
         2. “The most serious thing [concerning the credibility of our global witness] is the image around the world that evangelicals are soft on racial injustice.” (Vinay Samuel at the Lausanne II missions conference in Manila)