

PRESSING ON



the e-magazine for growing Christians

September 2017

Special Issue on Racism

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Pressing On
The Magazine for Growing Christians

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On the Mark

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK ABOUT RACISM?

By Mark Roberts, editor

The events of the last weeks have re-started the national conversation about race relations, prejudices, and racism in this country. It's been painful and discouraging and amazing and sad. In many ways, however, I am not surprised that the conversation so far has been ... less than productive. A zillion different voices from a zillion different perspectives with a zillion different values systems all weighing in on social media and the news doesn't bode well for real change, does it? It mostly seems like a lot of people with their minds completely made up who enjoy yelling and ranting.

At *Pressing On* we aren't that concerned with legislative and political issues. We do not imagine we will effect change on a grand scale by what is written here. We are, however, interested in helping brethren better understand the issues of racism and how the Gospel is the answer to this troubling and persistent problem. That is why, watching all that has been going on in Charlottesville and its aftermath, Warren and I decided to push back the regular issue we had planned for September and put together this special on racism and race relations. We want to help brethren. And we want to help brethren get along better in the local church.

Perhaps the beginning of that is to just be candid about why this issue is so hard for us to talk about. Can I share a thought or two in that direction?

It's hard to talk about because some of us want to believe there is nothing to talk about. I saw the Cosby Show. It looked to me like everyone was doing fine, doesn't it? President Obama clearly showed that a member of a minority can gain the highest office in the land. So what's the problem? I don't think anyone would deny that there has been progress made since it was legal to enslave human beings in this country. Yet we are kidding ourselves if we pretend racism is a dead issue, aren't we? Our brethren, people you go to church with, know injustice and are treated unfairly because of their skin color. That happens. And it must not happen in the local church.

It's hard to talk about because we aren't even always sure how to talk about it. Some are offended to be called "Black." Some want to be "persons of color," or "African Americans." And the labels matter and can be seen as insulting if we get it wrong. The uncertainty makes it hard to even start a conversation. Just opening your mouth can get you into trouble. When you don't even know the vocabulary how can you talk the problem?

It's hard to talk about racism because we don't trust one another. This may be the hardest one to swallow but the most important point to be made: we have to trust one another that we all mean well and want to do right. Paul will say “you are in my heart” as he appeals to the relationship and care brethren must have for each other (see his appeals in especially in 2 Corinthians, as in 2 Corinthians 3:2; 6:11; 7:3). He expects to be given the benefit of the doubt because brethren know him. We can and must do the same. We all know that there is to be no racism in the Lord's church. The way to root it out is for us to sit down with a brother and say “I don't mean to offend and I don't want to offend, so help me out here... what is offensive to you? Are we doing things as a church that appear racist? Do you feel like an outsider?” That conversation may not be nuanced or phrased exactly right - and that needs to be okay because we are giving each other the benefit of the doubt. Then we need to love and care for one another enough to make changes that help each other, even if we don't “get it” or think what is troubling our brother really should trouble him. Why? Because he is our brother and we give him the benefit of the doubt. Real conversations about real problems with love and trust and listening and caring so that brethren believe they can say “This bothers me” or “I don't understand why the congregation does it this way” opens the door to real change. But it doesn't happen when we shout at one another, or post divisive and inflammatory challenges on Facebook, or just stonewall and refuse to talk. And it doesn't happen if we don't trust one another enough to carefully explore a touchy subject together. We need to have each other in our hearts.

Hopefully this issue of *Pressing On* prepares us for those conversations, and paves the way for them. Give this issue to a brother or sister in your congregation who is of a different ethnicity than you are. Say “Read this and then let's talk.” Let's quit ignoring the issue and go to work on it. Let's show the world that while bitterness and mistrust may divide *out there* in the Body of Christ we are one!



Mark Roberts is the editor of *Pressing On*. He and Dena have worked with the Westside church in Irving for almost twenty-five years. Mark loves sports, hunting, chocolate, his Scottie dog Carson and all things Teddy Roosevelt. He is an avid fan of C.S. Lewis' writings, and as an admitted coffee nerd believes just about everything gets better with a cup of coffee. Hear his sermon “A Cup of Coffee with Jesus” at www.HaveCoffeeWithJesus.com.

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Be Wise Small

PEACE, PERFECT PEACE

By Dee Bowman

[Editor's note: this article from Dee's pen comes from his good work in *Christianity Magazine*. It fit our theme of this issue so well. –mdr]

The concept of peace is as old as the first man. Adam destroyed his peace with God when he sinned in the Garden of Eden. Since then, peace has been the elusive dream of all men, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

It is for the restoration of that peace that Christ came into the world. He is referred to as the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), a name identifying Him as the practical means by which the restoration of peace was to be achieved. Paul affirms the fulfillment of this prediction by saying, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom we have access by faith into this grace ...” (Romans 5:1–2). Access is equal both in concept and practicality to peace. Without peace there can be no access; without access there is no peace.

Peace is achieved by eliminating what caused the war. Man's enmity against God was caused by his sin (Isaiah 59:1–2; Romans 5:12). Since it was impossible for man, by his own ingenuity, to concoct a means for his forgiveness (Jeremiah 10:23; 1 Corinthians 2:9), God saw fit to do it for him. Paul says, “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one ...” (Ephesians 2:13–14). And again, “And came and preached peace to you which were afar off ... for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (3:16–17). Notice again, the equality between accessibility and peace. Peace between men and God assures that he may “... come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy ...” (Hebrews 4:16). Such a possibility could not exist separate from the vicarious sacrifice of Christ.

Peace between brethren is the essence of unity. Without the absence of hostilities among ourselves, our efforts to encourage the world toward peace with God are heavily damaged. In His prayer for unity, Jesus begged for agreement among His believers “... that the world might believe that thou hast sent me ...” (John 17:21). This kind of peace is what Paul sought when he said, “speak the same thing, and that there may be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together ...” (1 Corinthians 1:10). He made a solid melding of peace and unity when he called on the Ephesians to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ...” (4:3). Every child of God is bound to strive for unity, especially since Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9).

But the mere absence of hostility does not necessarily constitute peace. There can be the appearance of peace while the “cold war” seethes underneath. Such agreements are nothing more than peace at any price and peace at any price is not peace, but an effort to ignore the enmity. The same Jesus who said, “Seek peace and ensue it” (1 Peter 3:11) also said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). This seeming contradiction of Luke 2:14 where Jesus is announced as providing “peace on earth, good will toward men” is not a contradiction at all, but rather an effort to teach that when one makes peace with God he will bring himself into contradiction with the world, even sometimes those of his own family. One cannot be at peace with God and with the world at the same time (see James 4:4–5). There can be no peace in surrendering to the world.

And yet, the malevolence that accompanies faithfulness has little effect on our inner peace, that “peace which passeth understanding” (Philippians 4:7). It cannot diminish it. It has no hold on its duration. It cannot turn its direction for the hope it entertains. This peace, which comes from an agreement between a man and God through His word, has nothing to do with externalities. So rich and rare is this peace that it is inexplicable, even to him who possesses it—yet it is so practical that its presence allows him who owns it to “be anxious over nothing ...” (Philippians 4:7).

Let us be quiet, for God is good. Let us be quiet, for “... we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ...”



Dee Bowman has been preaching for about 50 years. He is the author of several books, was one of the editors of Christianity Magazine, and for several years was an adjunct professor at Florida College. He has been associated with the Southside congregation in Pasadena, Texas for over 35 years. His wife is Norma and his children are Russ and Denise.

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Be Strong and Courageous

GRACE-ISM REPLACES RACISM

By Wilson Adams

Racism is nothing new. It's been around as long as there has been...well, races.

There will always be a minority within any race who decide they are superior and everyone else is inferior. Whether Hitler or Haman; racism lives because Satan lives. It is evil because he is evil. It is agenda-driven because it is devil driven.

No race can claim complete innocence. In century one, Jews looked down on Samaritans; Samaritans looked down on Jews (Romans looked down on both). And Jesus? Jesus did more than raise eyebrows when he told stories showing Samaritans in a favorable light or telling His countrymen to "render unto Caesar..."

The Jewish Jesus

By the way, not only was Jesus Jewish (you see shades of Roman racism in Pilate's cynical: "Shall I crucify your king?"), but He was from the lowest caste among His own: a backwoods blue collar wood worker from Galilee, and even worse: the despised Nazareth. "Can any good thing come from Nazareth?"

Sadly, racism persists because a fraction of fascist people promotes it. Sadly (given some reporting), you would think all whites hate blacks, all blacks hate whites, all Republicans are alt-right neo-Nazis, and all Democrats are alt-left Christian-hating flag burners. Hatred, suspicion, and prejudice persist.

Apparently some just opened their history books to discover that racism was alive and well in the first two American centuries. Here's more news: it's been alive and well across the world for centuries prior to that. Thank God (literally!), our country was one of the first to take major steps to stop it.

If you think racism, bigotry, and prejudice starts and stops here, you're wrong.

Walking the Streets of Sofia

My wife and I recently spent two weeks in East Bloc Europe. We were in a Sofia city apartment with three children (whom we adopted). Walking from place to place, we were intimidated, accosted, and threatened for one simple reason: we dared to walk the streets with three Roma (darker skinned) children. One woman stopped us on the sidewalk and demanded an answer to her query: "What are you doing with those dark-skinned children?" Skinheads blocked our path as we tried to board a train. A kind pastry-shop owner who took a liking to us sent this message, "Tell the Americans to

watch their back.”

The kids saw, heard, and ignored. My guess is, they were used to it. Alexander (the middle child of the three) noted, “People in the village would beat us up.” Sadly, the farther you go in Eastern Europe (Ukraine and Russia), the worse the prejudice becomes. Until...sex traffickers get involved. Suddenly money trumps race—especially when you can get \$10,000 for a Roma teen girl.

Ours is a dark, decadent, depraved world. The point? **The evil of racism is everywhere.**

The One Place

There is one place it cannot exist, a very special place where color doesn't count; where ethnicity, education, and economic standing doesn't matter. That place is in the church of Jesus Christ where all are equal and we are one. “For you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3:28).

One.

In the body of the Lord,

We are bound in unity;

Just as we are one with God,

You are also part of me.

We are one, as we serve in truth and perfect love,

All united in the mind with Him above.

Glenda Schales

One.

It happens when amazing grace-ism replaces racism. Yes, in times like these we must show the world a better way.



Wilson and Julie Adams live near Nashville, Tennessee where he serves as an elder and one of the preachers with the Veterans Parkway church in Murfreesboro. In addition to meetings and lectureships, Wilson speaks at several "Where Is God When I Hurt? weekends based on the book, "A Life Lost and Found" which he co-authored. When home, he pursues a passion for writing including his 2013 book, "Turning Point," along with the Courageous Living Bible study series (now at 30 books). All materials can be viewed and ordered from the website: courageouslivingbooks.com Additionally they enjoy a “full house” again with the adoption of three children from Bulgaria.

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Mind Your Faith

RACISM AND THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

By Doy Moyer

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

This passage describes the world in which we live, almost as though Paul pointed directly to our times. Though every era shares the same types of problems and struggles, we might be tempted to think that we can just outgrow all the selfishness and hate. Yet, even in the years of advancing technology and awareness of global concerns, we have not been able to improve the human situation. The hatred, selfishness, gossip, greed, and arrogance is just as bad now as it ever was, and it shows no signs of letting up. Just as strong today is the hatred of God over against the love of pleasure.

What is the root of these problems? As a case in point to illustrate why we have not and cannot (in our present state of societal thinking) overcome the problems, let's think more about the problem of racism. One cannot see the news, read a magazine, or see much of anything happening online without being confronted with the fact of racial tensions and hatred. The hatred is real and the problems are monumental. Who can doubt that racism is alive in many hearts? The arguments can get loud and the protests can get ugly, but what I have noticed are two conspicuously absent issues, and I believe that until these greater issues are addressed, the problems will persist:

1. Why is racism ultimately wrong?
2. How can racism ultimately be defeated?

Sadly, our society has expunged from the discussion the very issues that are needed the most in order to deal honestly with something as inhumane as racism. I purposefully use the term “ultimately” because it expresses exactly what I believe to be the problem in most of these discussions. In other words, there is a failure to deal with the root of the problems. When we say, “racism,” we have, perhaps unwittingly, only dealt with the symptom of an even greater problem. That charge in itself neither says why it is ultimately a problem nor how it can ultimately be defeated. Until the above questions are asked and answered properly, racism will continue unabated and we will be left scratching our heads as to why an advanced, civilized society cannot figure it out. Make no mistake, when we leave God out of the discussion, we won't figure it out. That is

because, at the root of it all, the ultimate answers are found in how we understand and view both God and humanity.

Why is racism ultimately wrong?

Is racism wrong because some people say it is wrong, because a government says it is wrong, or because of a deeper issue? This is really the same question when it comes to human rights. Do we have human rights because some people say we do, because a government says we do, or because of something else more deeply rooted in who we are?

If racism is wrong just because some people say it is, or because a government says so, then we are forever doomed to suffer for it. Yet, to remove God from the discussion means that we must answer the question this way. Racism is wrong just because some people say it is, and might will just have to make right. If there is no God, then mindless, purposeless, accidental processes define who we are, and there are no ultimate reasons why we should do or believe anything one way or the other. There will be no final justice, and justice itself is just an illusion dreamed up by meat computers* who have deluded themselves into believing that some things really matter. There is no real hope for dealing with racism if this is the reality. We'll all just keep barking at each other about things that can only really be described as arbitrary preferences based on evolutionary processes. Why people cannot see this as a real consequence of materialistic darwinism is beyond me. These very discussions of racism show why moral relativism is a failure. For some reason, the ones who argue for moral relativism don't want these morals to be so relative when it comes to racial treatment and equality.

However, with God at the center of discussion, we can answer this question. Racism is ultimately wrong because all humans are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). All humans matter, all lives matter, and all actions matter because our humanity is grounded in the reality that God made us with moral senses and there will be final accountability. With God, evil has a day of reckoning, and justice is both real and really does count.

The same goes for human rights. We all have human rights because we have been endowed with these rights by a Creator to whom we must give an account. Take away God, and human rights are a farce. Society keeps proving that over and over. Without God, we'll just keep trying to fend for ourselves, and disaster, as is seen time and again, is inevitable.

With God, the truth is made clear: God “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’” (Acts 17:26-28, ESV). This makes all the difference in the world.

People want to define racism as a political or civil and social issue, but at its heart is a much deeper spiritual sickness, a manifestation of sin, selfishness, and pride. Until this is grasped, society will keep foundering in the uncertainty that comes with not having a true moral compass.

How can racism ultimately be defeated?

Can we ultimately defeat racism by protests, marching, civil disobedience, or any other political means? No. While these things can make some voices heard, these are not what will finally change hearts, especially when God is left out of the discussion. Tensions have only gotten worse it seems, and we are left with bigger questions than we started with. Racism is a spiritual problem of the heart, and coercion never changes hearts. Hearts open to God can indeed change, however.

With God, we have answers that are rooted both in who God is and in who we are as His creatures: God is love, and as creatures made in His image, we are made with the capacity to love. Because of this, anyone concerned ought to know fully the greatest commands ever given: love God with all the heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). If we were genuinely, unhypocritically—and I stress this—following the way of love as shown by God, racism is defeated. Period.

Does that sound too simple? Perhaps, but only superficially. Love is such a major theme of Scripture that one cannot just pass over it without doing great damage to the context and the overall message contained therein. Time and again we are taught the principle:

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8-10).

Read that again: “Love does no wrong to a neighbor.” “Neighbor” refers to anyone who needs mercy (cf. Luke 10:30-37); that covers everyone. Everyone! There is no crooking of the finger and pointing toward one particular group over another. There is no legitimate racial divide recognized by the love manifested on the cross; there is no partiality in what and who the gospel covers. God desires all men to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (1 Timothy 2:1-4). He welcomes any and all who, from every nation, fear Him (Acts 10:34). The beauty of the gospel is found in God’s grace and forgiveness. Death is often called the great equalizer, but in truth, God’s love is the greatest of all equalizers.

For us, therefore, to act in a racist way, or to show partiality (James 2:1-9), is to seek to undo the gospel. When we fail to act in love toward others, we have failed the gospel. When we show partiality based on skin color, or any other outwardly-judgmental

reasons, we have failed both God and humanity. When we fail to seek justice or fail to plead for the oppressed and those who will not otherwise be heard, we have sinned against God and others. To deny any human being the most basic right of being human is inexcusable, and not because some people say so or some government says so, but because of God's character and our humanity that is rooted in His image. Brute materialism can offer no solution to racism because it cannot even legitimately recognize why it is an actual evil in the first place. If good and evil were mere developments of materialistic darwinism, then the problem of racism has no deeper roots than blind, purposeless forces that care nothing for anything. Unalienable rights require an unalterable moral foundation that can only be found in God, for such rights cannot exist in a universe derived from mindlessness.

Racism can be defeated, but to do so we must pay attention to the ultimate questions, the answers of which are found only in a Creator who gave us life and meaning. We must think universally beyond our preferences and localized social matters. Otherwise, we will just be marching to the beat of a biological drum that cares nothing for meaning, purpose, right, wrong, or even humanity itself. Sadly, the latter seems to be the path chosen by modern culture, and the price is high. We know something is horribly wrong, but don't have the ability to solve the problem because we have rejected the grace of the One who holds those answers. Now, as much as ever, the call of the gospel needs to ring loud and clear. In Christ, there is peace both with God and humanity. In Christ, the barriers are torn down, the gap is closed, and saints all march together to the praise of His glory.

***Meat Computers – USA Today Column: Why you don't really have free will by Jerry A. Coyne**



Doy Moyer was a Bible professor at Florida College for over a decade and is now preaching with the Vestavia church in Birmingham, Alabama. He is an avid reader and is well aware of the attacks against our faith that the enemy mounts. Read after him and you will find that you are thinking more clearly on critical matters that affect your faith. You can read more of his good work at his blog, located at www.mindyourfaith.com

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Guest Column

THE REACTIONARY GOSPEL

By Seth Mauldin

Author's Note: I want to say upfront that I think it is good and proper for Christians to react to the issues of society. The editors of Pressing On are doing just that with this series of articles. It is especially helpful for those in positions of leadership such as elders or preachers to direct people to the truth of Scripture to help guide our actions. This past Sunday, our local worship service included multiple instances of brethren doing exactly that. In the wake of the horrific events in Charlottesville, I've seen many people submit and share well thought-out articles and posts appealing to the hearts and consciences of brethren, offered in the hope that they will be thought provoking. Unfortunately, in our rapid-reacting social media driven environment, I've seen even more discussion that is bickering, biting, unbelieving, un-hoping, and unhelpful. These thoughts are about those conversations, and the hope that we can work our way back to honest and earnest exchanges.

Before a mind can truly change, the heart must be cut to its quick as the facts of the situation become an indisputable reality that the soul can no longer deny. Think of the crowds on the day of Pentecost as Peter laid out the story of Jesus and they shouted of their own accord, "what shall we do?". Think about the brethren in Corinth, who after receiving Paul's first epistle were driven to such action and repentance, it was as though they'd never committed such grievous wrongs in the first place: *See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.* (*The New International Version*. (2011). (2 Corinthians 7:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.)

These are examples of the genuine change that is wrought when the God-breathed word has its gracious effect on hearts that are ready to receive it. These are outcomes we should strive and pray for when we are engaged in earnest discussions with the lost, or in lively discourse among brethren. While this is my desire, I perceive there to be a rising threat to brethren being able to engage in these types of conversations. I've come to think of this as the "Reactionary Gospel".

It is natural that our proclamation of the gospel will be influenced by the current problems and issues of our culture. Yet often it seems that the gospel itself is shaped and determined by the crisis of the week. For example, earlier in the year when the government made decisions that radically affected immigration, suddenly the very core of the gospel seemed to be about immigration. People came out hard and fast with concrete declarations about what was wrong and what was right, and how the scripture

spoke on the issue (covering wildly different degrees of the spectrum). The issue of loving our neighbors as ourselves and the treatment of others was always present, but now it had been brought to the front by a crisis. None of the conversation seemed to change anyone's mind, but a great deal of arguing was done and many relationships appeared to be greatly fractured. Looking at the way these conversations played out, this result seems to have been inevitable.

Our conversations have come to be influenced in every way by our culture and the modes of media that we have at our disposal. For every new issue that arises, everyone is expected to immediately weigh in. Whether in blogs, articles, tweets, or posts, a quick response is all but demanded. Like the media (we have come to mirror) the environment in which these conversations take place is highly toxic. On both sides of any given issue, the acceptable response falls within scripted parameters, nuance is set aside, and grace is reserved only for those who are in agreement. The debates rage on, often playing out in front of unbelievers. Everyone hopes that they've said the right thing to placate the crowd that they were hoping to please, and all parties seem to leave with mud on their hands.

Our news cycle has changed, another terrible and godless tragedy has struck again, and now the gospel must react once more. Christians are rightfully stricken with horror at the despicable actions of those who imagine themselves to be racially superior. They wish to speak out against evil, and affirm that they will not support it in any way. But as with most complex issues, it is difficult to strip it down to a single talking point. There are related problems. There are issues beyond easily identifiable sin that fall into the realm of judgment and deference. There are cultural boundaries that must be crossed, experiences that must be related and explained, and all of this requires careful conversation carried out by patient people. Unfortunately, we find ourselves once again engaging in debates where these qualities are absent.

Conversations about race are important. Injustice and inequality are certainly opposed to the core of the gospel, and we should want Christians everywhere to oppose them wherever they exist. But as with anything that runs contrary to the gospel, it is an issue of sin. Sinful behaviors are not changed with reactionary declarations. Sinful behaviors will cease when sinful hearts are changed, and that change cannot be forced. Our dialogue as brethren has been drastically harmed as it increasingly mirrors that of the world, becoming characterized by responses that are rushed and reactionary. I'd ask that you thoughtfully consider the ways in which our discussions are being rendered ineffectual:

There is no time to investigate and interpret information. One might argue that some actions are blatantly wrong. While this is true, even obvious wrong should be investigated. (*Remember the Duke lacrosse players charged with rape who, although innocent, are still associated with the crime.*) Who is accused of what? Did they do it?

What was their motive? Was anyone else involved? These are important questions in making sure that those who are guilty are held accountable, and those who were uninvolved are not tainted.

There is no room for discussion. No one takes time to consider and weigh a response. Statements are frequently emotionally charged and personally directed. Discussion is replaced with argumentation and instant retorts. We share, we post, we retweet, we take sides, and we divide. Incidentally, both sides end up “teaming up” with people who would “kick them off the team” if we were discussing a different issue. (*For example, those who are in favor of statue removal obviously don’t agree with those in the “pro-removal” camp who also are vigorous supporters of LGBT agendas and abortion. On the other hand, the brother who is in favor of leaving a statue would obviously not agree with the “pro-statue” camp that promotes white-pride. It is crucial to believe the best in those with whom we disagree.*)

Statements are often driven by guilt and assumption. The relationships I have with my brethren are built on more than momentary narrative. If I’ve been guilty of habitually marginalizing my brethren, my own actions will not be overturned by my commentary on the actions of others. If I’ve been living the gospel every day and communing with brethren of all races on a regular basis, they already know where I stand. It is an unfair and arrogant assumption to paint large swaths of the brotherhood as having such poor relationships with brethren between races, that unless people react in a certain way to a given event, their love will be in doubt. As previously mentioned, our services last Sunday contained multiple remarks on the terrible events of the day before. However, I never for a moment felt that brethren from minority groups were expecting it of me, or that they would have thought less of me if I had not weighed in.

There is also a problem when I essentially become an identity thief by crafting my response based on what I believe someone will want me to say. This person is black; therefore, they are offended by X and want me to say Y. This person is an immigrant; therefore, they will be offended by X, and want me to say Y. I’ve often been embarrassed by these assumptions. I’ve spoken with many minorities and said the words that the media told me they wanted to hear, only for them to state that they felt the opposite. What I’m saying is this: It may very well be that brethren in *my area* desire to hear a certain reaction from me; but it is unfair and dishonest for me to demand that reaction from someone else without knowing if it is an actual representation of the feelings of the brethren where they are.

Demanding change without discussion is unbiblical. Much of the conversation I’ve seen over the past week (*and prior issues*) has contained many a bold declaration. *This is obviously right! This is obviously wrong! Read this article! Share this post! If you don’t agree or get it now, then you are obviously a bad person! This is the truth and that settles it. Full stop! No room for discussion! I won’t abide it! I’m going to go*

out on a limb here and say that if we separated statues and monuments from the discussion, and it was entirely about racism, we'd still be required to have a full dialogue on the subject: *if we are interested in changing hearts*.

Consider that with this very issue of race relations, Paul wrote an entire epistle to the churches of Rome dealing with the divide between Jew and Gentile. Nowhere in Romans does he simply state that it is wrong for Jews to be unaccepting of the Gentiles (or vice versa) and then shut down the conversation. His points are fully articulated, and he deals with the responsibilities of both sides to live in harmony. The same could be said for all of sin; even actions that we deem obvious are explained at some point as to why we must change and put those behaviors to death. We acknowledge this and recognize it with other sins. We expect someone to see that homosexual behavior is wrong, but we exercise patience as they learn to overcome their temptation to act. But because racism is currently the narrative driving the reactionary gospel, patience for people to not only see their error, but change their behavior as well, is tossed by the wayside; *we demand change now!* I would hope that brethren would be able to immediately identify that racism is wrong; but I need to be careful that I'm exercising patience as they learn to better identify racist behaviors and attitudes that they may harbor.

I hope none of this is taken in a spirit of superiority or aloofness. It is written in a spirit of sadness. I hate the bitterness and divisiveness that is present in our nation, and hope that every last drop of it is wrung out of the garments of the church. But the current struggle that has been highlighted by tragedy will not be dealt with any differently than any other sin. We must strive to continually preach every aspect of the good news, do so with patience, and try to the best of our ability to save our anger for sin—not unleashing it on our brethren.



Seth Mauldin and his wife Summer currently live with their children in Roswell, GA. They have the good pleasure of working with the saints in Roswell, and previously with brethren in South Carolina and Nebraska. You can reach him at sethmauldin@gmail.com

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Guest Column

PREJUDICE

By Robert F Turner

[Editor's note: this article by Robert Turner shows how there is "nothing new under the sun" and that the Gospel's answer to the problem in the first century was the same as in the 1970's and is the same today. We never miss a chance to add brother Turner's fine writing to Pressing On. Enjoy! -mdr]

I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels— *what* a tremendous array of witnesses!! And for what?? That thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. (1 Timothy 5:21) Here a Greek word, *prokrima*, makes its single appearance in the New Testament. It means judging before-time, or prejudice. (See ASV)

Timothy would receive accusation concerning elders— but he must protect the elders by demanding adequate witnesses. He must not be hasty— to lay hands on any man. In brief, judgements had to be made then, as now; and Timothy is reminded that all who judge are themselves standing before God (no respecter of persons), and Christ (with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged), and the elect host of heavenly beings.

Pre-judging means drawing conclusions without sufficient evidence. It means disregard for the charged ones rights or claims; an unreasoned bent, without due examination or knowledge; bias. premature judgement. it is an ugly ungodly unrighteous attitude that causes us to ignore the Creator and mistreat His creatures— and that sin is compounded when the creatures are our brethren in the Lord.

It closes eyes to beauty, stops ears to truth, and steals from us the rationality that is our God-given heritage. It has burned as witches those whose only fault was being different, or misunderstood. It has deprived man of noble ideas, because they were new; of marvelous developments, because they called for change. Prejudice has built spite fences, and prevented a flow of love that could enrich our lives beyond fondest imagination. It negates the very brotherhood of man.

But more, prejudice— self-serving badge of littleness— creates in him who harbors it a distorted sense of greatness. He defies justice and justifies foolishness. With the wisdom of a fool he enthrones himself, and shuts out God; for we must be taught of God, and a prejudiced man will not be taught anything greater than his prejudices. Only the honest and good heart will inherit heaven.



Via Plain Talk, Vol. X No. XI, January 1974

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Guest Column

THE BIBLICAL ANSWER TO RACISM

By Ken Weliever

The recent events in Charlottesville, Virginia, fueled by racial bigotry were wrong. Sickening. Shameful. And sinful.

A 32-year-old woman, Heather Heyer, who was “a passionate advocate for the disenfranchised” was killed when a car was driven into a group of counter protestors. At least 19 others were injured.

The driver, James Alex Fields, has been described as “very misguided and disillusioned.” A former High School teacher told the Associated Press, “Once you talked to James for a while, you would start to see that sympathy toward Nazism, that idolization of Hitler, that belief in white supremacy.”

As a reaction to the actions and attitudes of this extreme fringe group, some have written, published blogs, and posted on facebook charges of racism attributed to conservatives and Christians.

Let me be clear. As a Christian and a social and political conservative, I disavow all forms of racial bigotry. It is wrong. And clearly against the teachings of Jesus, the apostles, and the entire tone of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Consider these 6 Biblical reasons why racism is wrong.

(1) All people are created in God’s image.

On the sixth day of creation, “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Then the Bible says “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

All races of people who descended from the original pair share in the “likeness of divinity.” Every person possesses an eternal soul. And has been endowed with the qualities and characteristics that can only come from our Creator.

(2) Jesus taught that the second great command is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

Christ did not distinguish one ethnic group from another. Love is not based on skin color or racial differences. In fact, Jesus associated with Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans, who were traditionally discriminated against in that culture.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr was right when he wrote, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

(3) Jesus died for the sins of the whole world.

The golden text of the Bible says, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16). That’s everyone. Every nation. Every race. Every ethnic group.

Jesus said his mission was “to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). All people. Regardless of their skin color. Or their language. Or their ancestry.

(4) The Gospel is for everyone.

In the great commission, Jesus instructed the apostles to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16)

Revelation 14:6 states that “the everlasting gospel” was to be preached “to those who dwell on the earth — to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.”

(5) All are one in the Family of God.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slaves or free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). This passage was written to the churches of Galatia urging Christians to accept the equality of everyone as brothers and sisters in Christ.

(6) The Bible teaches that partiality, prejudice, and favoritism is sinful.

James, the brother of Jesus, expressed this way. “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.” (James 2:1). While the context speaks of relationships between the rich and the poor, the principle applies to all social, cultural and racial relationships.

After illustrating the problem of partiality, James concluded “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:8-9).

It is an ugly reality that racism still exists in America today. However, as set apart people to glorify God, Christians must be a shining light in a dark world. There is no place for bigotry or hatred in our hearts.

“Racism springs from the lie that certain human beings are less than fully human,” wrote civil rights leader Alevda King. “It’s a self-centered falsehood that corrupts our minds into believing we are right to treat others as we would not want to be treated.”



Ken preaches for the West Main church in Lewisville. You can read more from his pen at <https://thepreachersword.com/>

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Guest Column

IT'S NOT RACISM, BUT WE DO HAVE A PROBLEM

By Josh Creel

Growing up, hardly a day went by when I didn't see the rebel flag (no one called it the confederate flag). It would be found plastered to the bumpers and rear windows of pickup trucks, emblazoned on caps and flown in various yards in the community. I'm from a small community in rural Alabama; I'm from the South, from Dixie. Memories of the Confederacy were all around me: monuments, streets and high schools named after Confederate leaders, the rebel flag. Relics of the Confederacy didn't trouble me before.

They do now.

What changed? Some might assume that I, a white Southern male, probably harbored some racist tendencies, but that I've now become more enlightened. I don't think that's it. I would honestly contend that racism has never been an issue for me, that my parents raised me to love others as myself, to treat them fairly regardless of race, economic status, nationality, etc. My issue wasn't racism, my issue was perspective. What changed is that I stopped viewing everything from my limited perspective and began considering how others would perceive things. And in noting the arguments that have arisen this past week over events in Charlottesville and the removal of Confederate monuments, I would say that our problem isn't racism, it's perspective.

We will return to recent events, but first it would be helpful to consider that the New Testament addresses our need for perspective. It does this because it was written in a time of great societal tension, mirroring in many ways the tension in our own society. The tension wasn't between black and white, but between Jew and Gentile... and it was every bit as fierce as what we've witnessed in our own country. The animosity was so great between the two groups that Paul was deemed worthy of death by his Jewish kinsmen simply because he preached to the Gentiles (see Acts 22.17-22). And while God had united both groups in Christ (see Colossians 1.20; Ephesians 2.17-19; Galatians 3.28), tension between the two persisted in the church. Both groups came into the church with vastly different perspectives, shaped by differences in culture and history. Jewish Christians would have been tempted to view Gentile brethren as outsiders; Gentile saints would have been tempted to view their Jewish brethren as strange, peculiar and arrogant. How could the "one body" survive?

Paul's letter to the saints in Rome was written against the backdrop of Jew-Gentile tension in the local church. It is likely that when the gospel arrived in Rome it first spread in the Jewish synagogues and that the churches were comprised predominantly of Jewish Christians. But then the Jews were expelled from Rome, a historical event that is confirmed by the Biblical text (Acts 18.2). What happened to the makeup of the

Roman churches during that time? We can only guess, but it is likely that they took on a Gentile flavor and by the time the Jews could return, there were more Gentile Christians in Rome than Jewish saints. This resulted in tension between Jew and Gentile within the Roman churches, a fact acknowledged by Paul within the text of his letter (Romans 15.7-13).

What hope was there for unity in the church? The only hope was the gospel! The gospel convicted both Jew and Gentile of sin (Romans 3.9-18) and revealed that both groups had hope only in Christ (3.21-26). Furthermore, the gospel compelled those who had experienced the grace of God to desire that same grace for others. Thus, Paul desired the salvation of the very kinsmen who persecuted him (9.1-3) and he counseled his Gentile brethren to not be arrogant against the Jews, but to desire their return to God's fold (11.17-24). And finally, the gospel compelled them to try and understand each other. It would appear that the Gentile saints in Rome had a difficult time understanding the scruples of their Jewish brethren (see 14.1,10-13). What did Paul counsel they do? Come into total and complete agreement on all things? No. Rather, they should seek to understand and appreciate the perspective of their brethren. This may not result in agreement on every issue, but it would allow them to "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (15.5).

I'm not surprised that good brethren have different perspectives on recent events or that they disagree over the place of Confederate monuments in our society. I've seen several defenses made for these symbols of the South: to remove them is to try and erase history, the Civil War wasn't really about slavery, the rebel flag isn't a racist symbol, etc. I don't agree with the reasoning and yet confess that the history of the Civil War is much messier and nuanced than we take time to consider. But all of that is beside the point, for what these arguments fail to consider is the legitimate perspective of other saints. Make any defense of the rebel flag you wish, but when it is an adopted symbol of the KKK, minority brethren have every reason to perceive that flag as a symbol of hate and oppression. Defend the character of Robert E Lee if you wish. I would agree that there was much admirable in the man (Abraham Lincoln would also agree). But when neo-Nazis protest the removal of his statue, our brethren of color have legitimate reason to view his statue as a reminder of a racist past. If Paul said he would never eat meat if it offended his brethren (1 Corinthians 8.13), then we certainly don't need to rush to the defense of flags and statues that offend our brethren today.

But the need for perspective isn't one sided. When we see some brethren defending Confederate monuments or the rebel flag we might be tempted to conclude they harbor racism in their hearts. But that may not be the case. As I've already stated, history is much messier and more nuanced than we often want to consider. The rebel flag, while clearly used as a symbol of racial superiority by some, came to represent a regional identity for others. I won't say that racism wasn't an issue in my small Alabama hometown, but most people didn't fly the rebel flag because they hated black people.

They flew that flag because it defined them as part of the South, a regional identity with a set of values different from the North... and many of those values helped shape me. So, while I wish that some of my brethren would no longer come to the defense of these relics from the past, I also hope they are judged fairly, that their perspective is taken into consideration.

We do have a problem. It's not racism, but it's a problem that causes great strain in the church: we rarely consider the perspectives of others, or seek to understand how brethren from different backgrounds perceive the issues of the day. May we learn to "accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (Romans 15.7).



***Josh Creel** preaches for the University church in Tampa, Florida. He is a regular contributor to Pressing On magazine.*

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From the Pasture

WHY WE ARE HOSTING A FORUM ON RACE

By Rusty Miller

On September 16, the church at Westside is hosting a forum to discuss “Healing America’s Racial Division with the Gospel.” We have invited five preachers of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities to discuss a topic that is increasingly volatile in today’s America.

Why are we doing this? What do we hope to accomplish or gain by hosting an event that many believe will just “stir up trouble?”

From the outset then, let me state it is not our intention to “stir up trouble.” This is not a political event, but a spiritual one. We want the conversation to center on God’s word and what it has to say about race relations, not on the current political climate. We see this as yet another way to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2).

As for what we hope to gain, here are is what the elders at Westside are hoping and praying for.

That We Understand the Gospel is for All. We pray that all who attend are able to come to an understanding that God “desires all people to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4, but see also Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). That means each of us must confront our own prejudices and determine what hinders us from taking the Gospel to others, even when (especially when) they don’t look like us.

If we believe God desires all people to be saved, we must be willing to reach out to all people. Jesus said, “I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). Do we imagine for one second that such joy only applies to certain races and skin colors? All are sinners and all have the capacity for repentance, therefore all are able to bring joy in heaven. We must overcome any thoughts to the contrary.

That There Be No Divisions Among Us. Paul responds to a report from Chloe about the Corinthians, “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Yet too many Christians are still divided, with “white churches” on one side of town and “black churches” on the other.

Jesus prayed that all who believe in Him might “be one” (John 17:20-21), and we must strive to make certain we are not the cause of division among God’s people. Read the

opening words to almost every New Testament epistle and you will find this prayer from the writers: “Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” God desires us to live in peace, and that peace stretches across all dividing lines, erasing them so that we may be one, united as Christians in His service.

That We Live Out the Admonition To Honor One Another. In his wonderful chapter on “everyday Christianity” Paul instructs all of us, “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:10). Again, since he wrote so often about the divisions among Jews and Gentiles, it is impossible to read Paul and see some kind of racial division that he might have commended.

It is not difficult to think that if Paul had written Galatians 3 to an American audience, he could easily have said, “There is neither **black nor white**, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

The elders here want Westside to be that kind of church, a place where all people and all skin colors feel welcome. We want to embrace all of our brethren.

Finally, Jesus told the disciples that it would be “love for one another” (John 13:35) that would demonstrate to the world that His followers were different. We must be different. We must be better. We must be united so that we can faithfully and forcefully bring God’s word to a broken, divided world.

No, a one night forum on race will not accomplish all that, but it can be the first steps toward healing a division God hates.



***Rusty Miller** has served the Westside church in Irving, Texas as one of her shepherds for 17 years. He enjoys writing, and you can find his tweets about Westside’s Daily Bible Reading @Miller24Rusty. He continues to hope this column will impact fellow shepherds for good in God’s service.*

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The Westside church of Christ invites you to a conversation and forum about America's racial issues ...

Divided We Fall

Healing America's Racial Division
with the Gospel

September 16, 2017 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.



Kevin
Clark



Ruben
Amador



Warren
Berkley



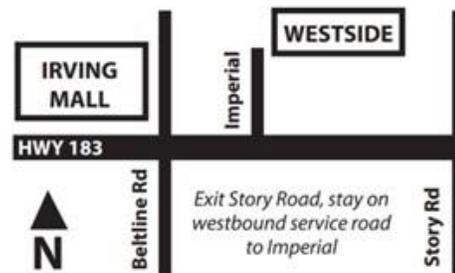
Ben
Lee



Mark
Roberts

Westside is bringing together five gospel preachers to discuss the Gospel and race relations. The panel will discuss these issues for the first hour and then take written questions from the audience in the second hour. Come be with us and let's see what the Bible says about healing America's racial division!

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Truth Connection

JAMES ON DISCRIMINATION (JAMES 2:1-13)

By Warren Berkley, assistant editor

Make a list of character-neutral traits.

Let me help: *genealogy, level of education, geographic origin, being bald, biological gender, age, income level, skin color*. These are **character-neutral**, meaning these traits (singularly or combined in one person), have nothing to do with the real character of the person. Hence, we have no right to reject, shun or degrade anyone based on anything in this list. Are you with me?

In typical human interaction, this is often a problem. I grew up in a time and place where racial discrimination was common. The public schools I attended did not implement court ordered de-segregation until the second semester of my senior year (1966, twelve years after the Supreme Court ruling).

My father forbade any racial attitudes or remarks in our home. But outside our home, we lived in a community that was discriminatory. (In southern local churches in the 1940's and 50's, black brethren were often welcome to visit meetings, but in a roped off section at the back of the auditorium. I recall a black preacher being asked to lead in prayer. He came forth from the roped section, stood before the audience and led the prayer, then returned to "his place.")

I hope we all now see the inconsistency of that. And I hope we are committed against all other forms of discrimination, where people are treated as inferior based on some character-neutral trait.

Truth Connection: *"My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in*

one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. – James 2:1-13 (ESV)

Follow-up

Read the passage again, but this time, instead of wealth, read "For if a man who is white," and "a man who is black." Any difference in principle?

Make a list of what James says is wrong about discrimination based on a morally neutral attribute. Let me help.

1. **It is inconsistent with faith in Christ (v.1).** When you consider what Jesus did, what Jesus taught and how Jesus behaved - there is no justification for favoritism. It is not compatible with faith in Christ. Would Jesus buy into any affirmation of a favored or superior race?
2. **It makes us "judges with evil thoughts," (v.4).** The kind of favoritism James describes doesn't come from good thoughts but evil. The treatment we give to people derives from our thoughts about them. This kind of insulting, dishonoring treatment stems from wrong or evil thoughts.
3. **It is wrong because God makes no such distinctions (v.5).** God is not a respecter of persons (see Acts 10:34; Ephesians 5:1; 1 Peter 1:17). When we engage in the kind of behavior James describes, we are not acting as God's children. Racism does not reflect God's love for all men (John. 3:16).
4. **It dishonors the poor man (v.6).** Why should we dishonor someone, simply or merely because of their income, their financial status or their skin color? The answer is, we shouldn't. 1 Peter 2:17 says we are to honor all men.
5. **It makes no sense when you consider, as a class, the rich were those who oppressed Christians (vss. 6b,7).** What a strange spectacle. Some of those who were rich and powerful oppressed Christians (see James 5:1-6). Now someone of that class appears, he is honored and the common man is shunned!
6. **It violates the law of love (vss. 8-13).** The royal law of love for God and neighbor is ignored when this kind of prejudice is practiced. "...if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors." Anytime we focus on some non-character trait, and base our attitude and treatment of someone on that neutral thing - we are guilty of the kind of discrimination James says is not compatible with faith in Christ.



Warren Berkley is widely known as an excellent student of God's Word, and as a faithful preacher of that Word. He is an assistant editor for *Pressing On*. He and his wife Paula work with the church in McAllen, Texas which is just across the border from Mexico. You can follow Warren on Facebook - which will brighten your day and amuse you considerably - and read more from his pen at Expository Files (www.expositoryfiles.com).

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