

Ferguson: How Should the Church Respond?

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INTRODUCTION

What happened last August (2014) in Ferguson, Missouri, when a white police officer shot and killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown may never be known with any certainty. What is certain, however, is that the events on that summer evening and their aftermath have exposed a profound divide between black and white Americans. The assumption—and the hope of many after Barack Obama’s election to the office of president—that Americans were living in a “post-racial America”—has now been dashed.¹

The long-awaited November grand jury decision not to indict Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson was further seen by most African-Americans and quite a few whites as a great injustice and a failure of the American legal system. The grand jury failure to indict in the soon-to-follow Staten Island, New York, case where another white policeman seemed to choke to death Eric Garner

¹ This article was originally written for and presented as a Faculty Form at Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, February 4, 2015.

only confirmed to many African-Americans the sad and lingering plight of black men in our “racist” nation. These events reminded many of the not-too-distant 2012 shooting of black teenager Trayvon Martin by Hispanic security officer George Zimmerman in Florida. And these events have left many in the nation feeling angry, saddened, and hopeless.

Unfortunately, these are not isolated incidents. The sad reality is that dozens of similar black deaths slip beneath the national news media radar every week in America. According to a *USA Today* analysis of the most recent FBI data, at least 100 African-Americans were killed by white police gunfire each year from 2005 to 2012.² A good number were unarmed men slain under suspicious circumstances. The actual numbers could be much higher because law enforcement officials self-report, and there is no conclusive national database.

Even before Ferguson, a national study had revealed what many involved in intercultural ministry have sensed for years: the majority of African-Americans still believe racism is a big issue continuing in American society while the majority of whites do not think racism is a significant factor.³ The events of 2014 did

² Kevin Johnson, Meghan Hoyer and Brad Heath, “Local Police Involved in 400 Killings Per Year.” *USA Today*, August 15, 2014 <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/08/14/police-killings-data/14060357>> (accessed 12 December 2014).

³ “Poll: Most Americans See Lingering Racism—in Others,” CNN.com Post on December 12, 2006 <<http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/12/12/racism.poll/index.html?eref=yahoo>> (accessed 15 December 15 2014). A late 1990s nationwide study of evangelical perspectives also confirmed a deep divide: “After hundreds of years of efforts, far from being brought closer together, white and black evangelicals, and Americans in general, are widely separated, perceiving and experiencing the world in different ways” (Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* [New York: Oxford U P, 2000], 88; for proof of this claim, see 69–91).

not create but rather revealed this deep chasm. After the national reaction to Ferguson, over 80% of African-Americans polled said “Michael Brown’s death raised racial issues that merit discussion” while 47% of white Americans said the incident was getting more attention than it deserved.⁴

In the wake of Brown’s death and the subsequent rioting, looting, and national protests that erupted in many of America’s largest cities, many Americans continue to grapple with the racial undercurrent and the broader implications for their daily lives. People of good faith and conscience can look at specific incidents like these in our recent history and arrive at different conclusions. Nevertheless, these tragedies and consequent protests have pointed Americans toward the need for both national and local conversations about how to bridge the racial chasm in American society. The national reaction to Ferguson and Staten Island has certainly opened the door to further discussion and dialogue between all American citizens, whatever their color, culture, or creed.

Many Christian leaders have recognized the necessity and opportunity for people of faith to lead the way in this urgently needed conversation. Evangelicals in particular, both black and white, have seen this as a divinely-orchestrated opportunity for those concerned about the sanctity of all human lives to step up and work toward more mutually trusting and respectful relationships, especially between law enforcement and minority citizens, within our communities. Many see this as an opportune time to point people to the hope for reconciliation and healing that is found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet, following the subsequent online discussions on the evangelical blogosphere, one thing is obvious: while Christians all

⁴ Reported by James Dean, “House Divided,” *World Magazine*, September 20, 2014, 36.

agree that the ultimate solution is found in the Gospel, no strong consensus has emerged between black and white Christian leaders as to the extent of the problem of racism in the nation and churches nor the specifics of how to address the perceived injustices. Sometimes it has felt like African-American and Anglo-Christian leaders have talked past one another and not always listened closely to the hurts and concerns of their brothers and sisters.

Many white evangelicals believed Ferguson police officer Wilson should not have been indicted. Others, uncertain over the facts of the case and the proper biblical response, were totally silent. However, when the Staten Island officer was also not charged for putting an unarmed Eric Garner in a chokehold that resulted in his death, the evangelical response from both blacks and whites was immediate and much more forceful and united than justice had not been served.⁵

While those of us involved in North American interethnic and intercultural ministry were delighted to hear many in the evangelical church now being willing to publicly speak out and have vital conversations about race and justice, we still sensed many leaders, both black and white, were relying at times on drive-by media reports or were being overly influenced by their personal political ideologies. This sometimes led to rushed judgments and superficial solutions being advocated.

This article thus seeks to propose a way out. As a white leader involved for over thirty years in multiethnic urban ministry, I (Ken) will share what I have learned as I have sought to listen and learn from African-American Christian friends and ministry

⁵ "A United Evangelical Response: The System Failed Eric Garner," *Christianity Today*, December 4, 2014 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/december-web-only/united-evangelical-response-system-failed-eric-garner.html>> (accessed 16 December 2014).

associates who have had to deal with these issues in ways I have not. As an African–American leader who has led and served in multiethnic urban and predominately white ministries for over forty–three years, I (Charles) will share what I have learned to accept as honest questions that many of my white evangelical friends and coworkers wrestle with as they hear and are confronted with charges of racism either personally or nationally.

While we do not propose to have all the answers, we are committed to engage in collaborative conversations that lead toward comprehensive solutions. Our goal will be to seek a deeper understanding of the divided perceptions concerning the dual problems of racism and injustice by listening more carefully to others within the family of God who can speak to these issues in ways we cannot.⁶ Based on the insights gleaned from listening, we will then share key lessons learned and propose some positive steps churches, Christian ministries, and leaders can take to biblically address these concerns.

WHAT WHITE CHRISTIANS NEED TO LEARN FROM AFRICAN–AMERICANS (KEN)

It is my firm conviction that before whites speak to this issue, we must listen more intently to our ethnic brothers. As Ed Stetzer has reminded us in his blog, we must listen for two reasons: “because there is a historical *context* to this [Ferguson] tragedy, we must listen to feel the pain behind the problem and finally we

⁶ We are not claiming to be the first calling for the need to listen to our brothers. Ed Stetzer has done us all a favor by inviting nine African–American evangelical leaders during the fall of 2014 to contribute thoughtful articles to his daily blog, *The Exchange*, on this subject, collected under the series “It’s Time to Listen.”

listen so that we might acknowledge that injustice really exists.”⁷ To these two reasons I would add: as ambassadors of the King, we should be deeply concerned in these days of conflict about having an effective ministry of interpersonal reconciliation (Eph 2:14–17; cf. 2 Cor 5: 11–21).

To better understand the present response of many within the minority community, I have learned it is necessary to remind ourselves of a painful and tragic history that many of us would prefer to relegate to the land of forgetfulness we label “the past.” We cannot deny the reality and legacy of America’s “original sin”—the shame of slavery.⁸ Sadly, many professing Christians justified the institution of slavery by a gross misuse of Scripture.⁹ Even after formal emancipation blacks were relegated to second-class citizenship in America. This societal assignment was made by a combination of law, custom, and the ever-present threat of violence, most graphically in the form of lynching, which claimed thousands of black lives.

Unfortunately Christians were mixed in their response to these evils, at times listening more to their culture than to the

⁷ Ed Stetzer, “A Decision in Ferguson: How Should Evangelicals Respond?” *The Exchange*, November 24, 2014 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/november/decision-in-ferguson-how-should-evangelicals-respond.html?>> (accessed 16 December 2014).

⁸ For an authoritative historical account of slavery, see John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980); also helpful, Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York: Oxford U P, 1974).

⁹ See Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford U P, 2000), 21–37; A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God* (Indianapolis, IN: Crossroads Bible College, 1998).

Word of God. Some, like northern abolitionist Charles Finney, publically opposed these evils, but sadly many more either defended the shameful status quo or were complicit by their silence. This complicity was most obvious when “Jim Crow” laws were enacted, enforced, and supported by people who often could be found attending church on Sunday mornings.¹⁰

To better grasp why African-Americans often respond differently than the majority culture, we must first seek to better understand this tragic 400-year history of institutionalized segregation.¹¹ We should realize that many blacks of our generation still recall the stories told by their grandparents who experienced the inequities while growing up in southern states. To many young adults of color, these current events sound eerily similar, and they certainly are interpreting them through this historical filter.

Seeking to listen to my African-American brothers, I have also learned there is no one black viewpoint—and no singular black evangelical perspective. What follows is a representative overview of how African-American evangelical leaders have blogged after Ferguson. This brief survey is intended to not only illustrate the diversity of perspectives which exists among respected and theologically trained black evangelical Christian leaders, but also to help us as whites to better listen and learn.

Bryan Loritts, pastor of Fellowship Memphis and author of *Right Color, Wrong Culture*, has properly pleaded with whites to

¹⁰ Ibid., 37–48.

¹¹ Often the value of black life was viewed as being on par with that of animals. For a better historical understanding of this spiritual lie that black people were not fully human, see Lisa Sharon Harper, “It’s Time to Listen: “The Lie,”” *The Exchange*, August 25, 2014 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/august/its-time-to-listen-lie-guest-post-by-lisa-sharon-harper.html>> (accessed 16 December 2014).

feel the pain and hurt of African-Americans. Despite how one feels about the “facts” of Ferguson (and Staten Island, etc.), we must seek, he says, to grasp the historical-cultural filter (or hermeneutic) by which blacks naturally interpret Ferguson-like incidents. Asking our black brothers and sisters to just quickly “get over” these events and move on is, in his opinion, “actually a white refusal to *attempt* to see things from [their] ethnically different perspective” and should be seen as “a subtle form of racism.”¹² Pastor Loritts exhorts us:

We will never experience true Christian unity when one ethnicity demands of another that we keep silent about our pain and travails. The way forward is not an appeal to the facts as a first resort. Rather, we should attempt to get inside each others’ skin as best we can to feel what they feel, and understand it.¹³

Loritts is no armchair theoretician; he leads a growing multiethnic urban Memphis church of over 2000 people. He acknowledges that as committed followers of Jesus Christ, the gospel makes demands on all of us, black and white, to submit and subjugate our cultural hermeneutic to the gospel hermeneutic.

In other words, my Jesus-ness must trump my blackness. As Dr. Tony Evans says, “Black is only beautiful if it is biblical.” This is at odds with the teaching of liberation theology, where you had black theologians like Dr. James Cone who wrote the gospel is essentially for the oppressed and not the oppressor. Not true. If I understand the gospel right, Jesus died for Michael Brown and Darren Wilson

¹² Bryan Loritts, “It’s Time to Listen: Feeling the Pain Despite the Facts,” *The Exchange*, August 20, 2014 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/august/its-time-to-listen.html>> (accessed 16 December 2014).

¹³ *Ibid.*

(the shooter); slaves and slave masters, the lynched and the lynch mob. My new gospel hermeneutic, therefore leaves no place for hatred, bitterness, or unforgiveness.¹⁴

Applying this insight to himself, he writes, “I [must] never give up on my white brothers and sisters because God in Christ has never given up on me.”¹⁵ Loritts closes by stating that the “God we serve is both a forgiving God and a just God. These two things can cohabitate.”¹⁶ In other words, we can forgive and love one another while at the same time expect to see justice enforced when wrong prevails. Both, he feels, are consequences of the gospel.

Leonce Crump, a former NFL football player and now founding pastor of Renovation Church in Atlanta, asks in a two-part blog, “Will White Evangelicals Ever Acknowledge Systemic Injustice?” His observation is that too many white Christians “seem to quickly jump to the defense of [an] officer Wilson with disregard for the fact that a human life has been taken” and thus seem to ignore the long historical pattern—“the African-American narrative”—which seems to devalue black lives. Crump then cites a series of “justified” and “routine” traffic stops that he personally and undeservedly experienced at the hands of white policemen growing up in the South. This he reminds us is a common experience for many black men.¹⁷ He goes on to remind

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ To read another evangelical’s testimony of undeserved encounters with police, see Thabiti Anyabwile, “One Man’s Justice is Another Man’s Nightmare: It Really Could Have Been Me,” *Pure Church*, December 14, 2014 <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/>

us that Anglo-Europeans, motivated by a fear of losing control and being tainted by the culture of incoming immigrants (people of color), historically established *systems* “of segregation and oppression” to protect their own cultural heritage. These sinful systems were most evident in enforced practices affecting housing, labor, education, and even the legal system—with the result that injustices were often forced upon ethnic minorities. Crump feels that for Christians to be a silent in the face of these pervasive inequities is to avoid the application of the gospel to obvious issues of injustice, “though those issues may be uneasy, unclear or politicized.” To be silent is to actually uphold “the very structures that purport and perpetuate injustice.”¹⁸

Philip Fletcher is a church planter for the Church at Oakwood in Conway, Arkansas, and author of *The Excellence of God*. As a young African-American pastor in the South, he writes about how his family is quietly seeking to demonstrate and display the gospel in an urban setting, in an effort to build and transform families and neighborhoods. Ferguson has caused him to reflect and grieve over sin’s effects, particularly upon urban life as he sees it daily. He acknowledges that racism is not a sin specific to Caucasians. Fletcher also calls for diverse ethnic groups to seek to learn from one another: “When we pursue the hard work of knowing and hearing intently what life as an African-American or Caucasian American resembles, embrace becomes possible. It is in the work of creating this new fellowship with each other that we have the opportunity to also demonstrate God’s embrace of a

thabitanyabwile/2014/12/02/one-mans-justice-another-mans-nightmare-it-really-could-have-been-me/> (accessed 16 December 2014).

¹⁸ Leonce Crump, “It’s Time to Listen: Will White Evangelicals Ever Acknowledge Systemic Injustice?,” *The Exchange*, Part 1, August 21, 2014; Part 2, August 22, 2014 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/august/its-time-to-listen.html>> (accessed 16 December 2014).

diverse humanity in Jesus Christ.” Pastor Fletcher correctly observes, “The people of God do not work for peace on behalf of their individual ethnicities.” We work for peace in our communities “in response to the rich outpouring of God’s grace through Christ on our behalf. . . . We work for peace because God our Savior brought about an eternal peace for the glory of God and our joy.”¹⁹

Blogging at the Gospel Coalition, Voddie Baucham, pastor of Grace Family Baptist Church in Spring, Texas, tells us he rather reluctantly decided to speak publicly to the Ferguson tragedy. While conceding there are occasional systemic issues plaguing black men, Baucham expresses his conviction that these more visible societal issues “are [ultimately] rooted in and connected to the epidemic of fatherlessness” so prevalent in the African-American community. He goes on to decry the fact that more than 70% of all black children are born out of wedlock. A conservative evangelical, this pastor is convinced that “any truly gospel centered response to the plight of black men must address these issues [fatherlessness and immorality] first and foremost.” Furthermore, his concern, he writes, is not so much with the epidemic of violence against black men (which he again concedes is an issue) as with the violence that more commonly occurs at the hands of other black men. He then goes on to cite FBI homicide statistics from 2012 that indicate a high rate of “black-on-black” crime and murder. He wonders out loud where the black “leaders” are who are marching against these community travesties.²⁰

¹⁹ Philip Fletcher, “It’s Time to Listen: How We Can Learn from One Another,” *The Exchange*, August 23, 2014 <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/thoughts-on-ferguson>> (accessed 16 December 2014).

²⁰ Voddie Baucham, “Thoughts on Ferguson,” *Gospel Coalition*, November 26, 2014 <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/>

Not afraid of controversy, Baucham concludes his blog essay by boldly stating his growing conviction that systemic issues are too often unduly and unfairly blamed for the sinful actions of individuals. He feels strongly that men who rob and police who stop or shoot blacks undeservedly are both nothing more than “sinners” who need to take personal responsibility for their dastardly deeds. In his view, Brown “reaped what he sowed.” While not denying the prevalence in our society of institutional and individual racism (and even prejudice in policing practices), Baucham wants to remind us all that we are each personally accountable to God and to one another for our actions and can never blame the system. Stating that there are “worse things than suffering injustice,” he pleads for all parents to teach their children to respect those in authority and to “understand what it [means] to treat others with the dignity and respect they deserve as image bearers of God.” As the father of seven black sons (some adopted), Baucham expresses gratitude for the “American privilege” [as opposed to “white privilege”] of raising his family according to the principles and precepts of the Word of God, which he believes is the ultimate solution to urban woes.²¹

Baucham’s bold pastoral call for personal responsibility went viral. Many white Christians loved it and sent it on to their friends via Facebook. It, however, soon raised a hornet’s nest of strong objections from many other African–American Christian leaders. Representative of the many countering reactions was that of Thabiti Anyabwile, assistant pastor for church planting at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC. Anyabwile is a Gospel Coalition council member, respected author, and frequent blogger at *The Pure Church*, which is carried by the Gospel Coalition. His thoughtful response to Baucham was posted under

thoughts-on-ferguson> (accessed 16 December 2014).

²¹ Ibid.

the heading, “Four Common but Misleading Themes in Ferguson-like Times.”²²

Anyabwile seeks to carefully respond to what he sees as four often repeated and well circulated themes: fatherlessness, black-on-black crime, black community apathy, “and the problem isn’t racism but sin.” He begins by affirming that all four of those issues are serious concerns in the African-American community, deserving of “accurate and loving discussion” by people of all ethnicities. He laments, however, that often proponents fail to “tell the whole truth about these things in proper context.” This can lead, he fears, to a fostering of further falsehoods and stereotypes, blocking constructive action.²³ He is bothered not so much with what Baucham has said as with what was omitted.

Taking up the first issue of absentee fathers and family fragmentation, Pastor Anyabwile acknowledges that the social science evidence indicates that “the single best predictor of child and family well-being is a healthy marriage between the biological parents of the child.” But he feels that, left alone, this argument “fails to recognize how systemic issues actually undermine the goal of family formation and stability.” For example, the disproportionate arrest and sentencing of black men does not leave many around to become responsible husbands and fathers. He feels appeals to marriage research can easily overstate the case. For example, the marriage benefit “decreases if one of the parents is not the child’s biological parent.” And it may even be harmful if constant abuse and conflict

²² Thabiti Anyabwile, “Four Common but Misleading Themes in Ferguson-like Times,” *Pure Church*, November 27, 2014 <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabitianyabwile/2014/11/27/four-common-but-misleading-themes-in-ferguson-like-times/>> (accessed 16 December 2014).

²³ *Ibid.*

are occurring in the marriage. “So marriage is no magic bullet” to many in “poor communities with long histories of distress.”²⁴

To the issue of “black-on-black crime,” Anyabwile points out that the same FBI data cited by Baucham shows that 82.5% of white murder victims are at the hands of white perpetrators—not too much less than black-on-black rates (91%). He contends the reality is people “commit crimes in their own neighborhoods against their own neighbors.” Thus urban crime is not so much a “race” thing as a “zip code thing.” Many homicides are intimate partner violence, or violence against spouses and girlfriends. Thus it cannot be said that blacks are more criminal by nature than whites. That perception, he states, needs to be corrected.²⁵

Is it true that African-Americans are not vigorously protesting the black-on-black crime and other crucial problems that exist inside the black community? Anyabwile shows this too is inaccurate. He cites a long list of those within the African-American community—both in the past and today—who are working hard to stop violence, to march against these and other urban evils, and stress the need for personal responsibility. Often the media fails to report this “unsung work.”²⁶

Another common reaction by conservative evangelicals is the statement: “It isn’t racism, it’s [just] sin.” Coming from my fundamentalist upbringing, I (Ken) admit this is one I have frequently used. In Ferguson-like scenarios, some would question whether Ferguson-like incidents are really “racially motivated” or “simply unfortunate.” Anyabwile acknowledges each public case must be weighed individually and that only an omniscient God can know the hearts and minds of both the perpetrator and the victim. Yet he rightly observes “*all our*

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

systems [political, economic, legal, educational, etc.] were shaped and forged during long stretches of history where systematic bias was the *stated acceptable norm* and not the exception.” Thus, in a fallen world we should not be surprised when such systems are not changed “overnight or [even] in a generation.” This bequeathed “legacy of learned practice” may still be around and “carry unintended bias.” Thus, Anyabwile contends, in most Ferguson-like situations we must acknowledge there is *both* individual sin for which people are personally responsible *and* systemic issues that may need addressing. Yes, the root problem is always sin, but we must realize sin often manifests itself in “systemic and systematic bias.” Racism, seen biblically is “a sin with systemic properties.” Thus, to say, “It’s not racism, it’s sin” he feels is “to fail to understand both racism and sin.”²⁷

One of Pastor Anyabwile’s objections to Baucham’s blog is over his “timing and tone.” He feels that injecting the above four themes when Ferguson-like events are being discussed can “divert attention and stymie [needed] action.”²⁸ To illustrate he points us to the abortion issue which conservative evangelicals rightly see as immoral and sinful:

But when we talk about abortion, *we don’t upbraid the mother seeking the abortion when a policy conversation is in view*. No. We discuss the policy with all the force we can muster on behalf of all the babies we can save. If we want to talk about personal responsibility, chances are we do that in pastoral tones in pastoral settings, or we even volunteer and find crisis pregnancy centers to create a safe productive place in which to engage the mother.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Anyabwile's point is that in Ferguson-like events, as with abortion, "conflating personal responsibility and public policy by insisting that *only* personal factors matter actually harms both personal and policy-level efforts at improvement."³⁰ In other words, *both* are necessary levels of reflection and action. We do not have to, nor should we, choose one over the other.

Dr. Anthony Evans, founding pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas and best-selling author, believes American culture is still reeling from the effects of historical racial injuries and injustice largely because Christian churches have yet to come together as one body under God to address and tackle these tough issues: "In order to impact our society, we need to first model unity in the church." He reminds us that the success of the Civil Rights movement was driven by the church: "Whole communities were changed, laws were changed, the way the government functioned, all changed because the church came together in unity to call for God's view of justice to be implemented in a segregated America, in an unjust society." Evans calls on Christian leaders in particular to not remain silent in Ferguson-like situations. He writes, "It is important that the leaders in the body of Christ be held accountable to speak to this matter because its continuance is affecting all of us as we bear the burdens of the systemic effects of racial division throughout our land."³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Quoted in Nicola Menzie, "Sin of Racism Will Continue Until Church Gets Its Act Together, Insists Pastor Tony Evans," *The Christian Post*, December 17, 2014 <<http://www.christianpost.com/news/sin-of-racism-will-continue-until-church-gets-its-act-together-insists-pastor-tony-evans-131053/>> (accessed 18 December 2014).

Evans boldly states that sin, not skin, is ultimately the cause of racism, and further describes the “evil” of racism as a “cultural cancer” that must be excised:

When you believe that racism is a skin problem, you can take three hundred years of slavery, court decisions, marches, and the federal government involvement and still not get it fixed right. But once you admit that racism is a sin problem, you are obligated as a believer to deal with it right away. As long as the issue of race is social not spiritual, it will never be dealt with in any ultimate sense.³²

Derwin Gray is founding pastor of Transformation Church in Indian Land, South Carolina, an intentionally multiethnic, multi-class church that is both growing and impacting its community. He decries the reality that nearly 90% of American churches are homogenous, where one ethnic group makes up more than 80% of the congregation. While acknowledging that sometimes this is caused by “geographic demographics,” he points out most churches remain segregated by choice. Research shows most churches are ten times more segregated than their neighborhoods and twenty times more segregated than the public schools they are near.³³ Gray asks, “What if black and white Christians, as well as other minorities, were members of multiethnic churches instead of segregated ones? ... If we worshiped side-by-side in the body of Christ, could we [not] address racism, oppression and injustice together?” It is Pastor Gray’s firm conviction that these kind of gospel-centered, reconciliation-preaching churches are the solution to the

³² Ibid.

³³ Mark DeYmaz, “Building the Church in Multi-Ethnic Expressions,” *NAE Insight*, Spring 2013 <<https://www.nae.net/nae-newsletter-archive/spring-2013/974-building-the-church>> (accessed 18 December 2014).

animosities that often separate us. He calls on churches to rise to the occasion in this “pivotal time” in our nation’s history.³⁴

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY: LEARNING FROM ANGLO BELIEVERS (CHARLES)

I was born in 1949 in a then-segregated Kissimmee, Florida. In 1968 I graduated from an upstate New York high school whose student body was predominately white. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Attorney General Robert Kennedy were both assassinated in 1968. Many U.S. cities were characterized by protests, violence, and racial divide. Morality and justice issues around race relations were severely testing America’s resolve to live out the lofty ideas of the Constitution. Also in 1968 two white evangelical Christians led me to saving faith through Christ in my home. I subsequently joined a predominately white church and in August of that same year enrolled in a predominately white Bible college. My wife of 41 years is white and we have six children, a son-in-law, two daughters-in-law, and two grandchildren. Over the years I have sought to understand the racial divide, especially within the fundamental/evangelical church.³⁵

I have spoken and written on the issue of race relations for the past 35 years.³⁶ During my journey I have grown in and

³⁴ Derwin L. Gray, “# Ferguson and the Cross,” *Just Marinating*, November 24, 2014 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/derwin-gray/2014/november/ferguson-and-cross.html>> (accessed 18 December 2014).

³⁵ Read more about my personal story and dealings with racism in the Christian world in A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God* (Indianapolis, IN: Crossroads Bible College, 1998).

³⁶ See Ken Ham and A. Charles Ware, *One Race One Blood: A Biblical Answer to Racism* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2010); A. Charles Ware and Eugene Seals, eds., *Reuniting the Family of God* (Indianapolis,

profited from my desire to understand the perceptions and motivations of many white evangelical on race. Are they just hardcore racists dedicated to unjust treatment and murder of blacks? Are they ignorant of America's racial history or just plain unsympathetic?

I am gratified that many today acknowledge the white evangelical church was too silent during the struggle of the sixties. Furthermore, many Caucasian evangelicals now confess that theologically erroneous views about race were used to protect and promote both cultural and institutional injustice. While I sense that sharp differences remain between white and black perceptions of racial injustice, it is encouraging to hear that many white evangelicals do not desire to make the same mistakes of the sixties.

However, many white evangelicals are raising honest questions that I believe black evangelicals should listen to and seek to understand. White evangelicals desire to be understood too. Yet, the white evangelical voice today, like that in the African-American community, is also diverse. Through private conversions and observations of public discourse, I have learned that a variety of viewpoints exist among white evangelicals. What follows are typical questions and concerns I have found that are often raised by Caucasian evangelicals.

IN: Crossroads Bible College, 2000); A. Charles Ware, "Pastoral Counseling of Multiracial Families," in *Just Don't Marry One: Interracial Dating, Marriage, and Parenting*, eds. George Yancey and Sherelyn W. Yancey (Valley Forge, PA: Judson P, 2002); A. Charles Ware, "Understanding Interracial Families: Can the Church Welcome Mixed Race Couples?" in Dwight Perry, ed., *Building Unity in the Church of the New Millennium* (Chicago: Moody, 2002); Charles Ware and Rod Mays, "The Importance of Multiculturalism in Biblical Counseling" in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013).

LEARNING FROM PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS

Can I Interpret Facts Differently Without Being a Racist?

Some whites fear that if they do not see that the recent publicized deaths of African-American young men that erupted in national protest as racial injustice, they will be tagged as a racist. Does engaging in an honest conversation demand denying my honest understanding of the facts of an incident? This is particularly true of the shooting of Michael Brown and the forensic evidence presented to the grand jury. Blacks need to be willing to let their brothers and sisters develop their own conclusions as they seek to understand the facts and the legal system without immediately dismissing other views or perceiving racism.

Can We Discuss Issues Without Playing the Race Card?

Some whites have shared with me that they are growing weary of discussions around race and the terms which are so quickly thrown around. "White privilege" is the idea that American society as a whole provides more benefits to whites as the majority culture and thus many blacks are treated unjustly. Whether being called a racist or the recipient of unearned privilege, it seems to some that honest conversations are discouraged by such characterizations. Whites reason that as a nation we have come a long way. Slavery has been abolished; legally enforced segregation and discrimination has largely been dismantled. Black presence is increasing throughout society, including the attorney general and the president of the United States. Can we not have a discussion on issues without playing the race card?

***Isn't the Real Threat to Black Lives
Black-on-Black Crime and Broken Families?***

Many white evangelicals see this as the root systemic problem for the tragic loss of many black lives, especially young black men. Do not statistics affirm that more black young men are killed by other black men than by police officers? Is not the real solution to lowering the alarming loss of young black lives ultimately the black community's responsibility?

Broken families, low education, and high crime do plague black communities in America. These problems persist even though the government has invested significant funding to correct them. Numerous programs have been instituted, providing financial assistance, early education, college educational grants, affirmative actions, etc. Why don't national black leaders arouse as much public concern in the black community to take personal responsibility for their own communities as they do to blame whites?

***Doesn't Violent Protest Hurt
the Very Communities Needing Help?***

How does self-destruction promote justice and equality? Protests that shut down schools, frighten children and parents, rob stores, and burn down businesses create insecurity within a community. (Keep in mind that many media reports focus upon violent versus legal protests.) Given the fact that many businesses within the community are black-owned, how does such action lead toward justice for blacks?

***Would not Simply Obeying Authority
Prevent Many Police Homicides?***

A young white pregnant wife of a good police officer asks, "Would not these black men still be alive if they simply obeyed the officer's commands?" We are a nation of laws, and police

officers are entrusted with responsibility to enforce these laws. Do not citizens who resist arrest or threaten officers bear responsibility, through their disrespect for authorities, for creating circumstances that often lead to more violent conclusions?

Aren't White Police Officers Being Profiled?

When media and black parents warn their black sons of the danger of white police officers, are they not also practicing racial profiling? When they enter high crime areas to pursue the peace and safety of all its citizens, white police officers and their families often feel like they are being unfairly perceived as the enemy. Some officers' family members wonder, "Where is the nation's sympathy and concern for the wellbeing of many who serve and protect communities throughout the nation? Does the nation really understand the sacrifices being made?"

Learning from Public Discourse

A growing number of white believers are now engaged in the national discussion on race. Though sometimes limited to private conversations, many are entering the much-needed public dialogue through social media. According to a recent LifeWay research survey of 1,000 Protestant senior pastors, white evangelicals, more than black evangelicals, now see racial reconciliation as a gospel mandate: "African-American pastors are less likely than white pastors to believe that the gospel mandates racial reconciliation, but more likely to be actively involved in reconciliation efforts."³⁷

³⁷ Ruth Moon, "Does the Gospel Mandate Racial Reconciliation? White Pastors Agree More Than Black Pastors," *Christianity Today Morning Roundup*, December 18, 2014 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/december/does-gospel-mandate-racial-reconciliation-lifeway-kainos.html>> (accessed 4 January 2015).

It is encouraging to hear more white evangelical leaders actively seeking to provide biblical direction for believers in their constituencies. Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), responding to Ferguson and subsequent events, blogged on the official ERLC website:

African-American brothers and sisters, especially brothers, in this country are more likely to be arrested, more likely to be executed, more likely to be killed It's time for us in Christian churches to not just talk about the gospel but live out the gospel by tearing down these dividing walls not only by learning and listening to one another but also by standing up and speaking out for one another.³⁸

This kind of statement was often made in the past by black clergy and civil rights activists. Yet this call comes from none other than a respected white evangelical leader of the largest Protestant evangelical denomination, one formerly with a poor track record on race.

However, we must resist the temptation to assume that there is a uniformity of thought among white evangelicals. Like many evangelical groups, the Southern Baptist Convention, for example, is still divided within its membership on the "race" issue. Some still assert that this is not a biblical but a social or cultural issue that does not deserve significant attention. Southern Baptist Pastor Randy White, pastor of First Baptist Church in Katy, Texas, illustrates the sharp differences. On his personal blog, White chided evangelicals for promoting racial justice as "gospel demand." He publicly took on Matthew Hall, vice president of academic services at Southern Seminary, and

³⁸ Reported by Adelle M. Banks, "After Ferguson And Eric Garner Decision, White Christians Are Taking a Stand," *Religion News Service*, December 26, 2014 <<http://www.religionnews.com/2014/12/04/ferguson-eric-garner-decisions-white-christians-say-time-stand-blacks/>> (accessed 4 January 2015).

other leading SBC leaders who had recently blogged on the issue and were condemning racial injustice as sin.³⁹ Blogging on the ERLC site, Hall had contended:

The sin of racial injustice is far more insidious than we often realize. It is not content to restrain itself to individual prejudices, beliefs, and attitudes. Injustice infects and perverts entire societies, institutions, and cultures. And when a fundamentally unjust system is perpetuated for generation after generation, the effects and consequences of that sin become far more deep-rooted than we often can begin to see.

... We see it around us in an industrialized penal system that is overwhelmingly populated by young black men. And we see it in the recurring headlines of unarmed black teenage boys shot by police officers. Sure, we can trumpet the virtue of personal responsibility and try to sleep better at night, our uneasy consciences salved by the distance of 'out of sight and out of mind.' But look more closely and you'll see that sin is never confined merely to the orbit of individual choice or personal responsibility.⁴⁰

Pastor White sees all this as misguided theology and not a systemic issue. He writes:

The ERLC seems to be full-court press, all using the same talking points.... Each article basically says, "We don't understand how blacks feel, so we should be slow in our judgment" and "the Kingdom brings us all together in one big, happy family, so let's act like Kingdom people in a big, happy family...."

³⁹ Randy White, "I Don't Understand the Evangelical Response to Ferguson," *Randy White Ministries*, November 26, 2014 <<http://www.randywhiteministries.org/2014/11/26/dont-understand-evangelical-response-ferguson/>> (accessed 4 January 2015).

⁴⁰ Matthew Hall, "What's the Big Deal," *Canon and Culture*, November 25, 2014 <<http://www.canonandculture.com/whats-the-big-deal-with-race/>> (accessed 4 January 2015).

This statement is fraught with difficulty. If sin is “never confined to the orbit of individual choice or personal responsibility,” is society to blame? Do the thugs looting businesses and burning police cars have a personal choice and responsibility for their actions? Are we wrong to say that the individuals of Ferguson riots have made a “personal choice” and have a “responsibility for their actions?” To blame society for a crime committed by an individual is soundly insane.

Further, is the penal system that is “overwhelmingly populated by young black men,” unjust by virtue of the lack of racial balance in the prisons? What if there are more young black men in prison because more black men commit crimes? Do we need an affirmative action mechanism in our justice system in order to bring racial balance? It seems we live in a society (and have a religious denomination) in which one cannot speak this truth without receiving the “racist” label.

I would have to wonder if God Himself gets a pass, since even a cursory reading of Scripture would prove that He began elevating one branch of the family tree in Genesis 12 (arguably in Genesis 9), and only strengthened the elevation of that branch through the pages of Scripture. Was the Old Testament God somehow racist?

In summary, Matthew Hall clearly thinks there is a problem, though he never really tells us what it is, other than, “racial injustice.” He did not give an example. I get the feeling the article was designed to elicit feelings of guilt on the part of whites for the sins of blacks. And that’s a feeling I typically get when Evangelicals talk about race.⁴¹

Pastor White’s views are no doubt representative of other white evangelicals. The subsequent Ferguson protest seems to have divided white evangelicals between advocates for more personal responsibility and those espousing a clear gospel mandate for racial reconciliation.

⁴¹ Dr. Randy White, “I Don’t Understand the Evangelical Response to Ferguson.”

However, some white evangelical leaders are calling for more compassionate and careful reflection before taking sides. Pastor James MacDonald, founding pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel, a multisite megachurch based in the Chicago metro, urges a nuanced analysis and measured response to media messages before aligning with either side. He posted, “None of us really knows exactly what happened in the Ferguson shooting. Sadder is that even many Christ followers don’t seem to want to know.” MacDonald gives examples of the views believers prematurely line up with:

“All police are driven by racial prejudice and out to get racial minorities”—oh please! Or “All police actions are justifiable and there is no abuse of authority or pent up feelings of righteous anger in our urban centers” —oh please!

If Michael Brown was justifiably shot, do we deny that many die unjustly in these environments just because this is not a good example of police brutality? If Michael Brown was not justifiably shot, do we deny that many officers rightly fear for their lives at thankless jobs in no win environments and have to make life or death decisions in a fraction of a second?

Can you let your heart be moved with compassion and seek to be moved for the impossible predicaments of real people on both sides of this? Come on, Christians—the essence of Christ’s compassion is hearing what the person in pain is saying and feeling and walking a few feet in their shoes. We are called to compassion for everyone [on] all sides of this escalation not taking a single simplistic viewpoint and thereby “crossing by on the other side of the road.”⁴²

⁴² Reported by Alex Murasko, “Pastor James MacDonald on Ferguson Shooting: Christians Appear to Take Sides Without Nuanced Analysis,” *Christian Post*, November 26, 2014 <<http://www.christianpost.com/news/pastor-james-macdonald-on-ferguson-shooting-christians-appear-to-take-sides-without-nuanced-analysis-130260/>> (accessed 4 January 2015).

All of us, whatever our ethnicity, need to be careful to gather the facts before taking sides. Proverbs 18:13 cautions, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”⁴³

LESSONS LEARNED FROM LISTENING

Today’s national tension after Ferguson and Staten Island calls for discerning ears, compassionate hearts, and wise solutions that move all of us toward a better future. The December 2014 reactionary execution-style fatal shooting of NYPD officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu while sitting in their patrol car has further disturbed the nation.⁴⁴ Without a doubt, the 21st-century church urgently needs clear direction from the Word of God concerning racial tensions—and she needs wisdom in how to apply the gospel and biblical principles to the current crisis.

We believe everyone would agree that mutual trust and respect between law enforcement and citizens provide a better quality of life for all within a community. Police officers are safer when citizens seek their welfare and engage in helping them to apprehend criminals. Citizens are safer when law enforcement effectively restrain crime within communities.

The racial barrier still seems to be the toughest long-term barrier to surmount in our nation. While we have made much progress in the realm of race relations since the 1960s civil rights era, most would agree we yet have much work to be done. The recent national unrest and sustained protests reveal that the perceptions of progress by blacks and whites often differ

⁴³ Space does not allow us to survey insights of other white evangelical leaders who have written or spoken passionately about Ferguson and subsequent events; notable are Ed Stetzer, John Piper, Darrin Patrick, and Matt Chandler.

⁴⁴ This NYC shooting was carried out by a disturbed individual with a long record of problems with the law and should not be seen as representative of all black protests to police shootings of black men.

significantly. The resultant outrage is only symptomatic of the distrust, disunity, and perceived inequity that continues to smolder beneath our nation's collective conscience. After years of legislative, economic and political efforts, it is now obvious these well-intentioned man-centered efforts can never close the gap entirely.

Thus it is our growing conviction, as co-writers, that the church of Jesus Christ must now boldly yet humbly take the lead. It is especially critical during these days of uncertainty and tension that Bible-believing Christians and evangelical churches step up to bridge the gap, pointing our nation and neighbors to the gospel of reconciliation. Evangelical Christian leaders cannot afford to be silent, as many of us were in the sixties. There seems to be a growing consensus among evangelicals of all ethnicities that the time has never been better for local churches and their leaders to begin bringing gospel light on the issues of race, justice, and reconciliation.

Yet before we seek to lead the way in our communities, evangelicals will need to do a better job of modeling interpersonal reconciliation and addressing ethnic segregation and distrust that is yet found in our own churches. LifeWay Research reported in January 2014 that the majority of Protestant congregations are still composed predominately of one race.⁴⁵ This sad reality has been repeatedly confirmed.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ "Research: Racial Diversity at Church More Dream Than Reality," *LifeWay Research* January 17, 2014 <<http://www.lifewayresearch.com/2014/01/17/research-racial-diversity-at-church-more-dream-than-reality>> (accessed 4 January 2015).

⁴⁶ See Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Faith and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000). A nationwide research study by The Association of Religious Data (ARDA) found desegregation of American churches still remains an elusive dream for many. Typically most churches were either 99% white or black. Also Baylor University researchers found that when minorities do attend a majority congregation, they are less likely to have close friends or feel they really belong to the church. See David Briggs, "Racial Power vs. Divine Glory: Why Desegregation Remains an Elusive

Christianity Today's examination of 2012 General Social Survey data found that

... church going evangelicals are not significantly different from the average American on race issues, including the likelihood of being close friends with a white or black person; thinking blacks should be able to overcome prejudice and work their way up; thinking the government should be able to offer race-based special treatment; or supporting affirmative action hiring preferences.⁴⁷

Clearly, evangelicals have much to first address and correct in their local churches.

Recent research has also revealed a growing weariness and unwillingness on the part of many Americans to address the racial divide. The 2012 Portraits of American Life Study found 69% of whites felt the best way to improve race relations was to stop talking about race altogether.⁴⁸ This white refusal to discuss race and acknowledge that nationally or individually we still have problems to address, may be itself a subtle form of racism. As Bryan Loritts points out, to lightly dismiss our brethren's concerns and refuse to hear his or her historical journey and current story-narrative, is to demean and disrespect them.⁴⁹

Before the evangelical church can hope to model and lead the community conversation on race, we need to begin the much-

Goal for U.S. Congregations," *The ARDA Press Room*, February 28, 2014 <<http://blogs.thearda.com/trend/featured/racial-power-vs-divine-glory-why-desegregation-remains-an-elusive-goal-for-u-s-congregations/>> (accessed 4 January 2014).

⁴⁷ Moon, "Does the Gospel Mandate Racial Reconciliation?" *Christianity Today* (December 16, 2014).

⁴⁸ David Briggs, "Racial Power vs. Divine Glory," February 28, 2014.

⁴⁹ Bryan Loritts, "A Time to Speak," Kainos Panel Discussion at the Lorraine Hotel, Memphis, TN, 16 December 2014, webcast found at <<http://live.kainos.is/>>.

needed conversation within our local bodies of believers. If believers cannot have these loving but transparent conversations in the church, we cannot reasonably expect the listening and watching world to have them! Thus we must not squander the opportunity afforded us. These congregational conversations may be uncomfortable and at times polarizing for some, but we must all learn to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:25). And our conversation must begin with acknowledging that every person, regardless of ethnic background, struggles with racism because every person is a sinner with a depraved nature. Yet, because of God's grace, believers in Christ are all recovering racists.

Ignoring the present hurt and anger in the African-American community is not an option. Biblically informed leaders would not do that in their marriages or in other interpersonal relationships and should not in this national conversation.

WHAT CHURCHES AND LEADERS CAN DO

Having listened intently to learn from our brothers, the time comes when we must act on our Bible-based convictions. It is not enough just to sympathize and empathize. We must demonstrate our faith and biblical convictions. We must move beyond rhetoric to results by getting personally and corporately involved. Christian leaders must model to their flocks how to apply the gospel and its implications to the burning issues of our day. We need to show the relevance of the word of God by clearly addressing it to the fears, concerns, and questions of our generation. In Ferguson-like times, we should be asking what churches can do to bring hope into a hopeless community. What follows are a number of actionable ways evangelicals, both conservative and "progressive," can get involved. No church or Christian ministry will be able to implement all of these practical suggestions, but every congregation can do something, seeking God's face for his direction in their ministry context.

(1) **Pray sensitively**—Pastors can publicly pray for all the families affected by Ferguson, Staten Island, New York, and similar tragedies. As we pray for those who have lost a beloved son, we should pray for the families of both the victims and the policemen involved. We recommend publicly praying during our weekend services and mid-week prayer meetings for peace in our own community. We should certainly not neglect to pray for those in authority, for wisdom for our elected leaders to pursue truth and justice, that they might not over or under react to community conflict (1 Tim 2:1-3). We might even ask the Lord God to help our church be more effective in bridging the racial, ethnic, cultural, and economic gaps that keep us isolated and in our own comfort zones. We should be publicly praying that our congregation might evidence a God-intended unity in diversity.⁵⁰ This kind of corporate prayer speaks volumes to people of other ethnicities in our community and church. It says “We care.” It demonstrates concern for and sensitivity to the pain of many, recognizing it is real. It shouts out loud that we too believe black (and other minority) lives do matter.

(2) **Model repentance**—Lead your staff, lay leaders, and congregation to search their hearts, to examine past and present attitudes, practices, and policies which either intentionally or unintentionally excluded people of color from membership, leadership, or a voice in the ministry. Help your people recognize individual and institutional racism and then deal with it biblically. Ask yourselves: Are we truly reflecting the growing diversity of our community today? In what practical ways has our

⁵⁰ We suggest learning to apply the corporate prayer of Paul as modeled in his letter to the Ephesians would be a great start (see Eph 3:14-21). Contextually this prayer follows Paul’s discussion of the believers’ interethnic oneness in Christ (2:11-19). Other helpful biblical prayers are Colossians 1:9-12 and Philippians 1:9-11.

ministry been pursuing, embracing, and celebrating the biblical doctrine of congregational unity in diversity? How are we reflecting God's heart for reconciliation and justice? If we are falling short, we should confess that sin and ask God for enabling grace to humbly change our ways.⁵¹

James challenges all believers to search their hearts for ungodly ("earthly, unspiritual, demonic") attitudes of bitterness, selfish ambition, pride, and jealousy in their interpersonal relationships; rather believers should be characterized by a spirit that is peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated (willing to yield our "rights"), full of mercy, impartial, and without hypocrisy (Jas 3:14-17). These attitudes are vital for "those who make peace" (3:18 ESV) and do not want to show the sin of "partiality" (2:1) within the local congregation. Paul further exhorts believers who desire to follow the humble "mind of Christ" to "count others more significant than [themselves]" and to look out for the interests of others before their own (Phil 2:2-5 ESV). Pastors should lead their people to monitor their hearts for these sins and repent of these before the watching Lord.

Those in leadership may need to model the public repentance demonstrated by the Apostle Peter when confronted by the Lord about his seclusion from Gentiles and told to take the gospel to Cornelius and his household. Realizing his error, he confessed, "Truly I [now] understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34 ESV). Though Spirit-filled at Pentecost, he was still being swayed by his Jewish racism and

⁵¹ Repentance over racial indifference, prejudice or pride is not just a need in Caucasian churches. African-American, Hispanic, and Asian churches may also need to search out and eradicate attitudinal sins of racial exclusion or bitterness over past wrongs.

initially objected: “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” (10:14 ESV).⁵²

(3) **Give hope**—In the midst of a badly fractured and torn nation, many have given up all hope of ever seeing real change. We must boldly declare there is hope in the gospel of Christ and his finished cross work that first reconciles us to God, and then, to one another (2 Cor 5:16–20). That hope lies in our embracing the message that the Apostle Paul wrote to the multicultural church in the city of Ephesus: Jesus “himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:14, 19 ESV). To give real hope, we must both proclaim and demonstrate the good news of Christ’s unconditional love, dying for his enemies and bringing former enemies and aliens together around the cross. While the civil rights movement of the last century changed laws, it could not change hearts. Only the gospel can do that. But we must be faithful to show, by word and deed, the hope-giving reconciliation dimensions of the good news message we proclaim. We must walk worthy of our divine calling (Eph 4:1–7).

Minorities who have given up hope of every seeing the American dream of *E pluribus unum* (“One out of many”) fulfilled in our nation need to see more evidence of Christians across all ethnicities loving one another in practical ways in order to be convinced of the truth of the gospel and its unifying implications in these Ferguson-like times (John 13:34–5; 17:20–3).

⁵² Later Peter fell back into sinful racist practices, refusing to eat with Gentiles, and had to be confronted again, this time by the Apostle Paul (Gal 2:11–14). This incident demonstrates that even well-taught Christian leaders may at times foster latent or overt racists and may need public rebuke because of their influence on other believers! Paul recognized this was essentially a gospel issue (Gal 2:14—“their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel....”).

Significantly, our Lord's specified hope-giving gospel before a fractured world is Christians from diverse backgrounds truly loving one another.

The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the Scriptures are written to give us encouragement and hope, so that we might through endurance "live in harmony with one another" and together within the body of Christ "may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15:4–6 ESV). Scripture-inspired hope will also enable us to "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed [us], for the glory of God" (15:7). This kind of earthly hope comes from catching a glimpse of and looking forward to our heavenly home where believers of every ethnicity, culture, and language will one day be gathered around the throne of the Lamb of God who has purchased us with his own blood (Rev 5:8–12).

(4) **Preach the Word**—We may need to go back and restudy key biblical texts that address the relevant themes of interpersonal and racial reconciliation, racism, and justice (cf. Eph 2:11–18). Our objective should be to seek to understand them afresh, preparing to preach, teach, and apply them to our people and present-day culture. Possibly meeting with an ethnic or minority pastor or Christian friend to study these passages together might give you a fresh perspective on both the meaning and application of long-familiar and pertinent sections of Scripture. For example, how about restudying the doctrine of the image of God (the *imago dei*) and how all men therefore have inherent worth and dignity, deserving of respect? This doctrine has tremendous implications to the issue of racism and how we treat one another. How about preaching an entire message showing why racism is sin?⁵³ Or focusing one message on the sin

⁵³ Growing up in fundamental Baptist circles and schools, I (Ken) never once heard a biblical message on racism, which is clearly a biblical sin issue. Messages were preached on outward behavioral sins ("the

of showing partiality (respect of persons) in the church from James 2:1–10? Why not use biblical personalities like Jonah and Peter to show how believers can easily carry racist attitudes from their pre-conversion days into their Christian lives? Or show from Acts that the early church also had to wrestle with ethnic rivalry (Acts 6 and 15). Consider developing a series of messages on Great Commission outreach with a particular focus on reaching your own Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.

We urge pastors not to be afraid to courageously teach the whole counsel of God and move beyond their comfort zones. John Piper, whose church in Minneapolis has sought to reach their diverse neighborhood, urges pastors not to be cowards in the pulpit on social issues like abortion and race, which are actually biblical-moral issues. Speaking at the recent “A Time to Speak” forum in Memphis, organized after Ferguson, Piper exhorted pastors to “pre-empt [these] issues biblically” by preaching on them long before they hit the news media: “Biblically, go there first. Capture the vocabulary, otherwise you’ll inherit the Fox News vocabulary, [or] whatever vocabulary, instead of biblical vocabulary.”⁵⁴ Piper reminds pastors not to think of racism as a temporary crisis that will eventually fade away, but as a sinful reality which will remain until Jesus returns.⁵⁵ Wherever sin

dirty dozen”) but rarely on attitudinal sins of the heart. Contact me for my sermon manuscript entitled “Why Racism Is Sin.”

⁵⁴ Reported by Emily Belz, “Race, Social Media, and the Church,” *World Magazine*, December 16, 2014 <http://www.worldmag.com/2014/12/race_social_media_and_the_church> (accessed 19 December 2014).

⁵⁵ Reported by Bob Smietana, “Race in America: A First Person Report from A Time To Speak,” *The Exchange Blog*, December 19, 2014 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/december/race-in-america-first-person-report-from-atimetospeak.html/>> (accessed 21 December 2014).

prevails, we should not be surprised to discover both blatant and subtle forms of racism, both in human hearts and in culture. Thus, pastors should be willing to confront the evil of racism and point people to biblical reconciliation regularly. They must move beyond the fear of men and preach the whole counsel of God even if some of their people may be discomforted.

(5) Care for the Poor and Disadvantaged—Biblical churches should teach their people to develop a special regard for the fatherless and the poor. The theme of justice for the poor and oppressed is of particular importance in Scripture. Over 400 verses indicate God’s concern for the poor.⁵⁶ The Hebrew people were expected to treat fairly and provide for the foreigner and alien who had immigrated to their land.⁵⁷ Scripture is clear that God cares deeply for the disadvantaged and marginalized and he expects his people to demonstrate intelligent concern as well.⁵⁸ Our Lord, when he walked on earth, was moved with compassion for those in the cities and towns who were harassed, helpless, and beaten down. His concern drove him to get involved—to enter the cities of his day, to teach, proclaim good news, and heal the afflicted (Matt 9:35–36). While Christ stated that the poor will be

⁵⁶ See, for example, Psalm 41:1; Proverbs 14:31; 21:13; 28:27; 29:7; Luke 6:33–36; 1 John 3:17–18, etc.

⁵⁷ See Exodus 22:21–22; Leviticus 19:9, 33–34; Deuteronomy 10:18–20; 24: 17–21; Jeremiah 7:5–8; Malachi 3:5–6. The Hebrew word for stranger, *ger*, is often mentioned alongside the widow and orphan as people who were particularly vulnerable because they often did not have family members to take care of them, or property in order to become self-sufficient. Thus, the assistance of the community to which they migrated was critical.

⁵⁸ See Deuteronomy 24:16–18; Psalms 82:3; Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27, etc.

with us always, his example indicated provisions should be made to care for them.⁵⁹

This kind of ministry of mercy is sadly lacking in many of our conservative evangelical churches today.⁶⁰ White congregations may want to learn from the rich heritage of the African–American church that has a long history of caring for those in need and providing for the suffering. The black church has often helped hurting people through ministries of sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding.⁶¹

(6) Practice Inclusive All-Nations Ministry—Hold your leaders—and yourself—accountable to seek to reach and disciple all the cultures and ethnicities in your city and geographical region so that your church is not solely composed of people who are all alike. Your church needs to be fully committed to fulfill the Great Commission to make and multiply disciples among all the “nations” or “people groups” (= *ethné*) represented in your

⁵⁹ The Deuteronomy 15 passage to which Jesus was referring in Mark 14:7 mandates the Jewish nation to provide for the poor (Deut 15:7–11): “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land’” (15:11).

⁶⁰ For help in implementing a mercy ministry, see Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997); also Steve Corbett and Brain Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody P, 2009). For why Christians should not over-rely upon the government to solve the problem of poverty with more money handouts, see Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992).

⁶¹ See Robert Kellemen and Karole A. Edwards, *Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

community (Matt 28:19–20). A sovereign God has internationalized our North America cities, bringing to our shores numerous unreached and under-reached people groups. The Global Research Department of the International Mission Board (SBC) estimates there are 541 unreached people groups in North America (361 in the U.S. and 180 in Canada).⁶² Many of these recently arrived immigrants are dispersed into cities across our nation and could be now resident in your community.⁶³ Seek to have a biblically balanced Acts 1:8 missional thrust, where your church is sharing the gospel in your own Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, as well as internationally. If your church or ministry is unable to reach the large number of “diaspora” peoples in your community on your own, consider partnering with other evangelical ministries or mission agencies that are already present and ministering. Discover what the Lord of harvest is already doing in your diverse community and join him!

To present a credible witness of God’s love for all people in an increasingly diverse and cynical society, established congregations must begin to both go with the gospel and open their doors to warmly welcome and embrace all ethnicities. For the sake of gospel advance, churches must move beyond homogeneity to become more heterogeneous, intentionally reflecting the diversity of their communities and following the

⁶² J. D. Payne, “Examining Evangelical Concentrations and International Migration in the US and Canada,” in *Reaching the City: Reflections on Urban Mission for the Twenty-first Century*, eds. Gary Fujino, Timothy R. Sisk, and Tereso C. Casino (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012), 152–53.

⁶³ To discover what immigrant, language, ethnic, and people groups are found in your city or region—and to learn how to better minister to them—check out <<https://www.peoplegroups.info>>; also see the North American people group data and resources compiled by the Joshua Project at <www.joshuaproject.net/regions/12>; and by the International Mission Board at <www.peoplegroups.org>.

clear pattern of New Testament churches like those at Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.⁶⁴ Failure to become more intentionally diverse will likely render segregated congregations irrelevant in the years ahead. In a culture that values diversity, they also may run the risk of being viewed by many as cultic.

(7) Build Ethnic Relationships—Work diligently in your church and ministry to challenge, inform, and train your people, particularly those in the majority community, to be sensitive to the pain, hurts, and needs among minority peoples living all around you. Then move beyond building empathy to actually equipping your people to build bridges and close relationships with nearby people of color. Use John 4 and other related passages to teach your people to follow the example of Christ in reaching out to your local “Samaria.”⁶⁵ Jesus’ final command to

⁶⁴ For a thorough overview of the biblical case for multiethnic churches, see Ken Davis, “The Biblical Basis for Multiethnic Churches and Ministry,” *JMAT* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 55–96; and Ken Davis, “Building a Biblical Theology of Ethnicity for Global Mission,” *JMAT* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 91–126. For a scholarly and more sociological view of why multiethnic churches are the answer to the racial divide, see Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2003); and Michael O. Emerson, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 2006). For biblical and practical helps, see Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007); and Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

⁶⁵ John 4:1–38 contains helpful principles for cross-cultural and intercultural friendship building and evangelism. See Anthony T. Evans, *Developing Cross-Cultural Fellowship* (Chicago: Moody P, 1988).

his disciples specifically identifies our “Samaria” as one of the places to which we must faithfully witness (Acts 1:8). Your church’s Samaria would be those who are *geographically close but culturally distant*. And the starting point for effective evangelism and discipleship should be friendship–building with those of other ethnicities and nearby cultures. Pastors should be modeling to their people this kind of intercultural outreach and ministry by intentionally developing friendships with those beyond their own ethnic group.

Sadly, recent research shows most Caucasian Christians have only a few if any black and ethnic close friendships.⁶⁶ Yet, as Bryan Loritts reminds, if believers lack proximity with those of other ethnicities, they will also lack understanding of and empathy for them.⁶⁷ Many relationships between blacks and minorities are unequal; we often do not talk to each other unless we need something. Sometimes we come with our fixed agenda or solutions to our brother’s needs. This can distort the relationship. Most whites need relationships with minorities who do not need them. Serving together as peers is one step forward. But the ultimate test may be when majority people are willing to sit under the leadership of an ethnic ministry leader—or even join his church and recognize him as their pastor.

(8) Pursue Justice—Conservative Caucasian evangelicals may need to rethink what it means for individual Christians and churches to corporately be pursuing justice locally and nationally. Sitting down and engaging Christians of color in meaningful conversation to hear their perspectives on local and national social justice issues might be a helpful start. The Old

⁶⁶ David Briggs, “Racial Power vs. Divine Glory.”

⁶⁷ Bryan Loritts, “A Time to Speak,” Kainos Panel Discussion at the Lorraine Hotel, Memphis, TN, 16 December 2014; webcast found at <<http://live.kainos.is/>>.

Testament prophet tells us that the Lord requires “good” of his people and then goes on to describe that as *doing justice*, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God (Mic 6:8). Significantly, godliness and pursuing justice are linked. Jesus announced that his own ministry of preaching and healing would be to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed (Luke 4:18). A careful reading of both testaments leads us to conclude that those on the outside of society owing to prejudice, ethnic origin, or lifestyle—as well as women, children, and orphans—are special objects of the Father’s concern.

Acts of justice performed by Christians not only put the gospel on display, but they also can help non-Christians deconstruct their own distorted views of Christians fed to them by the media. They may also open up doors of conversation with nonbelievers.

Social justice is not just the most recent ministry buzz word. Over eighty biblical texts underscore divine concern for justice to the disadvantaged.⁶⁸ In the Old Testament, God often warned his people that judgment would come if they refused to show justice to the poor, the oppressed, and the powerless.⁶⁹ These passages speak not just of individual sins but systemic, institutional evils. God calls for his people to uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute, to rescue the poor and helpless, and to deliver them from the grasp of evil people (Ps 82:2–4).

Some individual believers and evangelical pastors have taken these kinds of passages as a biblical warrant to use every available means of peaceful protest to stand with the poor or those suffering injustice, and to push for legal and legislative

⁶⁸ See, for examples, Psalm 37:28; 106:3; Proverbs 28:5; 31:8–9; Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:16; Micah 6:8; and Luke 14:12–14.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Exodus 22:21–24; cf. Isaiah 10:1–3; 1:21–23; Jeremiah 5:27–29; 7:5–6.

changes in our society.⁷⁰ Openly resisting injustice in this way is seen as simply being salt and light in our society. The biblical understanding of respect for authorities needs to be balanced by a recognition that American citizens have the constitutional right to peaceful protest to bring about needed change.

White evangelicals are often slow to recognize the need for and value of pursuing racial justice through the civil courts or by seeking appropriate legislative change, perhaps fearing “big government.” Yet we must acknowledge that many of the major historical changes toward racial equality have come through legal and governmental actions. African-Americans watch white evangelicals seek legal and legislative action on current issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, government-mandated contraception, and IRS unjust treatment of conservatives. Yet they are bewildered when they see white believers argue against peaceful protests demanding change in perceived racial injustice. This is rightly seen as highly inconsistent.

(9) Explore Urban Partnerships—Your church, particularly if you are in a suburban or rural setting, may want to prayerfully consider partnering with one or two center city or inner city need-meeting Christian ministries. In addition to financial support, this should involve urging your people to personally get involved as volunteers on a regular basis. Doing so would sharpen the sensitivities of your people to social issues and needs, help them begin building redemptive relationships

⁷⁰ See for example Thabiti Anyabwile, “Three Reasons Why I Stand With the Protestors.” *Pure Church Blog*, December 15, 2014 <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabitianyabwile/2014/12/15/3-reasons-why-i-stand-with-the-protestors/>> (accessed 19 December 2014). This pastor cites Psalm 11:3 (“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”) as a biblical rationale for marching for an end to police brutality, which he sees as a modern-day civil rights issue. See also his blog posted 12 December 2014.

with the disadvantaged, and provide them with practical ways to share the good news in both word and deed. Ministries that might be considered for involvement include a local rescue mission, crisis pregnancy center, school tutoring program, job training program, community service projects, a ministry to inmates and their families, an outreach to single moms, and a local food pantry or clothing closet.

Some concerned evangelical pastors have also begun gathering regularly with local African-American and Hispanic leaders to explore ways their churches can partner together in addressing urban need, racial tension, justice, or racial reconciliation issues in their community. The goal is to build urban and interchurch coalitions to address pressing community issues biblically. In urban partnerships leaders begin to hear one another's stories and to exorcise the ghosts of the past together. These partnerships must be based upon mutual respect and teamwork. They should also include scenarios that involve minority leadership being the primary driver of strategy and execution.⁷¹ Evangelical minority leaders who understand and minister within their communities are often best suited to guide and connect outside groups who desire to engage the community. In addition, more established churches need to see the benefit of partnering with young, growing immigrant churches so that they can offer as well as receive from the new churches God is raising up in our cities.

Other concerned evangelical congregations, rather than reinvent the wheel or duplicate what others are already doing, have found ways to love their community by working directly with civic leaders to support local social service providers. Faith Church in Lafayette, Indiana, well-known for its community

⁷¹ A good example of an effective Christ-centered partnership of urban and suburban churches, often led by minority leaders, is City Mosaic in Indianapolis. See <<http://citymosaic.org/>>.

biblical counseling center, has worked with their city in neighborhood revitalization, with the Red Cross to provide emergency service, and with their local Big Brothers Big Sisters programs. They have partnered with public school officials to provide tutoring, lunch buddies, and playground cleanup. Faith has also collaborated with their city's Family Promise program to help the homeless with relief for the poor. In recent years they have even developed a neighborhood community center that provides community fitness and athletic programs to their neighbors but is also used for weekend worship services as a multi-site campus across town.⁷²

Faith's senior pastor, Steve Viars, states four biblical reasons why their church has chosen to serve and partner with their community in this way:

- To give those around us a better understanding of the character of God (Matt 5:16).
- To follow Christ's example of incarnational ministry to those who are hurting (Luke 4:18).
- To faithfully obey the second great commandment (Matt 22:39).
- To better function as an effective, biblical church.⁷³

This kind of partnership with civic organizations should be seen as good citizenship and certainly gives added credibility to the gospel. It helps earn the right to be heard and may give us a

⁷² Steve Viars, "Loving Your Community: Finding Fresh Ways to Make a Difference for Christ." *Baptist Bulletin*, November/December 2014, 22-25.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 23. Viars also cites Ephesians 2:8-10, James 2:14-26, and Titus 3:14 for the importance of God's people seeking to meet urgent need as a vital part of the believers' practice of good works.

place at the civic table where Christians can give voice to the application of biblical principles to urban issues.

(10) Cultivate Gentleness and Respect—In the midst of public conflict, Christian leaders should be modeling how to handle disagreement in Christ-like ways. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2 Tim 2:24, 25a, ESV). As we reach out to dialogue with ethnic and civic leaders about pressing community needs and issues, we need to be doubly careful to exhibit grace and humility, coming with a learner’s spirit. Recognize that good and godly men and women may at times disagree on perceived inequities and proposed solutions, and yet need not be disagreeable and mean-spirited. In a day when nationwide civic and political discourse is often harsh and full of personal attacks, Christian leaders on the front lines of reconciliation ministry must exhibit courtesy, grace, and forbearance. It is significant that Paul, in a context of being submissive to rulers and authorities, instructs church leaders “to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:2 ESV).⁷⁴ Leaders must learn how to be righteously angry but never vindictive.

From our perspective, many urban young people and millennial adults today seem to lack a proper respect for and appreciation of the role of those who are in authority. They fail to understand that governing rulers (that would include the police) and civic leaders are divinely ordained and so deserve basic

⁷⁴ This is contrary to what many conservative radio talk show hosts publicly exhibit and what some foolish Christians sometimes mimic in their public (Facebook, etc.) demeanor. Christians seeking to engage with ethnic and community leaders will at times need to learn to hold back their own personal political and social viewpoints lest they limit their audience and potential impact in the marketplace of ideas.

respect and honor. Significantly, the Apostle Paul instructs Christians in the first century to submit to their God-established authorities, all of whom were probably pagans at the time of his writing (Rom 13:1–7; cf. 1 Pet 2:13–17). Paul teaches that rulers are God’s agents who exist for the benefit of society, to protect the general public by maintaining law and order. Thus to disobey a human ruler is ultimately to disobey God. Peter teaches that good citizenship counters false charges made against Christians and thus commends the gospel to unbelievers (1 Pet 2:15). Christians are to “show proper respect to everyone” (1 Pet 2:17 NIV). This is because every human bears the image of God and some have been granted special authority from God. Peter also shows that at times, submitting to duly constituted authority “for the Lord’s sake” (2:13; cf. Eph 6:7–8) may mean submitting to the point of suffering unjustly, if it is God’s will (2:19–21).

These clear principles need to be taught and modeled to this generation. Those who are tempted to take the law into their own hands—or to use the abuse of authority as a rationale for lawlessness—need to be instructed to distinguish between the ruler’s (policeman’s) position and personality. One can disagree with an authority’s personal decisions and public mandates yet respect that authority for his or her providential position in civic affairs.⁷⁵ Well-taught Christian young adults should be dialoguing with and modeling these timeless principles before their peers, whether believing or unbelieving. This would help to reshape the tone and culture of our communities.

On the other hand, citizens, especially in America, have been given legal rights and procedures to challenge abuse of power or injustice even among authorities. The respectful and peaceful exercise of these rights should not be denied. The American

⁷⁵ When Peter wrote to submit to the king, the emperor was the godless, brutal Nero (who ruled from AD 54 to 68). Yet obedience to the emperor, though extensive, was never to be in violation of the clear commands of God (see Acts 4:19, etc.).

governmental system allows for appeals, change of laws, peaceful protests, etc. Given the depravity and flaws of humanity, we must be eternally diligent to respectfully assess and improve our legal and governmental systems as needed. All of us should seek to gather accurate, factual information, and we must allow our legal system to work prior to making premature judgments.

(11) **Support Urban Church Planting** —The tragedy of the latter decades of the last century was that many white conservative churches fled the city for the suburbs. Often this left a spiritual and moral vacuum in the city with little or no clear gospel witness. Today we are seeing a resurgence of interest in reaching our cities, recognizing this is where most of the nation's unreached and unchurched reside. Research and experience confirm the best way to reach those far from God is through renewed church planting. And in diverse urban settings, the great need is often for new Christ-centered, gospel-preaching, and Great Commission-focused churches that are intentionally multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-class. If your church would like to really make a difference in a nearby city, you might identify and support a church planter and his urban launch team. Some of the most exciting and fast-growing churches in North America today are multiethnic and economically diverse communities. They are a foretaste of and embody what heaven will look like one day (Rev 5:8-10; 7:9-10). These mosaic churches are a response of the Holy Spirit to today's cultures wars and prepare Christians for the reality of eternity. Urban churches that model well the gospel are the ultimate answer to the racial and ethnic division and discord in our land, needing our support and encouragement.

We are convinced many North Americans are longing to see solutions to our racial divide and discord. Our experience and observation is that particularly the younger generations will be attracted to faith communities that both proclaim and

demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the only one who can reconcile humans both to God and to one another. Genuinely diverse congregations where people of differing ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds worship together and lovingly minister to one another as equal members of the local body of Christ can have a powerful witness. In these faith communities, people hear and know each other's stories, and they walk in each other's shoes, thus enabling believers to put faces they know on racial and economic injustice. Such churches can truly transform our culture and bring healing to our hurting cities.

These were the kind of churches the Apostle Paul planted in the first century where they had their own version of ethnic strife with Jews and Gentiles normally separated and distant. In Christ, former enemies became co-worshippers in the same urban multicultural local churches. The Apostle Paul boldly proclaimed to these diverse city churches that Christ was the Great Barrier-Breaker who through his cross work broke down "the dividing wall of hostility" that separates people, bringing people together and making us "one" (Eph 2:14–16). This was a revolutionary and radical message in his day—and can have similar impact in our day. But local churches need to be strategically planted and positioned in North America's diverse cities where they can broadcast this message.

(12) **Use Social Media**—Churches that are engaging the issues of race, justice, and reconciliation today are finding ways to publicly and sensitively address these concerns on Facebook and pastoral blogs and with Twitter and other social media tools. They are showing their local community and the wider watching world that Scripture is relevant and speaks to both the individual and institutional sins of this generation.⁷⁶ Needless to say, if one

⁷⁶ For two fine examples of white evangelical Baptist pastors blogging on the Ferguson issue, see Stephen Stallard of Mosaic Baptist, Brooklyn, NY <<http://www.stallards4brooklyn.com/ferguson-race-a->

goes public in this way, we need to exhibit grace and discretion. It is disheartening to see some believers who use Facebook and other public media in Ferguson-like scenarios to express harsh tones and make quick judgments. It is far too easy to push one's political persuasions and to talk past one another.

Some involved churches are publicizing recommended resources on race, racial reconciliation, and justice on their church websites and blogs. This not only helps to biblically educate their own people but makes a strong statement to the general public that their church cares enough to get involved.⁷⁷ We also recommend that churches include in their public statement of faith and constitution a clear declaration that their congregation welcomes all ethnicities and views racism and its various manifestations as sinful (and thus a matter for church discipline). This reality should be prominently displayed in some simplified form on the church's website. This kind of publicized open door policy makes a strong statement to the often skeptical watching world.

(13) Develop Ethnic Leadership—Concerned majority Christian leaders need to insure that qualified people of color have access to take places of leadership and influence at the highest levels in our churches, Christian schools and colleges, agencies, and ministry boards. We need to be aggressively recruiting, training, and empowering minority leaders (and

[plea-to-my-white-christian-brothers/](#) (accessed 16 December 2014); and David Whiting of Northridge Church, Rochester, NY, 27 "My Thoughts on Ferguson," November 27, 2014, and "What Ferguson is Causing Us to Forget," December 3, 2014) <www.davidwhitinglive.com/myweblog/page/3/> (accessed 16 December 2014).

⁷⁷ For a great example, see the website of Providence Bible Church, Denver, CO, at <www.Providencedenver.org>.

potential leaders) to assume key positions and places at the table.⁷⁸ Identifying ethnic leaders who share our theological convictions or philosophy of ministry may at times be a challenge. But white organizations need to remember that for decades, blacks and other minorities were excluded from some of our finest theologically conservative educational institutions. To remedy the shortage, majority community churches should seriously consider providing tuition scholarship funding for young men and women of color who have a sincere desire to serve Christ and his church.⁷⁹

It is also true that sometimes capable and competent men and women of color are available, but Christian ministries have just not looked in the right places or been aggressive in recruitment efforts. Here making inquiries to respected and well-known evangelical leaders in the minority community could help locate potential candidates. Churches serious about becoming more diverse at the leadership level may also want to practice a modified form of “affirmative action.”⁸⁰

(14) Provide Inclusive Platforms—Pastors, Christian college presidents, and denominational and agency leaders need to be sensitive to whom they invite to speak in their churches, chapel platforms, retreats, and conferences. Our local, regional,

⁷⁸ Crossroads Bible College in Indianapolis models this well. At various times they have had faculty and staff representative of numerous ethnicities.

⁷⁹ Baptist Bible Seminary has, for example, an Ethnic and Minority Student Scholarship Fund for aiding men who desire to be urban church planters.

⁸⁰ For an example of a well-worded statement of how one church is seeking deliberate ethnic diversity in the hiring of pastoral staff and selection of elders, see “How and Why Bethlehem Baptist Church Pursues Ethnic Diversity,” in John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross and the Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 256–59.

and national Christian gatherings ought to reflect the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of our local communities and nation. If we sincerely desire to see more people of color attending our events and churches, we will need to be more deliberate to invite African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, and other ethnic leaders to address our people. Sadly, far too many Christian events have only white speakers and a white audience. When our churches and conferences fail to hear men of God from other ethnicities, our people are rarely challenged to re-examine their racial and cultural stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. Then, too, lost people who show up at our Sunday services may be dissuaded, thinking that Christianity is just “the white man’s religion.” African-American, Hispanic, and Asian American churches also need to work diligently to diversify their platforms.

(15) **Change Our Language** — A major step forward in our churches and communities would be to drop the language of “race” and begin to use more biblical terminology. The modern concepts of “race” and racial distinctions are rather recent social constructs which arose out of eighteenth-century anthropology and Darwinian evolution.⁸¹ Christian sociologists Michael

⁸¹ Historically, the emergence of the anthropology of races in the modern world went hand in hand with early assumptions of racial inferiority and superiority. From the beginning, science was bent on serving “the superior.” See Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race, Scripture, and the Protestant Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2006), 3–9; and Jenell Williams Paris, “Race: Critical Thinking and Transformative Possibilities,” in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, ed. Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (New York: Oxford U P), 22. For the connection of the race concept to Darwinian evolution, see Ken Ham and A. Charles Ware, *One Race, One Blood* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2010) and Carl Wieland, *One Human Family: The Bible, Science, Race & Culture* (Atlanta: Creation Book Publishers, 2011). Some researchers believe race as a social construct actually arose much earlier, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

Emerson and Christian Smith remind us, “[Race] continues to exist only insofar as it is recreated. That is, races exist because a society is racialized.”⁸² “Race” is not a biblical category or way of understanding the human family. Scripturally there is *only one race* and that is the human race. Challenging the Athenian philosophers of his day, the Apostle Paul declared, “And he [the Creator God] made from one man [Adam] every nation [*ethnos*] of mankind to live on the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26a). This clear text teaches the unity and dignity of the human race, that humans are all biologically related to one another and descended from one common ancestor.⁸³

A more accurate way to understand and describe the differences in the human family would be to recognize that God created and designed “people groups” or “ethnic groups.”⁸⁴ Ethnicity is a concept that is bigger than race. It stresses “the cultural rather than physical aspects of group identity. Ethnic groups share language, dress, food, customs, values, and

to justify the enslaving of whole people groups; see Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, Vol. 1, *Racial Oppression and Social Control*, ed. Nicholas Canny (London, England: Verso, 1994); and Robert E. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

⁸² Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 8.

⁸³ This is why any talk of “inter-racial marriage” is ludicrous; there is no such thing! Unfortunately, some fundamentalists foolishly sought to make such marriages wrong and even sinful, caving in to the cultural traditions of their day. For a good discussion and refutation of the “proof texts” used by some preachers, see Craig S. Keener, “The Bible and Interracial Marriage,” in *Just Don’t Marry One: Interracial Dating, Marriage and Parenting* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson P, 2002).

⁸⁴ For biblical validation of the missiological concept of “people groups,” see John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

sometimes religion.”⁸⁵ We agree with John Piper that ethnicity is not only biblical but a more helpful concept, better than race in helping humans relate to one another with respect and understanding.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

We offer these specific steps for evangelical leaders to consider in these Ferguson-like times so that our churches might better model gospel-centered reconciliation and biblical justice. These fifteen recommendations are certainly not an exhaustive list of action steps. Each one needs further explanation and discussion of how it could be best implemented.

We believe the evangelical church must be committed to building a biblical worldview in all things, including race relations and injustices. To do so, we will need to work on multiple levels—personal, moral, and institutional—to truly offer a holistic answer to the complexities of a racialized culture. Ironically, the discipline of interethnic studies and ministry is just emerging in our conservative evangelical circles. Resources are still being developed and tested. We yet have much to learn from each other and to live out in our churches and communities.

We are convinced that Christ and the biblical gospel are sufficient to resolve the pressing issues of our day. A truly Christ-exalting, Gospel-centered, approach to ethnic relations will stress God’s grace more than man’s proposed remedies, pointing people to the cross. We firmly believe it is critical that the Church pursue grace relations rather than “race” relations. Grace offers a healthy foundation for dealing with the sins of the past as well

⁸⁵ Eloise Herbert Meneses, “Science and the Myth of Biological Race,” in *This Side of Heaven*, 34.

⁸⁶ John Piper, *Bloodlines*, 234–40.

as the alienation of the present. Grace relations are built upon forgiveness and the intentional pursuit of peace, trust, unity, and loving relationships because of Christ. The Church must move beyond society's blame and shame game. The anger, distrust, and polarization of such a philosophy are very apparent today—but it need not remain so.

Within this article we have sought to encourage, especially within the evangelical community, honest and respectful conversations about the continuing racial divide in our nation and churches. We have sought to model listening so that we can all learn and profit from the concerns of our brothers and sisters within the one body of Christ. We pray that the generations that follow us will discover that the evangelical church of the 21st century was the church of reconciliation! What will you do to make this a reality?