

Biblical Thinking for Building Healthy Churches

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CHURCHES



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Jonathan Leeman

Editor's Note

Satan has always loved to exploit the lines of ethnic division. Think of how the Egyptians in Exodus hold the Jews in contempt. Or how the brand new Jerusalem church, price sticker still on the backseat window, divides in Acts 6 between Greek-speaking and Hebrew-speaking Jews.

So churches today too often mimic their host culture's ethnic rivalries, whether in South Africa, India, or America. Or at least, too often they forget they possess a resource for overcoming racial or ethnic strife that the world does not have: the gospel.

Most evangelicals recognize that possessing the righteousness of Christ means "putting on" that righteousness in every-day decisions. Yet the same is true of the reconciliation we share with one another in the gospel (see Eph. 2:11-22). We are to "put on" that reconciliation. If we do not put on that righteousness, and if we do not put on that reconciliation, we call into question whether we have been declared righteous or "one new man."

The blood-bought reconciliation that believers share with one another in the gospel, ethnically and otherwise, does not require any *one* of us to participate in any *one* form of reconciling work, as in, "If you don't carry that picket, you're not a Christian!" But it does require *all* of us to undertake *some* sort of reconciling work. Those who have been *made* one new man *work* as one new man. It's just what they do.

Consider this Journal 9Marks' way of inviting you into that work of ethnic reconciliation. Don't you want to see churches in South Africa, India, America, and everywhere not lagging behind their neighbors in this area, but pushing out ahead? What a witness that would be to the power and glory and goodness of the gospel!

Most of the articles have been borne out of the American experience, but hopefully the lessons will translate into any national setting. Brian Davis begins very much in the moment of cultural crisis and walks us by the hand out of it. Jarvis Williams then explains the relationship between the gospel and racial reconciliation. Trillia Newbell exposes the symptoms of racism in our hearts where we might not

have recognized them. Isaac Adams and Russ Whitefield point us to some unexpected lessons of humility as we approach the topic.

Turning to multi-ethnic churches, Aubrey Sequeira provides a substantial and foundational theological piece. John Folmar, Gustav Pritchard, Jeffrey Jue, and the brothers in the pastoral forum advise us on how you may or may not go about building a multi-ethnic church. Juan Sanchez and John Smuts offer a couple of case-studies from their own situations. Isaac Adams and Tim Chiang provide a couple of the more challenging pieces for White readers in White churches, while Patrick Cho gives advice for predominantly Asian-American settings.

My own piece, let's just say, is a bit experimental. Here's the key: it's more about the power described in the second half than the logic employed in the first half; and it's more for White readers than minority readers than you might at first think.

Friends, even if you don't have time to read anything, stop for a moment now and pray for Christ's churches around the world: that they would increasingly fulfill that promise first whispered to Abraham of a multi-national blessing and a multi-national people. Pray that our boast would not be in our skin color, our music style, our parentage, our manner of expression, whether we say "pastor" or call him by his first name, or anything that tends to divide one ethnicity from another. Instead, pray that our boast would be in Christ alone, and our love would extend one step more broadly today than it did yesterday.



By Brian Davis

How Do We Respond to Cultural Crises Over Race?

Is there anything proactive we can do in response to current cultural crises involving racial issues? What I mean by “cultural crisis” is the tornado of racially charged events that have been happening in our country as of late, events that have taken these issues from other places and brought it, in God’s providence, to everyone’s attention.

Mike Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in New York City, Walter Scott in South Carolina, Freddy Gray in Baltimore.

I want to start by saying something that’s obvious, but still needs to be said: All African Americans are not the same *and* many African Americans are very hurt.

That said, there is a variety of viewpoints even in the black community—there are Voddie Bauchams and there are Thabiti Anyabwiles, and they disagree how to feel. It has been my experience, though, that the vast majority have been hurting in some ways, especially in the past year.

So, what should the church do? What *can* the church do?

I want to look at a passage of Scripture that I think helps us as we consider these difficult questions. In 1 Peter 3:8, Peter writes to his elect exiles in the church and I think he has words for us, too. The passage reads: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

UNITY OF MIND

I’ve heard it said that “the gospel creates ethics.” I think that’s right, but I haven’t heard many people talking that way about racially charged issues. Forgive me for these generalizations, but I’m using them

because they are generally true. But it seems white people feel like black people always play the race card, and black people feel like white people never acknowledge racism.

This has been perplexing, and it has revealed a divided hermeneutic in our churches. How is it that Christians in the same church, looking at the same event and the same Bible are landing in entirely different places? And these landing-places seem to be ethnically divided. By and large, black people in churches feel different about the situation than white people in churches. How is it that our ethnicity is shaping our ethics rather than our Bible or our gospel? Why do we disagree across ethnic lines?

I don't have an answer for that. I just think it's something worth considering. It's *strange* at best, especially when we look at a text that tells us to have "unity of mind."

If nothing else, we should be laboring for like-mindedness. Racial injustice is a huge, devastating part of our history, and it affects life today. But the Word of God and the gospel applies because there are things that the church ought to feel *together*. There are things that the church ought to oppose *together*; there are things we ought to support and assert *together*.

And I'm not trying to put a finger on exactly the correct conclusions but rather to emphasize the *togetherness* of those conclusions. And I think pastors have the responsibility to lead in this effort.

Many white people have had the freedom to pretend like racial injustice is a non-category. Black people haven't. And both of those mindsets are in our churches. And we want them to be unified.

Listen to Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10: "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."

Or in Philippians 4:2: "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord."

Brothers, it's good to entreat and to help people in our churches agree in the Lord. I know that's easier said than done, but leading our churches toward like-mindedness and unity is crucial. We certainly won't agree on everything, but we must try to be in agreement with the mind of Christ.

SYMPATHY

A necessary companion to "unity of mind" is something that's generally lacking in these situations: "sympathy." One of the most hurtful things for me, especially in the Mike Brown and Eric Garner situations, was the general lack of sympathy and pastoral concern. I got so many phone calls from my black brothers and sisters in Christ who are in churches led by white leaders about how hurt they were because these issues were not addressed. They didn't get talked to about the situation; they didn't get pursued in their hurt.

Pastor, if you didn't publicly address your church concerning that Ferguson tornado, I think it's pastorally irresponsible. Why? Because God's providence has made this an *everybody* issue. He has taken things from random corners we'd never know anything about and he has stuffed it in our faces

over and over and over again. And brothers, just because you're being silent does not mean that everyone else is.

And pastors, there are few responses to hurting more hurtful than silence.

In too many of these situations, there has been an astonishing lack of sympathy. We are called by God to suffer with those who suffer. We're called to enter into another's situation; to understand it, feel it, share it. I don't mean the pastor goes to them and tells them not to hurt; I mean the pastor goes to them and learns how to hurt with them. Perhaps you don't have anything to teach about it? That's fine. But one of the main things you *can* teach is how to learn what it looks like to be slow to speak and quick to listen.

During these months, have you listened to the black people in your churches? Have you had conversations with them? Have you said to them, "Tell me. How are you feeling?" Did you gather them up and actually talk to them?

Diversity without sympathy is how you get assimilation. Diversity with sympathy is the key to unity. The former says "Be here, be with us—but we don't really care how you're doing; just be like us." The latter says something much different: "Come here; affect us."

BROTHERLY LOVE FROM A TENDER HEART

In some ways, I don't understand what all the confusion is about in terms of how to respond to racial difference. Brotherly love is intended to be simple. We are to love each other like it's a family—because it is. There are not merely black people in your church; there are black brothers and sisters in your church. They're your family. In Christ, we become the very family of God. And in Christ, our family-of-God-ness is greater than, more intimate, more permanent than our ethnic identities.

We are co-heirs with one another, members of one another. This is important because racial issues specifically tend to separate and divide. And how you love your black fellow members can either confront that lie, trying to conquer it with gospel, or it can spread the lie so that it will try to rip apart what God has made one.

Are you a brother or a sister to those who are hurting? Do you have a tender heart? Are you moved? Do you care? Are you affected by people being hurt? Do you care what they are going through? Are you irritated when someone talks about racial injustice? When you hear "systemic racism" do you just get mad? I understand how you could feel accused, but I don't think that's the aim.

There's a reason people are talking about how black lives matter, and it's not because all white people hate black lives. Do you care why people say stuff like that, why they feel like their lives are less valuable? Is there compassion for them? When your brothers and sisters share about their experience in this country, or in your church, is your heart pricked for them? Is it tender?

A simple, loving conversation goes an incredibly long way, and especially so to shape the heart.

A HUMBLE MIND

We're talking about love here—basic, bottom-floor Christianity. Sure, the field that we're currently playing on is comprised of racial challenges, but the playbook of love is the same.

Listen to how Paul links our humility to Christ: “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”

In other words, Paul is saying, “Be like the Lord Jesus!” As pastors, you have to lead in that. They have to lead in emulating the one who was not in our situation, but love compelled him to come. He suffered like us; he suffered with us. There are few encouragements more prized than the fact that we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect was tempted as we are.

So, in a lot of ways, I'm simply asking pastors to love the people God has given them like Jesus. Love them like Jesus.

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By Jarvis J. Williams

Racial Reconciliation, the Gospel, and the Church

The relationship between the gospel and racial reconciliation has been a contested topic among evangelicals of late.

Some Christians propose that the gospel and gospel action can solve the current racial divide in the church. I (an African-American) make this point in a book called *One New Man*, and biblical scholars Kenneth Mathews (European-American) and Sydney Park (Asian-American) make a similar point in *The Post Racial Church*.

However, there is hardly a Christian consensus regarding the church's role in the work of racial reconciliation.

A SOCIAL ISSUE OR A GOSPEL ISSUE?

Michael Emerson and Christian Smith observe in *Divided by Faith* (Oxford, 2000) that evangelical Christians have traditionally viewed racial reconciliation and matters of race as a “social issue” instead of a “gospel issue.”

One white Southern Baptist pastor illustrates the point in his 2014 article “[I Don't Understand the Evangelical Response to Ferguson](#),” where he argues that racial reconciliation is a social issue instead of a gospel issue. Assuming the modern social construct of race, he strongly criticizes fellow evangelicals for suggesting, in light of the sad events in Ferguson, Missouri, that the Christian gospel speaks to issues of race and racial reconciliation.

To be sure, we should be extremely careful about referring to various issues as “gospel issues,” as D. A. Carson [has observed](#). But Carson continues,

Certainly the majority of Christians in America today would happily aver that good race relations are a gospel issue. They might point out that God's saving purpose is to draw to himself, through the cross, men and women from every tongue and tribe and people and nation; that the church is one new humanity, made up of Jew and Gentile; that Paul tells Philemon to treat his slave Onesimus as his brother, as the apostle himself; that this trajectory starts at creation, with all men and women being made in the image of God, and finds its anticipation in the promise to Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Moreover, the salvation secured by Christ in the gospel is more comprehensive than justification alone: it brings repentance, wholeness, love for brothers and sisters in the Christian community. But the sad fact remains that not all Christians have always viewed race relations within the church as a gospel issue.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION, NOT JUST DIVERSITY

Part of the problem is that evangelicals can confuse racial reconciliation with multi-ethnicity or diversity, and so they begin conversations about racial reconciliation with a push for multi-ethnic churches.

I agree that gospel-grounded racial reconciliation produces multi-ethnic and diverse churches. But diversity is not the same as gospel-centered racial reconciliation and the goal of gospel-centered racial reconciliation is not simply diversity. An assembly of the United Nations is multi-ethnic and diverse, as is the army, or the local public high school, or so many other groups. Yet such settings hardly enjoy the racial reconciliation of the gospel.

Gospel-grounded racial reconciliation begins with what Christ accomplished at the cross. He united one-time enemies to God and therefore to one another. He made the two one. Racial reconciliation begins, in other words, with the "indicative" of who we are in Christ. And then racial reconciliation shows itself in our love for the "other." It flows from the Spirit-empowered obedience and demonstration of who we are in Christ. To define racial reconciliation as simply diversity, or to think that our churches are racially reconciled simply because they might be diverse, is misleading.

To clarify, I strongly desire, promote, and live for ethnic diversity in both church and society. I am multi-ethnic. I have African-American, Native American, and Caucasian blood flowing through my veins. I long to be part of a multi-ethnic church. I am in a multi-ethnic marriage with a Hispanic woman from Costa Rica. I have a multi-ethnic son. My wife and I hope to adopt a little girl from another country. And I live in a multi-ethnic community. But none of these things depends upon a gospel-centered racial reconciliation. Gospel-grounded racial reconciliation, after all, is supernatural, not natural.

NEEDED: RELATING THE GOSPEL AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION

In order to understand what biblical racial reconciliation is and what it means for the church, Christians, first of all, need a better understanding of the relationship between the gospel and racial reconciliation. Let's just consider Ephesians 2 and 3 for a moment.

The mystery of the gospel is an important theme in Ephesians (1:9-10). Paul defines this mystery as the unification of all things in Christ (1:10) and "the gospel of your salvation" (1:13). Chapter 2 then begins by recalling the fact that we are all dead in our sins and separated from God (vv. 1-3). "But God," verse 4

famously begins, makes us alive in Christ and saves us by grace, say the following verses. Based on Ephesians 2:1-10, evangelicals often define the gospel with reference to our reconciliation to God (see esp. Eph. 2:1-10).

Yet that's not all God does in the gospel. Paul goes on to say that the gospel includes the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles into one new humanity. Verse 13 begins with a second sharp adversative: "But now," Paul says, and then points to something else Christ has *already* accomplished: those Gentiles "who were far away have been brought near." They were brought near God's promises of salvation to Jews "by the blood of Christ Jesus" (2:13).¹

The good news of the gospel includes the fact that the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, died so that he would put an end to the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, to reconcile Jews and Gentiles to God, and to each other into one body through the cross, which made both groups into one dwelling place of God by the Spirit (2:14-22). And Jesus himself preached this gospel of peace (=reconciliation) to Jews near the promises and to Gentiles far away from those promises (Matt 15:21-28).

In chapter 3, Paul refers to the stewardship of the grace of God given to Paul (v. 2). He describes that stewardship as a mystery that was made known to Paul by a revelation, and that mystery is the mystery of Christ as revealed to Paul by the Spirit (vv. 3-5). He explicitly states the content of the mystery is Jew and Gentile inclusion as "fellow heirs" and "of the same body" because together they are "partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel" (v. 6). And he connects reconciliation between Jew and Gentile to the gospel by stating that God graciously called Paul to proclaim as good news the inexpressible riches of Christ to the Gentiles (v. 8).

It would not be exegetically accurate to say that Ephesians 2:11-3:8 are "about racial reconciliation," at least in the way we think of those terms today. The ancient division between Jew and Gentile was not the same as the divisions we know exist between Black and White or Serbian and Croatian or Hutu and Tutsi or Japanese and Chinese. The division between Jew and Gentile was God's own doing according to his covenantal plan, and Ephesians 2 and 3 dwell on the fulfillment of that covenantal plan. But certainly we must say that a lesson or an implication of Ephesians 2:11-3:8 is that Christ united Christians of every ethnicity together. He removed ethnicity as a barrier. The good news of the gospel, in that sense, includes racial reconciliation. Christ did it! He reconciled us both to the Father and to one another!

Christians who contend that racial reconciliation is a gospel issue also cite verses like Romans 1:16-17 and Galatians 2:11-14. Passages like these demonstrate that the Bible's categories of identity and racial reconciliation intersect with salvation and gospel.

NEEDED: A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF RACE

In order to understand what gospel-grounded racial reconciliation is and what it means for the church, Christians, second of all, need a better understanding of race.

Race was one kind of social construct in the biblical world, and it is another kind of social construct today. Race in the ancient biblical world was a social construct based on special characteristics that had

nothing to do with pseudo-scientific racism. Race in the modern world is a product of eighteenth and nineteenth century racist theories in Europe about the “science” of whiteness and non-whiteness.

Understanding the nature of past and present social constructs will help us to understand what really does and does not divide us. We must accurately diagnose the problem. The Christian gospel tells us that racism fundamentally exists because of sin. Racism is an evil ideology of hate, which shows itself most clearly through violent or prejudicial actions. But racism exists even without violent or prejudicial actions because of sin. Could the very construct of race be one more manifestation of the sin of racism? Racism begetting the very idea of race?

FURTHER TO GO STILL

Christians have come a long way on race relations since the inception of America. I am a proud black, multi-racial Southern Baptist. I became the first person of color to join Hindman First Church in Hindman, Kentucky in 1996. I came to faith in Jesus Christ through the ministry of this all white SBC church and began to see racial reconciliation personified as the brothers and sisters there ministered to me and my family, nourishing us in the faith and into my calling into the ministry. Furthermore, I am privileged to be the only African-American New Testament scholar teaching at any Southern Baptist seminary or institution of higher education (to my knowledge). Therefore, Southern Baptists who rightly understand and promote gospel-centered racial reconciliation as a gospel issue should be very dear to my heart, and the ethnic diversity that exists in the SBC should be commended.

However, in my view, at the moment, Christians in general must do a better job at defining the gospel, race, and racial reconciliation, and we must be intentional about pursuing racial reconciliation in our churches and communities. We must do a better job living out the gospel of racial reconciliation in community with real people in both church and society.

Five further steps occur to me. First, Christians must believe and preach the whole gospel, including what the gospel says about racial reconciliation.

Second, Christians must be honest about our racist past to answer some of the complicated questions in our racist present. Moreover, progress will be difficult, if not impossible, if we deny that racism still exists—individually and systematically, in both church and society.

Third, Christians should work to listen to ethnic minority voices within the Christian movement who have thought long and hard about the race of issue, how it intersects with the gospel, and how this intersection applies today. Whites must welcome minority voices at the leadership table whenever and wherever discussions about the gospel and race happen. And the white majority must share their privilege and power with those sensible voices among the underrepresented minorities and suffer with them. Minorities must be willing to sacrifice some preferences to live in a reconciled way in the church.

Fourth, Christians and Christian churches must boldly press the claims of the Christian gospel onto a racist society, and we must be willing to stand against any and all forms of racism with legal and peaceful means whenever we see racism raise its ugly head.

Fifth, as citizens and residents of the United States, we must hold our leaders accountable. If they commit injustice instead of uphold justice, we should take the necessary legal steps to ensure that justice under the law will be upheld for all citizens and residents.

- 1 He here offers a Christological reading of Isa 9:6, 52:7, and 57:19 in Eph. 2:13-18. “Peace” in 2:14 and the proclamation of peace to “those far off” and “to those near” in 2:17 link 2:13-18 with Isaiah. The proclamation of peace in 2:17 is a reference to the proclamation of the gospel. In Isa 9:6, “peace” refers to the Jewish Messiah. In Isa 52:7 and 57:19, “peace” refers to the salvation (=the gospel) that YHWH promised to bring to Israel through the Jewish Messiah.

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By Trillia Newbell

Racism as Favoritism

Even with the recent surge of attention given to issues of race and ethnicity, any attempt to enter a conversation on these issues comes with a degree of timidity: *Can I say this? Am I allowed to use that word? How will he respond if I ask about . . . ?* Our reluctance to address race and to resign to “safe” silence often comes from a desire to respect others, but also from our own fear of being called insensitive, hurtful, or, worse, a racist.

That term comes with so much weight and penalty that people do not relate to it. There are few self-identified racists, though many in our country and our churches indeed struggle with racism. And if we are honest with ourselves and evaluate our actions and heart, we might be surprised (or perhaps not so surprised) to see where we struggle with the sins of favoritism, partiality, and racial bias. So, though we will most definitely concentrate on race here, let’s keep these other temptations in mind.

SIN OF PARTIALITY AND FAVORITISM

James challenged Christians about their sin of partiality. These Christians had preferred the rich who came into the assembly over those who were poor. They would pay attention to the visitors who would arrive in “fine clothing” and “gold rings,” giving them preferential treatment while essentially ignoring those who came in “shabby clothing.” James rebukes them, saying, “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. . . . If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:1-9).

The problem for James wasn’t that these visitors were rich. Wealth is not a sin. The problem was that some in the church thought that the rich were *better* than the poor. They elevated these men above others. Their preference wasn’t because they were honored to have welcomed guests; their preference was motivated by pride. They would *rather* have the rich in attendance than the poor, and their treatment of the poor reflected their view of them.

But God doesn’t view man by worldly, material standards. James explains, “Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which

he has promised to those who love him?” (James 2:5). God is the Creator. God created man equally, in his own image. And then he sent his Son to die for us. Besides the fact that Jesus loved the poor, orphan, widow, tax collector, and prostitute, he died for those who weren’t his friends. His impartiality is absolute, extreme. His death wasn’t for his friends or for those like him. Jesus laid down his life for his *enemies*. This is amazing.

Our outward appearance has zero bearing on the gospel. In Galatians we read, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). These verses have been misinterpreted and I can see why. Paul isn’t saying that these various roles or descriptions (Jew, Greek, male, female, etc.) no longer exist. In other words, they retain their various roles, but in Christ we’re all equal. In the gospel there is no superiority. In the gospel there is no color. We are equal in creation and equal in redemption. The gospel ushers in the new covenant no longer requiring believers to become Jews or follow the Mosaic Law—because the ceremonies do not save.

In other words, being Jew or Greek had no distinction in the gospel. Yet, let’s be honest, we make distinctions and judgments based on those distinctions.

RACIAL BIAS AND FAVORITISM

I’ve [written previously](#) that Christians should evaluate their hearts to see whether pride and self-exaltation has fueled the sin of racism or racial favoritism within them. I know this form of favoritism is alive and well because I have met people who tell me they struggle with it. Over the past year, I’ve engaged with brothers and sisters who are willing to face their sin, repent, and ask God for strength to change. Many of these people, I believe, would continue to be complacent in their sin if some churches and organizations hadn’t become more vocal over issues of race. When we are willing to have difficult and sometimes uncomfortable conversations, God works through them. But we now must further the conversation and dive deeper into the heart so that we can build churches that display the sort of race-transcending ministry found in the gospel.

So, what is racial bias? Racial bias comes as a matter of instinct. What’s your reaction when you see someone who appears to be of Middle Eastern descent boarding your plane? If you are walking in an urban area and a group of large black men approach, what do you think? Do you feel slightly unsettled when someone of your ethnicity marries outside your ethnicity? Do all your friends look like you? Would you prefer for your restaurant server, pastor, best friend, child’s dolls, child’s spouse, electrician showing up at the door, or the lead character in a movie to have your skin color? These biases can be instinctive and they can be a product of our racial favoritism. We are easily influenced by culture—what we’ve read, seen, or heard but not experienced—and the attitudes and belief systems of generations past. In order to see reconciliation and progress in our nation, communities, and churches, we must recognize that racial favoritism is indeed a possibility for each and every one of us. We then must fight our assumptions of others and learn to ask good questions.

The problem with racial favoritism is so often we believe our bias and react accordingly. This could lead to all sorts of errors and challenges within the body of Christ. If we believe, for example, that *all* young black men are “thugs” how might that affect the way we relate to a young black man who enters our congregation? It is true that crime rates are high in the black community but it is not true to assume that

all black men (or black people in general) belong in that category. If we buy into assumption, we show bias and don't treat these men as brothers and men made in the image of God. We ought to be fighting generalizations by truly getting to know our fellow image bearers...not starting with the assumption that this person is a terrorist, thug, etc.

If we treat that young man walking into the church as a stereotypes or a statistic, there are a few potentials: 1) we might become fearful and not approach him; 2) we might begin to view him as a project to be fixed rather than a brother to be loved; and 3) we could take our assumption and begin to try to relate with our perceived notions rather than asking good questions to get to know our fellow image bearer.

It is up to us to recognize these problematic assumptions and address our ignorance. Though the lack of understanding beneath much racial bias is not necessarily sinful, it can lead to an unbiblical mindset that favors your race over others'. Once bias causes unwarranted judgment, anxiety, or fear, it plagues us as sin. Repent of this sin. Find freedom from anxiety and fear, and celebrate the unifying, favoritism-destroying power of the gospel.

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By Isaac Adams

Don't Be Color-Blind at Church

When it comes to race and ethnicity, should Christians seek to be “color-blind”? As with most things: yes and no.

But I suggest that Christians especially should be both colorblind and color-conscious. Why? Because that's what God is like, and Christians like all people are made in his image and made to image him (Gen. 1:26-28). Unlike all people, Christians conform to his image more and more (2 Cor. 3:18). Thus, more and more Christians should—as they mature—grow in replicating God's colorblindness and color-consciousness. The local church provides the best home for this growth because that's where we should be meeting those who are different from us—our local “Greeks, Barbarians, Scythians, slaves, frees,” etc. Here's what I mean.

GOD DOES NOT SEE COLOR

God does not see people's color. God does not see color in that all men find their genesis in him (Acts 17:22-27). God does not see color in that he does not hold men to different moral standards; all people of all colors stand condemned before his judgment bar (Rom. 3:23). God does not see color in that he equally loves all shades of people. Christ at Calvary preeminently displayed this impartial love in that he died for all without distinction of color. The most important color to God, if any, is red—the red that flowed from Christ's veins and now covers his redeemed people; we are a new, supernatural “race” being renewed (1 Peter 2:9; also, Eph. 2:15).

Likewise, in the church, Christians should strive to love and think of all humans as equal image bearers created by God. If Michael Jackson somewhat grasps this concept in his song, “Black or White,” how much more should Christians be colorblind in their dying to themselves for the betterment of others? The myriad of “one another” commands in the Scriptures do not come with an asterisk that reads, “love one another . . . * if the other person is the same color.” Rather, the very act of loving someone who appears different than us speaks of a supernatural transformation and glorifies God to the world (John

13:35). Angels must love to look into such a salvation lived out among diverse but unified people (1 Pet. 1:12).

But as with most good things turned bad, we Christians take colorblindness to the extreme. We tend to erase people's color altogether, like when we see brother "so-and-so" not as our Asian friend but just as our "friend." When we do this, we begin to erase the person altogether. Tragically, we image the world more than God in this erasure. It's the world that sees even the most basic things, like gender, as permeable constructs up for erasing, bending, changing. Some parts of ethnicity are indeed permeable, but we often use this as grounds for dismissing the world and experiences of someone altogether. That is the natural, though often unintended, effect of complete colorblindness. It leads toward a dominating, unloving ethnocentrism that consumes its victims through the teeth of acculturation and assimilation. In other words, we love people less when we ignore how God made them. And we are nothing without love (1 Cor. 13).

To be fair, many well-meaning brothers and sisters in the Lord see "colorblindness" as progress, as a more excellent way toward their kin in Christ who appear different. One elderly white brother told me, an African-American, "When I grew up, the problem was that the culture was so cognizant, so hateful of blacks, that we white Christians saw it as love to simply see blacks as people, not black people." He helped me understand that erasing color is not always intended to destroy the person but to love them. Colorblindness, for some people, is a good step toward love.

GOD LOVES COLOR

But complete colorblindness cannot be the final step in our love because it requires ignoring God-ordained realities about people—realities that shape our joys, fears, experiences, and make us who we are. We love when people share themselves with us, and their experiences enable them to do so. Thus, Christians do need some balance of color-consciousness in the church because God does see and value the worlds he's made us to live in. He created our colors. He loves them! They bring him great glory in all the earth, and his glorification is what he wants. His Church is his means to that end (Eph. 3:10). The math is simple: what brings God more glory—one color of folk praising him in one way, or a glorious cacophony of diverse tongues coming from peoples of all nations, of all colors, praising him together around the throne in diverse ways (Rev. 5)? And so, God unashamedly maintains color-consciousness. As one brother said, "Heaven is diversity united around God's throne."

Brothers and sisters, even after Christ—our supreme identity—saves us and saves us into his Church, we must retain consciousness of people's identifiers. Imagine if all the fellas in the church did not think of their sisters in their local congregation as "sisters." Instead, these brothers treated them not as female friends but just as "friends"—we've all seen what messes occur from that mentality. God in his wisdom honors basic specifics about how he has made us, and we should image him by doing the same. That's partly why Paul told Timothy: "Encourage [older men] as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Timothy 5:2). God, through Paul, honored the identifiers of age and gender and showed how they mattered in the church's witness and love for one another. The same goes for our melanin and all that it represents—the worlds and cultures we embody in varying degrees and expressions. God, through Paul, makes clear how good diversity is in the church (1 Cor. 12:13, 21-23). So we must honor diversity as well. We must not prefer, idolize, demonize, or reject the appearance and worlds of the person in the mirror or across the pew. To do such, history testifies, is the natural human proclivity.

Such a wicked proclivity is partly why Paul so spoke so fervently of treasuring Christ in all above all (Col. 3:11). As one brother has said, “It’s only as we cling to Christ that we find other men and women clinging to Christ!” We must cling to him with some color-blindness and some color-consciousness. This balanced clinging will be hard, messy work; the easier thing is to be completely colorblind or completely color-conscious.

Yet this more excellent way—colorblindness combined with color-consciousness—requires forgiveness, patience, maturity, and love. Colorblindness combined with color-consciousness shows off God to watching worlds and angels. Brother and sisters, will you love others toward such a glorious display of God’s image? We can’t excuse ourselves from this labor simply because we can’t love perfectly until heaven. And God will get all the glory for having us do so—in all our fumbling ways—until then.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

In the meantime, how do we practically live with color-blindness and color-conscience? I offer a few ideas in the context of a majority-ethnic church here. For starters, pray about it, and pray about it regularly. Are you willing for God to open your eyes to see things you cannot presently see?

Second, ask someone who is different than you what they wished other people understood about them.

Third, use your spiritual gifts. If you have the gift of encouragement, write a card to someone. If you have the gift of teaching, study and teach on it. If you have the gift of service, set up chairs and provide snacks for a discussion group. If you have the gift of hospitality, host a meal and invite someone you might otherwise neglect.

Whatever you do, just start.

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By Russ Whitfield

5 Steps to Racial Peace-Making

There is an abiding polarization in the American church when it comes to racial reconciliation. We see the tension play out in the blogosphere, in our denominational discussions, and in the verbal jousting among Christians on social media.

5 STEPS TO PEACEMAKING

But I would like to briefly offer five steps to peacemaking within our churches as we work for racial reconciliation. And I get all of them from 1 Peter 3:8: “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

1. Have Unity of Mind

In this short verse, the Apostle Peter minces no words. We don’t have to hold identical opinions, but we must be agreeable and sensitive to each other’s concerns, prioritizing our common spiritual bond over our particularities.

Responding to this exhortation should lead us to stop caricaturing our brothers and sisters and impugning the motives of those who see things from a different angle.

We have become very good at building and demolishing straw man opponents that do not fairly represent the concerns of our brothers and sisters on the other side. We can have vigorous discussions about our disagreements, but we must work hard at listening to those with whom we disagree. Our shared commitment to the glory of God and the centrality of Christ must shape the way we process our different approaches.

2. Have Sympathy

Once we come to an understanding of the concerns that our brothers and sisters have, we must then take the time to process their struggles, wrestling to understand the fears, struggles, and anxieties that the issue may raise for them.

We have to “walk in their shoes” and ask the Lord to help us to sense the whole range of emotions and experiences that play into the issue for them. If you can begin to feel their sense of loss, their feelings of betrayal, powerlessness, or hopelessness, it will go a long way in dispelling mutual suspicions and fostering understanding.

“Feeling with” another person can be exhausting but it is relationally rewarding and surprisingly fruitful in our own knowledge of God.

3. Have Brotherly love

We must always keep in mind the centrality of brotherly love in the church. As the apostle Peter wrote these words to his people, we can only imagine the flood of images coming to his mind. How many times did he hear the Lord’s command to love! He was an eye witness to the costly example of Christ’s love played out in many ways, even unto death.

I wonder, when Peter wrote this verse, was he remembering Jesus’ washing his dirty feet and then commanding the disciples to love one another as Jesus loved them? Was he remembering his denial, the Lord’s restoral, and then that soul-searching question, “Peter, do you love me?”

Redeeming love necessitates brotherly love. It’s not an optional pursuit. We must weigh the command to love with great care and sobriety as we engage discussions of racial reconciliation because love must be demonstrated in concrete ways.

Love is patient with those who “just don’t get it.”

Love always hopes. It assumes that my brothers and sisters on the other side of this discussion really desire the same Revelation 7:9 picture that I long to see—even if we disagree on what it looks like to anticipate that final day right now.

Brotherly love will surely change the climate of the conversation, but we must take this out of the abstract and see those before us as people to love rather opponents to conquer.

4. Have a Tender Heart

To my mind, this is one of the best things you could say about a person: “They have a tender heart.” It communicates warmth, care, and interest. It’s full of kindness and approachability. Those with a tender heart have a conscience that is sensitive to the impact that their words and actions have on others. If they should ever cause damage, they are quick to repent and repair what they have broken.

But it’s easy to identify with the flip side of this picture, isn’t it? In the mirror, we sometimes see that hard-hearted person, the person who is mean-spirited, cold and prickly, overly stern and seemingly incapable of feeling when it comes to our “opponents.” Unfortunately, it seems that the more

cognitively-oriented denominations and local church fellowships are the ones that draw these cold and prickly types in spades.

It is true, all of us are familiar with hardheartedness in our own lives, but we should simply take this good word from the apostle into prayer, asking the Lord to give us tender hearts through spiritual renewal. After all, if “my name is written on his heart,” then my heart should be growing ever more tender toward my brothers and sisters in Christ. But there is one final Christian commitment that I’d encourage us to consider: humility.

5. Have a Humble Mind

Have you ever considered the possibility that meaningful progress in racial reconciliation has been so slow because humility has been so absent? Our hearts have not been soft because our heads are so hard. One of the ways that pride works is that it always convinces you that *those people* are the problem—every time. They are the ones who need to change. They need to get it together. They are the ones who are theologically, culturally, and socially ignorant.

The fact is that we are very good at making sure that we are the ones who are always cast in a favorable light. We are constantly placing ourselves in the “enlightened” camp while all of *those people* continue to be mired in ignorance. We are the good guys, they are the bad guys. It’s no wonder we often find ourselves at an impasse when all of us are thinking this way about the other!

NOT MAGIC, BUT DISCIPLESHIP

We must replace pride, condescension, callousness, and self-interest with unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, tender hearts and humble minds.

It’s not magic, it’s discipleship. The manner in which we deal with one another is not up for grabs. These virtues are in your possession by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

The question is, will you draw upon these vast resources so that you can be an instrument of reconciliation for the glory of God alone?

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By Jonathan Leeman

Why the Race Conversation Is So Hard

This race conversation in America today is hard. So hard. This is not only true outside the church, but inside the church.

The conversation is hard because it is a deeply and inevitably political one. By this I mean it involves the structure and shape of our relationships inside the American body politic, and these structures define our identities and our opportunities in relation to one another. The conversation is hard because it touches on people's understanding of justice, and our ideas about justice differ. And it is hard because it is filled with emotionally-freighted and hard-to-pin-down terms like "narrative of oppression" and "white privilege" and "micro-aggressions."

Yet the contemporary American conversation about race is especially perplexing for us as Christians, whether we're Black, White, Asian, or Hispanic, because it is motivated by one of two brands of politics: identity politics or a gospel politics.

The first is a politics of power. The second is a politics of love. The first is a worldly ideology, which careens back and forth between utopian and nihilistic. The second is not of this world, rooting instead in the vicarious righteousness of Christ. It leaves no room for boasting. You might find shadows and simulacrum of it outside the church, but it belongs especially to the church.

What's perplexing is, identity politics and gospel politics will sometimes say the same things, like a false friend who mimics a true friend often enough that you begin to mistake the false friend for the true. Identity politics will say right things. But it is a false savior. Or rather, it is no savior. It offers no salvation, no redemption. If anything, it can exacerbate the divisions between groups of people.

But in gospel politics—oh, here we find hope!

IDENTITY POLITICS

Identity politics defines peoples' identities according to the groups they occupy, whether those groups are based on gender, race, class, religion, sexual orientation, or something else. It is a way of thinking which the democratic West learned at least in part through the twentieth-century women's rights and civil right's movements. At the level of public conversation, identity politics aims to give a voice to the oppressed and to raise the public's consciousness of that oppression. This is what we hear in campaign speeches, television talk shows, and workplace speech codes. And to a Christian way of thinking, all this can sound reasonable. How many times do we hear the God of the Prophets inveigh, "Woe to him who judges unjustly!"

At a deeper, more philosophical level, however, identity politics is one of the few species of belief left on the desolate and post-apocalyptic landscape of postmodernism. Truth has died. The individual self is extinct. All that's left is tribal power. People live and identify with their tribes, which themselves persist in a perpetual state of war, like a Mad Max movie. In the more radical, post-structuralist view, our very sense of self is the ephemeral cold-morning breath of our conversations and language groups. There is no "I." What we think of as "I" or "myself" is a composite of all the tribes we inhabit: the values and words we learned from this family, that ethnic identity, that nation, that high school, that professional group, and so forth. Just as you are physically what you eat, so your social and psychological "self" is nothing more than the words you have heard and swallowed.

To be invited into a "conversation," in this way of thinking, is to be invited into re-forming the self, since language completely defines our tribes and ourselves.

For instance, think of how evangelicals get breathy when they pray and overuse the word "just." "Lord, we *just* ask that..." What might that breathy earnestness reveal about our concept of God and ourselves? The structuralist and post-structuralist would explore these kinds of clues to find the evangelical community's sense of identity, power, and source of personal inner coherence for all its members.

Or think of all the attention given to "sounding Black" or "sounding White" in America today. On one occasion in an upper-level English class in college (circa 1993), I remember the lone African-American in the classroom said the word "ask," and then corrected himself: ". . . ask, I mean, *aks* . . ." At the time, I probably quietly condemned his self-correction. But what was he doing? I assume he was asserting his independence and identity over and against the White majority, and such assertions are not always a bad thing.

So in the world of identity politics, inviting someone into a conversation is often a political maneuver: I'm not happy about the status quo, and so I want to speak to you about who you think "you" are as well as who "I" am. Behind that language, remember, is nothing else—no shared essence, no absolute substance. Or so would say a fully secular identity politics. Our entire social and psychological lives are socially constructed: our selves, our laws, our whole social and moral universe.

WHY WHITES BALK

Whites tend to divide over America's race conversation. In my very limited view of things, Whites in the political center and on the left will acknowledge the phenomenon of "White privilege" and the larger structural injustices from which they benefit. When news events like the episode in Ferguson, Missouri, occur, the progressive blogger enjoins, "Now is a time for us Whites not to speak, but to listen."

Such counsel is well-meaning and probably pastorally astute, but Whites further to the political right interpret such invitations as a power move. The political subtext is, "Here, in this major area of social struggle and upheaval, where profound questions of justice are at play, our skin color makes our thinking on this matter suspect. Instead, we must be told what to think!" And so arises on the political right dismissive complaints about "White guilt."

Faced with what feel like a levitical administration of political correctness and all the rules of race speech, these Whites back away from the conversation and refuse to acknowledge what they *really* think for fear of being called a racist and cast outside the sacred public square. Ultimately, the final state of the race conversation just might be more divided than its beginning. The majority suspects the minority of trying to control the conversation and them; the minority deepens in suspicion toward the majority for avoiding the conversation. And so the culture war deepens, each side trusting the other slightly less than before.

WHY MINORITIES ARE FRUSTRATED

In response to all this, minorities and progressive Whites observe that White America's refusal to join the conversation, even if it is only to listen, is itself a power move. Note especially: a White *can* walk away from the conversation and ignore it because—on the whole—power still rests in White hands, if nothing else by virtue of being in the statistical majority but also because historical patterns of structural inequities (like, what neighborhood do you live in and how are the schools there?) possess significant inertia. Minorities cannot walk away from the conversation. They live in it. To step outside of their house every day is to sign up for yet another race seminar.

It appears then that a White's refusal to listen to what the other side has to say is less about justice than it is about self-interest. Whites don't want to renegotiate the power structures because they presently work in their favor. They are like the parent who, instead of negotiating with a petitioning child, simply shuts down the conversation because he or she can.

BACK AND FORTH

But the argument hardly ends there. Back and forth it goes. The White claims the whole conversation relies on an injustice of its own, a kind of reverse racial profiling, or reverse racism. The argument of the last paragraph, for instance, presumes a kind of White privilege. It assumes that because one's skin is White, one possesses various economic and social advantages over and against those who are not White. Some minorities [argue](#) that all Whites are "guilty" for the disadvantages and injustices experienced by minorities, even the four-year-old uninitiated White. Why? Because that four-year-old enjoys the privileges that come with being White, and unless she grows up and actively works against it, she becomes personally culpable. The concept of sin and guilt here are almost covenantal, the White

father's guilt being imputed to the son by birth, who we know will repeat the Father's sin as soon as he is capable.

But notice, observes the White critic, such structurally-based judgments require their own typecasting and stereotyping—their own racial profiling. The White is pre-judged because of the color of his or her skin: “privileged and guilty,” says the judge as the gavel slams down. Never mind the individual's name. Never mind the individual circumstances of their lives. Never mind the manner in which they have or have not conducted themselves with respect to minorities.

Furthermore, says the White critic, there are double standards at play. Identity politics sanction a kind of separatism among minorities that would never be allowed among majorities. The public accepts the “Congressional Black Caucus” or a “Hispanic university group” or an “Asian-American church.” Would today's public be willing to accept a “White” version of such institutions? Presumably not.

Once again, however, the minority is not without a reasonable response to this suspicion of minority separatism and reverse racial profiling. Look again, says the minority rejoinder, at the historical disparities of power between ethnic groups. Black churches exist precisely because Blacks were forced by Whites to gather separately. White supremacy created the Black church! And how well do White corporations and churches do at promoting Asians Americans into leadership positions? Not well at all, [say the comparative statistics](#). There's a [bamboo ceiling](#). If justice indeed requires parity and fairness, we must address historical inequalities based on race because their effects continue into the present. And sometimes this requires minority voices and institutional resources to consolidate in a way that would be unjust for majority voices and resources to reciprocate.

Back and forth the conversation goes, each side presenting a logic and justice and power of its own. Whites possess the power to walk away and ignore. Minorities possess the power of righteous indignation because—right now at least—their cause is publicly perceived as just. (Harvard political scientist Harvey Mansfield writes, “You can tell who is in charge of a society by noticing who is allowed to get angry and for what cause. . . . The civil rights movement and the women's movement are obvious recent examples.”) Both sides, in other words, leverage whatever they can to negotiate their position. At one time, Whites required minorities to live in White world, and conform to White rules, and say only the things that Whites wanted them to say, as DuBois observed. But now the rules for America's race conversation push in the opposite direction. It turns the tables. Whites feel imposed upon to enter America's race conversation saying only what minorities would have them say.

FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE ONLY CREATES MORE FIRE

To reveal my own feelings regarding the conversation, there does seem to be a kind of justice in this turning of the tables. It brings—to speak analogously—the justice of Moses and the Law. The reversal is a kind of retribution, and it demands that forgiveness be earned through contrition and merit. It's true that White sons and daughters are to some measure prosecuted for the sins of their White fathers, which may sound unjust to an individualistic American; but I dare say it coheres with a biblical worldview wherein children inevitably and invariably repeat the sins of their parents apart from a supernatural intervention (e.g., Ex. 34:7).

But whatever one might think of corporate guilt and judgment, my larger concern is, doesn't fighting fire with fire only create more fire? The whole conversation thus far has been about power and disputes over power, which can only be resolved through more assertions of power.

I can understand why minorities and progressive Whites want to assert some measure of control over today's race conversation through a stringent set of conversational rules; the race conversation has worked against minorities for centuries. The minority's conversational rules therefore seem just and fair. The majority cannot be trusted. Every member of the majority I have ever known is self-justifying and quietly power-hungry. At the same time, I can understand why White majorities would be suspicious of the minority's assertion of control, seeming asymmetrical standards of justice, and the kind of reverse racial profiling that's intrinsic to the very concept of White privilege or the corporate guilt of Whites. After all, minorities cannot be trusted. Every member of the minority I have ever known is self-justifying and power-hungry. Speaking in context of both Jews and Gentiles, Paul's summary is best:

None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God. (Rom. 3:10b-11)

By saying that fighting fire with fire only creates more fire, I mean we will never establish true reconciliation by working within the tit-for-tat of a power struggle. There can only be a forced peace. Perhaps, just perhaps, we can institutionally enforce a just distribution of resources and opportunities between the Majority and Minority, however one might define a just distribution. But if we trade only in the language of power, both sides will continue to look with suspicion on the other side, always waiting for the other side to grab back whatever territory it can.

In that sense, the history of race in America, including the race conversation of today, is not all that different than any historical rivalry between two kingdoms that border one another. Imagine one kingdom dominating the other for centuries, stealing land and goods from the other. Then imagine history changing course and offering the second kingdom a chance to gain the upper hand. Supposing it does, do you really think the second kingdom will stop once it achieves equality? Will it not begin to encroach upon the first kingdom in the name of justice? Just think of what the Versailles Treaty required of Weimar Germany.

The disanalogy with two side-by-side kingdoms, of course, is that political rivalry between the American Majority and Minority *occurs within one nation*, which means the nation cannot be at peace with itself.

THE DEAD-END REDEMPTION OF IDENTITY POLITICS

Here, the long history of White supremacy bears primary responsibility, but it's at this point we find what I believe is the grand paradox of America's racial conversation. Identity politics descends upon White Supremacy as a Moses-like Law Giver threatening a rightful justice and retribution. But it can only do so by adopting and abiding within the same divided categories of race, reifying the original divide. And so like Moses, identity politics brings a proper condemnation, but it's incapable of offering redemption.

To put it another way, White supremacy begets identity politics, just as racism begets the concept of race, as a number of people have observed. The more thoroughgoing forms of identity politics, like

White supremacy, treat each one of us according to our skin and sex. I'm White. I'm male. And those things define me all the way down, all the way in. So if you are Black, or female, I can never really "get" you, and I can never really "get" this conversation, because of the asymmetries of power that pit my labels against yours. We are irrevocably divided. Identity politics means you're going to interpret *everything* I say through the grid of the fact that I'm White, as in, "You just think that way because you're White!" I cannot say anything as an individual. I can only speak as White. Or Man. So don't call me by my name. Call me White. Or Man.

As such, identity politics, like White supremacy before it, always risk robbing you and me not just of our individuality, but of any point of connection and commonality between us. When it sees people, it only sees race, or gender, or some such grouping. Remember, it sees nothing of significance behind the labels, no essence of humanity that unites Minority You and Majority Me. Of course, we might pay lip service to our common humanity: "Yes, of course I know we're all human!" But when I as a White man walk away from the conversation because I don't like its terms, or when you effectively shut me out of the conversation by saying, "You just think that way because you're White," we're both succumbing to identity politics, and we are treating the divide as irrevocable.

Identity politics quarantines me inside of White. And you inside of Black. Or Asian. Or Female. Or whatever. And we can never really commune, or overcome our differences.

Identity politics rightly addresses the imbalances and injustices of power between different groups created by White Supremacy and male chauvinism. That's good. But insofar as it insists we continue to view ourselves fundamentally according to those group memberships, it concretizes the divisions between us. It solves one problem only to create another. And inside of identity politics, I will be less likely to fully trust you, and you will be less likely to fully trust me, because we will always be more different than the same.

ANOTHER WAY: GOSPEL POLITICS

One way to solve the intractability of broken trust and the perpetual racial war is to explode all group memberships and radically assimilate. Suppose, for instance, that we collectively decide that there is no such thing as "White" and "Black" and "Asian." We insist instead that there are only light-skinned and dark-skinned people, and those differences amount to nothing more than eye-color.

This utopian and diversity-crushing solution is presently the favored societal approach to the imbalance of power between the genders. From elementary schools that give children the ability to choose their own pronouns (he, she, ze, mir, etc.) to Target's decision to do away with the "boys" and "girls" section and replace it with a "children's" section, our society is boldly crusading to eradicate the war between the genders by eradicating the all distinctions between the genders.

Assuming, however, that we wish to remain within the boundaries of God's Word, to say nothing of remaining fastened to reality, there is another way to establish true peace between different ethnicities: a gospel politics, which is a politics of love.

I don't know the solutions for all our neighborhoods and all our politics and all our police departments. What answer can you give to Moses? He comes with justice to punish the fathers and the children. I'm not sure what to say to him.

But I also know there is love. Love has a way of untangling knots, neutralizing acids, and dissolving the most intractable clogs. God's love worked out through his people, somehow, achieves justice when all our best political thinking gives up and declares a situation hopeless.

TWO INGREDIENTS: DOCTRINE AND A PEOPLE

Gospel politics requires two basic ingredients: gospel doctrine and a gospel people.

Gospel doctrine begins with a common creation narrative. It does not view people fundamentally as European-American or African-American or Asian-American. Each of these labels amounts to a different Genesis narrative, after all. Instead, it insists we all descend from the race of Adam, which was created good.

Gospel doctrine indicts us with a common fall narrative. Each of us has rejected God and sought to put ourselves over others, using whatever worldly category we can: strength, beauty, riches, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so forth. We are all guilty.

Gospel doctrine offers a common salvation, whereby the solution is not anything inside of us, but something that is external to us: the vicarious righteousness of Christ. It leaves no room for boasting. No one can point to something internal by which to place him or herself over another. Not only that, union with Christ means that everyone united to Christ is united to one another (Eph. 2:11-22).

And gospel doctrine promises a common glorification.

Within the context of gospel doctrine, in other words, space exists for diversity and multiple groups because we share one narrative of creation, condemnation, redemption, and glorification. Our differences are real, but they don't go nearly as deep as what we share.

A GOSPEL PEOPLE

Yet most Christians, I assume, know that gospel doctrine is crucial for racial reconciliation. What they too often miss, I fear, is the necessity of a gospel people bound together by covenant in a local church. It's no good to point to the glories of gospel doctrine and say, "I am reconciled with Christians of all ethnicities!" if nothing in my life demonstrates that reconciliation.

Which is to say, we fool ourselves if we are incapable of leaving the realm of doctrinal theory and getting into the real.

Let me therefore speak about Jeremy. Jeremy and I were elders together until he left to help plant another church. I love Jeremy. Jeremy once brought a fellow African American to church with him, and the White person sitting next to the two of them, trying really hard to be welcoming, said something like, "I'm surprised you liked it here. You know, with the really long sermon, and all." Oh, goodness. Jeremy,

please tell me that Whitey didn't really say that. "Hello, Mr. Newcomer. You have black skin *and* you like long, intelligent sermons. How unexpected! How delightful!" Would someone please hand me a protest sign? Or better, how about I speak in love to that member!

I want to talk about Steven. Steven attended the mostly White seminary I attended. Then he did an internship at my majority White church. I love Steven. One time I asked Steven what it was like for him to be Black among White Christians in our theological tribe. Steven paused, and then said, "You know, J, I'm not sure how to answer that." He always calls me J. He went on: "It's like, everyone is really friendly, and they are glad you are there, but then . . . I don't know how to say it, J, but *this*." And when he said "this," he waved his hand, open-palmed, in front of his Black face. His point was, it felt like the Whites don't always *really* see him. Sure, they are glad he is there. They invite him into conversations about race, like the rules say you have to. But after a friendly pat on the back, they walk away without him, off to their own all-White dinners and birthday parties. He's not really one of them. An insider, but an outsider. I wish you knew Steven. You would love him. My heart broke when he waved his hand like that.

I want to talk about Paul, a dreadlocks-wearing, patchouli-oil smelling, dyed-in-the-wool Democrat if there ever was one. The brother has an instinctual disdain for political conservatives, even though he denies it. He and I are working on that. Paul and I have been meeting once or twice a month for almost a decade. The brother loves Jesus and fights to be like Jesus. And I love Paul for the example of the fight he is to me. He perseveres through the ups and downs of life. I can talk to Paul. I can explain my difficulties and frustrations to Paul. Paul is patient with me. I hope I'm patient with him. I love Paul.

I want to talk about Joe. Joe came late to lunch one day. He had been pulled over. Nothing bad happened, but he explained to me how, when he is pulled over, he is careful to roll the windows down, put his hands on the steering wheel as the officer approaches the car, and then tell the officer exactly what he's going to do before he does it, and all that with a smile: "I'm going to unbuckle and get my registration out of the glove box now." I have never thought about any of that stuff. I've never had to. And Joe has a cousin who was pulled over and had his car seats slashed by police officers looking for drugs. They said he "looked like" someone one. Have you ever heard a White tell that kind of story? I haven't.

I was pulled over recently. It was 1 a.m. and I was driving from Philadelphia back to DC, going way over the speed limit, pepped up on caffeine drinks and Doritos so that I wouldn't fall asleep. The officer told me to slow down, and to make sure I got home safe. I drove away wondering what he would have said if I was Black.

I want to talk about Jason and Kendrick. They talk to me about what it's like to be Asian-Americans in our church. Jason was the first to raise it with me. I think it took courage for him to do it, given my status in the church as an elder and long-time member. He seemed nervous. He talked about feeling overlooked and stereotyped. It's not that people had been mean to him or *excluded* him. It's more that they hadn't exactly *included* him. Is Jason just being paranoid and insecure? Maybe. Or maybe not. Maybe that has been his experience.

I want to talk about all of these friends with their real names and their real experiences and our real relationships because that is where the race conversation needs to occur: inside of a church among people who love and cherish and know one another in the gospel.

Public and impersonal conversations about race are fine, for their part, but they are forced almost by necessity to remain politically correct. Which means, people cannot admit to how deeply their trust has been broken in the other “side.” They can never admit, “I don’t trust you.” And where there cannot be a frank admission of broken trust, there can be no healing. So we resort to mouthing politically correct phrases, while hiding this thought deep in our hearts: “I trust people who look more like me.” Indeed, we scarcely admit this thought to ourselves. Yet at the heart of racial strife in America today, at least where racism itself is no longer active, is the residue of racism, which is broken trust.

The best place to begin the so-called race conversation, then, is in private among godly brothers and sisters united in the love and trust of the gospel. Step one in the race conversation, we might say, is making gospel friendships across racial lines—not token friendships, but invite-you-to-my-birthday-party, go-on-vacation, confess-my-sins, and encourage-you-in-the-gospel friendships. Trust, after all, is built into the gospel, and so it is built into every friendship founded upon the gospel.

Apart from love, justice becomes a means to power just as much as injustice, and even if justice is won, a rivalry remains and there will be no relationship. Love, unbelievably, sometimes calls us to give up power, which leads to vulnerability, which allows for trust. If the breakdown of trust is indeed at the heart of so much of our ethnic rivalry today, how then will trust be restored unless the power-holders begin to relinquish some of their power for the sake of love?

WHY WE WHITES NEED THE RACE CONVERSATION

Once the gospel friendships afforded by a local church are established, the difficult conversations can begin.

My friend Isaac tells me there are subtle racial insensitivities in our church. I’ll be honest, apart from the testimony of brothers like him, I have a hard time seeing them. But I’m not him. I have never been Black. Maybe I need to ask him to help me understand what he sees. Maybe I need him to help me walk in his shoes. He’s a member of the body, after all. Where he suffers, I suffer. We’re members of one another. If there is discrimination in my church, Isaac and I need to work against it. Talk to me, Isaac, tell me what you see.

I need Jeremy to tell me how he had to die to his preferences to join my church. I never thought about that until he told me, but it’s obvious now that he mentioned it. Am I willing to die to my preferences?

I need Steven to let me explain myself, explain my frustrations, and help me understand better. And he does. Steven is so godly that he, like each of these others, lets me speak to him *as if he is White*. Meaning: he assures me we are more united than divided.

He and Paul and Isaac and Jeremy and Joe all let me say, “Brother, can I be honest with you?” And then they let me say a lot of foolish stuff because I’m ignorant and I have never walked in their shoes, and they know that, but they love and forgive me and help me to understand and grow and stumble and get up and keep walking.

Oh, these, my friends and my brothers! How I need them and their grace and their patience and their conversation. How many times have I stepped on their toes by saying something insensitive or

unknowing, and they smiled and said nothing, but forgave me and kept being my friend! No defensiveness toward these brothers. Only tears and love as I think about them.

We as Whites especially need the race conversation. Or at least, we need real relationships with minority brothers and sisters in our churches, and we need their conversations. The intractable impasse of our conflicting political logics will only dissolve through the politics of interpersonal love.

And, make no mistake, the White majority needs this conversation more than the minority needs it. The minority's eyes have been opened for years. We need minority brothers and sisters to help us be conscious of a world outside of our own little sheltered experience. Isn't that what Paul basically says in 1 Corinthians 12 when he calls us to identify with other parts of the body? None of us is the whole body.

LOVE

And isn't that what Paul continues saying in 1 Corinthians 13?

Love is patient and kind. My minority friends have been patient with me, just like Christ has been patient and kind with me in my sin. Shouldn't I be patient and kind as we have this conversation? Yes, this conversation is hard, so hard. But does patience and kindness ever walk away?

Love does not envy or boast. Isaac and Jeremy and Steven and Jason and Paul have stopped and listened carefully to me. They don't boast, as if they have all the answers. Shall I boast, as if I have all the answers? Shall I envy their opportunity to say something that teaches me?

Love is not proud, rude, or self-seeking. "Racism" is not a biblical word. But if I were to use biblical language to describe what racism is, those three words offer a good starting point: proud, rude, self-seeking. And I have certainly been those things. I have wanted to protect and justify myself ("I'm not a racist!") more than I have wanted to love the brother ("Tell me how you've been hurt, and how I can help").

Love is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs. Suppose the other side of this conversation does make a mistake. Am I going to be angry? Am I going to hold it over their head? My brothers have not done that with me. I guarantee you that I've said insensitive things along the way. But these brothers have not gotten angry. They have not held my sins against me. (Goodness, doesn't that remind you of Jesus!) Am I willing to eschew anger and keep no record of the other side's wrongs? To keep trying to have this conversation?

Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. If there have been injustices and discriminations and racisms in my church, I should delight to search those out and work against them. I should delight in seeing the truth of these situations brought into the light and addressed.

Love always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. To be forthright, I don't have a lot of trust or hope in America's "race conversation." I don't think America has the right resources for solving its problems. But I do have hope and trust in the work of Christ and his Spirit in the church. We have the solution. We have the gospel, which breaks down the barrier between us and God, and then the barrier between us

and one another. Christ accomplished both by dying on the cross as a payment for sin and then rising from the dead.

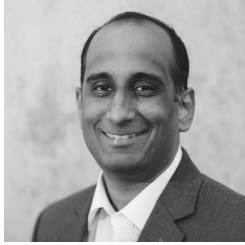
I misspoke earlier when I said the first step in the race conversion is building relations in the context of your church. The first step is to be reconciled to God. When you realize that the divide between you and another human, no matter how wide it is, is comparatively small to the divide between sinful you and a holy God, only then will you discover the power to overcome that human divide: be reconciled to God.

God alone is the source of love, true love, 1 Corinthians 13 love. God alone is the source of redemption and forgiveness and justification and justice. And knowing God's love for us, the Spirit quickens our hearts to love one another. Love alone resolves the tit-for-tat of power grabbing. Love alone will cause us to beat our swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Love alone turns the other cheek and walks the extra mile.

Shouldn't our churches be the first places on the planet where we talk about these things, and listen to one another?

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By Aubrey Sequeira

Re-Thinking Homogeneity: The Biblical Case for Multi-Ethnic Churches¹

I am a Christian, an Indian, and a former rock musician. I grew up in South India, and lived within a particular sub-culture of my particular urban Indian melting pot.

When the Lord saved me in my final year of college, I soon found myself surrounded by people completely different from me—people from different ethnicities and cultures, who spoke different languages, ate different kinds of food, and even had completely different musical preferences (they didn’t even know who Deep Purple was!). Was I uncomfortable? Yes. But what amazed me back then, and what continues to amaze me now, is not the radical differences and “otherness” that separated us. No, what amazed me was the unity and brotherhood that these people shared with one another, despite all their differences—a unity and brotherhood that I was folded into through my conversion to Jesus Christ, who breaks all barriers and brings all peoples together as members of his household.

Both in North America and in missions work worldwide, the “homogeneous unit principle” of church growth has been unquestioningly assumed as the most effective way to multiply disciples and plant “strategic” churches. Churches grow fastest, church growth gurus say, when the gospel is propagated along existing social lines and networks and when people do not have to cross ethnic, cultural, or class barriers to become Christians.² People are thus grouped together into churches demarcated by ethno-linguistic distinctions, tribal or caste distinctions, social and economic status, education level, profession, and even common affinity groups—such as churches for cowboys or NASCAR-lovers (this is not hyperbole, Google them!). The “homogeneous unit principle” of church growth maintains that such homogeneous churches grow faster because they are more accommodating to outsiders who might feel uncomfortable crossing cultural, ethnic, or other boundaries. This “strategic” homogeneity pervades multiple church-planting organizations and fills the pages of missions and church-planting strategy

manuals. But does the Bible support homogeneity? Or does Scripture set forth a different vision for the local church?

My aim here is to debunk the “homogeneous unit principle” of church growth by showing that this pragmatic framework is antithetically opposed to the apostolic vision of the church in the New Testament. In doing so, I will argue that, wherever possible, establishing multi-ethnic churches is not only more faithful to Scripture, but that multi-ethnic churches more fully display the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.³ In other words, churches should strive to be as diverse as the communities they inhabit.

A (BRIEF) BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF GOD’S MULTI-ETHNIC REDEMPTION PLAN

To set the context for the multi-ethnic vision of New Testament Christianity, I will briefly explore how this theme plays out across the canon. Linguistic diversity in Scripture begins at Babel, when God responds to the arrogant rebellion of mankind by confounding their language (Gen 11:1–9). On the very next page, we see God’s multi-ethnic plan of redemption with his covenant-promise to Abraham that all nations will be blessed in Abraham’s seed (Gen 12:1–3; 22:15–18). This promise is sharpened through the biblical corpus, as David is promised a universal kingship through which God’s law and glory will be established in all the earth (2 Sam 7:19; Psalm 72:17–18). The prophets further clarify this vision as they foretell of a glorious eschatological restoration in which a reconstituted and restored Israel will consist not only of ethnic Jews, but of peoples from all nations who worship and know Yahweh, the true and living God (Isa 2:2–4; 56:6–8; Zech 8:20–23).

The New Testament shows us that God’s promise of global redemption has come to fulfillment in Christ, and the boundary of the people of God is no longer marked by Jewish identity but by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Israel is re-gathered, reconstituted, and resurrected in and through the resurrected Messiah who has established the new covenant by his blood. Faith in Christ provides full access into membership in the new covenant people of God. This redemptive-historical movement is played out in the book of Acts, as Luke shows us the gospel expanding in widening concentric circles to include those who were once excluded. The people of God are gathered into local assemblies that proclaim and reflect the glorious gospel of Christ. The New Testament culminates with John’s stunning vision of an innumerable multitude of redeemed peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation, worshipping Christ in unison (Rev 7:9–10).

THE HETEROGENEITY OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES

The biblical-theological vision of global redemption helps us understand the apostolic model of churches. In the New Testament, the kaleidoscopic glory of Christ’s redemptive work is reflected in the establishment of local churches that cut across ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, and even linguistic lines.⁴ This striking heterogeneity of the apostolic model flows from the pervasive and firm conviction of unity in Christ, who has reconciled believers to God and one another (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).⁵ The “otherness” of different people is surpassed by the “oneness” that these people share in Jesus Christ.

As the early church grew, the apostles faced several problems arising from the diversity of nascent congregations, but never partitioned the church into homogeneous units. The evidence of Acts is that the church initially formed at Pentecost comprised of Jewish Christians from wide-ranging cultural and

linguistic backgrounds (Acts 2:5–11). In Acts 6:1–6, tensions rose between those from different cultural-linguistic groups, namely the Diaspora (Hellenistic) Jews and the Syro-Palestinian (Hebrew) Jews. The apostles did not separate them, but resolved the issues through appointing men from the minority groups for the work of service. Acts further reinforces the heterogeneous nature of the early church by telling us about the diversity of the leadership in the church of Antioch (cf. Acts 13:1), which included a former Pharisee (Paul), a former Gentile (Lucian), a former Levite (Barnabas), a member of the court of Herod (Manaeon), and a man of dark skin (Simeon, called Niger).

In Romans, Paul addresses a congregation that was undoubtedly composed of people from varying ethnicities, both Jews and Greeks (Rom 7:1; 11:13). Paul implores them to live together in love because of the gospel and to sacrifice their own preferences for the sake of others (Rom 13:8–10; 14:1–23). Here we see that the gospel has implications not only for individual salvation but also for corporate sanctification—believers must learn to live in community with those different from them by following Christ’s example and considering others above themselves.

In 1 Corinthians, writing to a congregation with members from diverse backgrounds, Paul asserts their oneness in Christ and exhorts them to prefer one another and show sensitivity to the consciences of weaker brothers (1 Cor 10:23–33; 12:12–13). In both these instances, the question of separate churches along homogeneous lines is completely foreign to Paul’s thought. “Strategic” considerations for more effective outreach or to make people feel more comfortable never take precedence over shared life in Jesus Christ. Rather, the conviction that believers are a new humanity in Christ drives Christian unity within the church, as believers love one another just as Christ has loved them. Indeed, Paul proclaims that the manifold wisdom and glory of God is manifested through the unity of diverse people in the church (Eph 3:1–10).

The early church also radically broke down social and economic class divisions. Paul radically subverts the social order of slavery by exhorting slaves and masters to fellowship together as brothers in Christ in one congregation (1 Cor 7:17–24; Phlm 8–16). Faith in Christ obliterates social status as a boundary to fellowship. Likewise, James commands that there be no partiality or special treatment given to rich persons. James assumes that rich and poor people will fellowship together in unity, rather than being separated in homogeneous units along socioeconomic lines (Jas 2:1–9). The New Testament also shows us that churches were “multi-generational,” consisting of both younger people and elderly people, living in fellowship, unity, and self-sacrificial service (1 Tim 4:12; 5:1–16; Titus 2:1–8; 1 John 2:12–14).

The apostolic model of multi-ethnic heterogeneous congregations is not limited to the New Testament, but is also supported by the evidence of early Christian history. As David Smith says, “It was precisely the heterogeneous multi-ethnic nature of the church which made an impact on the divided Roman world and led to the growth of the Christian movement.”⁶ While homogeneity in churches simply *reinforces the status quo of society*, the biblical evidence shows us that the *gospel broke down and cut across ethnic, social, economic, and cultural barriers in ways never before seen in history*.

THE NEW TESTAMENT POLEMIC AGAINST ETHNOCENTRISM

Another reason why homogeneity runs contrary to the New Testament is that it promotes and reinforces an ethnocentric mindset. Throughout the NT we see an attack on ethnocentrism, and consequently, a mandate for believers from differing ethnic backgrounds to accept each other lovingly and to live

together in harmony in local churches.⁷ Paul is unwavering in his insistence that Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, so that in Christ, “there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” (Col 3:11). Christ has broken down the “dividing wall of hostility,” and reconciled Jews and Gentiles to God “in one body through the cross” (Eph 2:14–16). Believers are part of God’s new creation, they were once all sinners in Adam, but are now the new humanity in Christ.

The issue is most clearly seen in Galatians 2, in Paul’s rebuke of Peter for his separation of himself from the Gentiles (Gal 2:11–16). Peter, along with other Jewish Christians in Galatia, was acting in fear of Jews who would be offended by the sharing of table fellowship with Gentiles. But Paul insists that this sort of withdrawal is an affront to the gospel itself (Gal 2:15–21). Here, the acceptance of Gentiles—those from a differing ethnic group—as fellow members of God’s family by sharing table fellowship takes priority over a pragmatic desire to avoid offending others.

In Romans as well, Paul attacks the root of ethnocentrism. Paul asserts universal human depravity and the power of the gospel for salvation in God’s act of justification for both Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Rom 1–3). *All* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by grace through faith in Christ (Rom 3:21–26). *All* become children of Abraham through believing in the God who justifies the ungodly (Rom 4). *All* stand condemned in Adam, and *all* in Christ are justified (Rom 5:12–21). Paul warns both Jews and Gentiles not to grow arrogant, but to recognize God’s grace to both peoples (Rom 2:17–29; Rom 11:17–24). The evidence from Romans indicates that Paul was almost definitely writing to a heterogeneous congregation, exhorting them to lay aside ethnic pride and live together in Christian unity.

The polemic against ethnocentrism is not limited to Paul; it is pervasive throughout the Gospels as well. Jesus offends the ethnocentric pride of the Pharisees by his associating with Gentiles, tax-collectors, and sinners. The Gospels teach that citizenship in the kingdom of God is obtained by faith in Christ rather than by ethnic identity.⁸ The call to repentance includes a call to repentance from ethnic and racial pride. As John Piper frames it, “Faith in Jesus trumps ethnicity.”⁹ Piper adduces several examples of this theme in the Gospels: the commendation of the Centurion’s faith (Matt 8:5–13), the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33), the healing of the ten lepers, of whom only the foreigner returned to give thanks (Luke 17:16), the healing of the Syrophenician’s daughter (Mark 7:26), the cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:17). Clearly, Jesus was not afraid to offend the ethnocentric pride of the Pharisees.

Now, to be clear, proponents of the “homogeneous unit principle” argue that they do not want to promote ethnocentric pride in Christians, but rather, they maintain that homogeneous churches are more culturally sensitive and accommodating to unbelievers who might feel uncomfortable crossing cultural barriers. In other words, advocates of homogeneity believe that it is more *strategic* to remove cultural barriers to the gospel by establishing monoethnic and monocultural churches. However, it is naïve and far too hopeful to assume that sinful people who have an inherent disposition toward ethnocentric prejudice will somehow grow out of it without being called to live in community with those who are different from them.⁹ The evidence of the New Testament indicates that Jesus and the apostles never accommodate the ethnocentrism of unbelievers, but instead include the call to repentance from ethnocentrism and the call to embrace “others” as an integral part of the gospel message. While the “homogeneous unit principle” emphasizes seeking to win people by not offending their ethnocentric sensibilities, Jesus’s approach is radically different—Christ lays the axe to the root of ethnic pride.¹⁰

WERE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES “MONO-ETHNIC”?

Donald McGavran, the father of the Church Growth movement who formulated the “homogeneous unit principle,” argued that “New Testament congregations were strikingly monoethnic.”¹¹ McGavran maintained that under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the apostles moved forward along the lines of homogeneous units, reaching primarily Jews at first, in order to grow the church: “As long as Jews could become Christians within Judaism, the Church could and did grow amazingly among Jews. . . . These, becoming Christians within the synagogue, could do so without racial and class barriers.”¹²

So naturally, we must deal with the question of whether this is a faithful reading of the New Testament. I contend that McGavran’s reading of the evidence is skewed because he has overlooked the way that Luke shows salvation history as progressively unfolding in the book of Acts.¹³ The apostles were not guided by any kind of a “homogeneous unit principle”—this is manifestly clear from the cultural and linguistic diversity among Jews on the Day of Pentecost, and the heterogeneous nature of the congregations planted after Gentiles were brought into the church. Luke portrays the advance of the church’s mission along *salvation-historical* lines in Acts. Luke’s point is that the gospel, proclaimed by the apostles and powered by the Holy Spirit, crosses insurmountable boundaries as the people of God are reconstituted around the risen Christ. Thus, Donald McGavran and the Church Growth movement have used a flawed reading of Scripture to support homogeneity, by imposing a preconceived pragmatic framework on the text.

CONCLUSION

The apostolic model of the church in the New Testament indicates that, wherever possible, churches should *not* be established or partitioned along lines of ethnicity, culture, class, age, or any affinity group. In some cases, differences in language might necessitate separate churches. But even in these cases, if there is a *lingua franca* in which people can communicate, linguistic differences might not necessitate separation.

The glory of Christ is seen most vividly when outsiders observe the cross-shaped and cross-cultured love and unity that believers from varying backgrounds share with one another. A pragmatic desire for rapidly growing and multiplying churches should not lead us to compromise the unity that Christ has purchased with his blood. René Padilla puts it well:

It may be true that “men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers” but that is irrelevant. Membership in the body of Christ is not a question of likes or dislikes, but a question of incorporation into the new humanity under the Lordship of Christ. Whether a person likes it or not, the same act that reconciles one to God simultaneously introduces the person into a community where people find their identity in Jesus Christ rather than in their race, culture, social class, or sex, and are consequently reconciled to one another.¹⁴

Am I against rapid growth and multiplication? By no means! I too deeply desire to see multitudes of people groups reached for Christ. But I ask that gospel laborers bear in mind that nowhere in the New Testament are we commanded to segregate churches by people group. As we have seen, the evidence of Scripture points in exactly the opposite direction—people from differing tribes, tongues, and nations are brought into the one people of God to worship God together in fellowship and harmony as a

kingdom of priests to our God.¹⁵ May the church in America continue to labor for racial reconciliation, as we learn to recognize that in Christ there is no “Negro” or “Ku Klux Klansman.” Likewise, may we recognize that in Christ, there is no “Brahmin” or “Dalit” or “Tutsi” or “Hutu.” May our unity be reflected in the demographic compositions of our congregations as a display of the manifold wisdom of God, who has reconciled us to himself through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 3:10). May he receive the glory and honor of which he is worthy!

- ¹ This article includes several edited and modified excerpts from the author’s forthcoming article, “Caste and Church Growth: An Assessment of Donald McGavran’s Church Growth Principles from An Indian Perspective,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Missions and Evangelism* (forthcoming).
- ² Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 190–211.
- ³ Of course, I am *not* referring to monoethnic contexts, such as rural regions or even suburban America, where the demographics of the context is predominantly from one culture / ethnicity, and thus monoethnic churches are inevitable. I am referring specifically to contexts in which more than one culture / ethnicity is represented. Even in monoethnic contexts, however, I do not believe that churches should be established along homogeneous lines related to class, age, or affinity.
- ⁴ See the incisive criticisms and thorough refutation of McGavran’s Homogeneous Unit principle by the Latin American theologian C. René Padilla, “The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6 (1981): 23–30. Much of my discussion here is indebted to Padilla’s persuasive and penetrating examination of the biblical evidence.
- ⁵ David Smith, “The Church Growth Principles of Donald McGavran,” *Transformation* 2 (1985): 27.
- ⁶ Ibid., 28. Cf. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).
- ⁷ A renewed emphasis on the NT’s polemic against ethnocentrism has been one of the helpful contributions (despite other problems) of the so-called “New Perspective on Paul.” See for instance, N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 774–1038.
- ⁸ See John Piper’s excellent discussion in *Bloodlines*, 115–27.
- ⁹ Ibid., 118.
- ¹⁰ This is sadly confirmed by my own experience with several monoethnic congregations around the world, as well as the painful experiences of friends in the work of pastoral ministry in India. For instance, in direct violation of 2 Corinthians 6:14–18, people prefer marriage to unbelievers from the same ethnic / caste group over marriage to believers of other ethnic groups. At times, when two believers love each other and desire to marry across caste or racial lines, ethnocentric prejudice raises its ugly head as their professing Christian families refuse such inter-marriage. Apparently, the “homogeneous unit principle” has fostered and reinforced sinful ethnocentric prejudice within a people professing to know Christ.
- ¹¹ Some proponents of homogeneity argue that a parallel should not be drawn between the Jew-Gentile divide and modern racial, ethnolinguistic, and cultural divides on four counts: (1) “Jew” and “Gentile” are not primarily ethnic terms; (2) the division between Jews and Gentiles was rooted in the Law, unlike modern ethnic divides; (3) the cultural distance between Jews and Gentiles in NT times was not as great as the cultural distance between ethnicities today, and (4) Jews struggled to accept Gentile salvation, which is not the case in the Christian landscape today. Richard W. Hardison, “A Theological Critique of the Multi-Ethnic Church Movement: 2000–2013,” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 117. First, it is true that “Jew” and “Gentile” were not primarily ethnic distinctions, but primarily religious distinctions rooted in the law covenant. Yet, the hostility between Jews and Gentiles was more than merely religious; it extended to culture, language, and ethnicity. The notion that Jews and Gentiles did not share a great cultural distance is simply incorrect, as any survey of literature from 2nd Temple Judaism indicates. Finally, it is true that Jews struggled to accept Gentile salvation, which is not the case today, but the ethnocentrism of the Jews is parallel to ethnocentrism of all human beings at all times, simply because we are fallen people who struggle to accept and live in community with those unlike us. Therefore, though there are some points of discontinuity between the Jew-Gentile divide and modern ethno-cultural divides, there are enough points of continuity to warrant the parallel. Furthermore, the New Testament does extend the call to unity beyond “Jew” and “Gentile” to include categories like “Barbarian” and “Scythian,” which are ethnolinguistic categories (Col 3:11). In the New Testament, unity in Christ trumps all other issues of identity, and the call to embrace the “other” encompasses all categories of “otherness,” and takes shape in the form of life together in the local church.

¹² Donald A. McGavran, “The Priority of Ethnicity,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 19 (1983): 15.

¹³ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 202.

¹⁴ As Padilla notes, “Luke’s record, however, does not substantiate the thesis that the apostles deliberately promoted the formation of ‘one-race congregations’ and tolerated Jewish prejudices against the Gentiles for the sake of numerical church growth. In order to claim that it does, one needs to come to Scripture with the preconceived idea (1) that the apostles shared the modern theory that race prejudice ‘can and should be made an aid to Christianization,’ and (2) that the multiplication of the church invariably requires an adjustment to the homogeneous unit principle. Without this unwarranted assumption, one can hardly miss the point made by Acts that the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles was such a difficult step for the Jerusalem church that it took place only with the aid of visions and commands (8:26ff.; 10:1–16) or under the pressure of persecution (8:1ff.; 11:19–20). No suggestion is ever given that Jewish Christians preached the gospel to ‘none except Jews’ *because of strategic considerations*.” Padilla, “Unity of the Church,” 25 (emphasis original).

¹⁵ Padilla, “Unity of the Church,” 24.

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By John Folmar

Building a Multi-Cultural Ministry on Gospel Doctrine

There were fourteen of us last weekend, sitting in a nicely appointed receiving room, addressing weighty matters. All together, we called the following countries our home:

- Kenya
- Malaysia
- Ghana
- Zambia
- Nigeria
- South Africa
- Scotland
- The Netherlands
- The Philippines
- The United States
- Lebanon

But we weren't a subcommittee of the United Nations. We were just ordinary church members gathered to celebrate the upcoming marriage of our Kenyan brother, Ian. No one was aiming at diversity—these were just the handful of friends who were closest to the groom—all members of the same church in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Ian was going home to Kenya to deliver the bride price for his wife, calculated on the basis of farm animals as consideration and respect to the bride's family. (Worlds apart from the wedding traditions prevailing in the Netherlands or Lebanon or Malaysia these days.)

So, given our diversity of backgrounds and cultural expression, how could we presume to give helpful advice to our friend? How could we successfully minister to one another in an ultra-multi-cultural environment?

TRANSCENDENT TRUTHS

The Word of God was the common thread that passed through all of our counsel to Ian. As brothers shared from their own experiences, errors and backgrounds, each one of them wove scriptural truth into the fabric. What mattered most was not what culture you're from, or whether you know about dowries and donkeys, but whether you know Christ and are acquainted with his word about the meaning of marriage and forgiveness and money and edifying communication.

This was the cash value for Ian—men who all (as one Nigerian put it) shared the “same constitution”—the Word of God. The Bible provided the basis of our counsel and care.

The worst thing you can do in a multi-cultural environment is to dumb-down the doctrine, or avoid the hard-edges of theological truth, in order to try and keep diverse people on the same page. Maybe you think: they are from all over the world and I must lighten up the teaching to keep them unified. In actual fact, robust truth is what will keep churches and friendships together amid their diversity. *Lowest-common-denominator theology promotes strife and feebleness, not unity and strength.*

If, on that day in Dubai, we were merely giving Ian our cultural insights on marriage or communication techniques, then at best we would merely be dispensing sound practical advice. But we rooted our comments in the transcendent truths of the scripture, which is what Ian needed most.

Years ago, I preached a sermon on election from 1 Peter 1:2 in the regular course of expounding that book from beginning to end. I remember an older member pulling me aside afterward and warning, “These people don't need that kind of doctrine. Better to teach on something simple and practical, like marriage.” Little did he realize that God's sovereignty is a bedrock truth that bears strongly on marriage and all of our relationships. I learned that, although it may take years, genuine believers who receive sound biblical ministry will grow to love transcendent truth—regardless of what continent they come from.

A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The gospel is foreign to all of our cultures. None of us has an advantage over anyone else. An American raised in a Christian home is no closer to God than a Sunni Saudi citizen—both of them need to be born again through the word of truth. Until then, we are all “strangers and aliens” from God (Eph 2:19). To be sure, the child brought up in a Christian home is blessed to have heard the gospel unlike those who are unreached, but the fact remains that God must regenerate someone who is spiritually dead, regardless of his religious or cultural background. In that sense we are all on a level footing.

Through the crucifixion of Jesus, God has created “one new man” in the place of Jew and Gentile, thus making peace and unity (Eph. 2:15). In this way, despite the presence of many diverse ethnicities in a church, we are nonetheless reconciled to God “in one body.” And how does this reconciliation occur? Paul says it happens “through the cross” (Eph. 2:16).

When people grasp the wonder and power of Jesus' atoning cross-work, their interests begin to shift away from smaller, parochial concerns and broaden out to gospel horizons that we all share regardless of cultural background.

For all our diversity, we are still sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, in need of the one remedy that only Jesus could secure: redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.

The reconciliation achieved at Calvary is bigger news than the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or the Protestant-Catholic divide in Northern Ireland, or unity between the Afrikaners and Zulus in South Africa. It's of greater significance than if the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil rebels laid down their arms. Christ has reconciled us to God!

Since the gospel is transcultural, it speaks with power to every ethnicity. Insofar as we focus on the gospel in our multi-cultural churches, we will "attain to the unity of the faith" (Eph 4:13).

A SOCIOLOGIST'S NIGHTMARE

Healthy churches are laboratories for multi-cultural ministry. They are comprised of what the second-century *Letter to Diogenes* called "a third race"—neither Jew nor Gentile, but united in the "one new man." Such unity amid diversity occurs nowhere else. Where else will you find Hindu-background Indians loving and serving Muslim-background Pakistanis? Or black and white South Africans ministering together in harmony and humble deference? Only in true churches where the Word is rightly preached.

We could try to build unity around something else—like affinity groups or multi-media or musical preferences or niche marketing. And it might appear to work for a while. It's easy to build a crowd. But it's another thing to unite a church.

We can strategize all we want, but ultimately only the Holy Spirit can collect God's people and produce a unity that confounds the sociologists. As Mark Dever has written,

We can create a people around a certain ethnicity. We can create a people around a fully-graded choir program. We can find people who will get excited about a building project or a denominational identity... We can create a people around social opportunities for mothers or Mediterranean cruises for singles. We can create a people around men's groups. We can even create a people around the personality of the preacher. And God can surely use all of these things. But in the final analysis the people of God, the church of God, can only be created around the Word of God.

Increasingly, global cities throughout the world are home to multi-national churches that worship in English, the *lingua franca* of our day. These churches reach into countless national and ethnic groups, even through English as a second language. To lead these kinds of churches, we must avoid the temptation to focus on sociology at the expense of theology. We must prioritize transcendent truths, always viewed through gospel lenses, and all lived out in a local church comprised of genuine believers. Foreigners like us can only be united by an alien gospel.

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Pastor's Forum: Can You Reverse-Engineer a Multi-Ethnic Church?

By John Onwuchekwa, Greg Gilbert, and Andy Davis

Editor's note: We asked three pastors this question: Can you manufacture a multi-ethnic church programmatically, pragmatically, or consumeristically? In other words, is there a way to reverse engineer one?

No, I don't think you can, anymore than you can duct-tape apples to an oak tree and call it an apple tree. The growth and development of bonds of love between people of different ethnicities has to grow naturally and organically. That's the only way those bonds will be strong enough to hold through the strains and difficulties that naturally arise in church life. Let me mention a few reasons why you can't "reverse-engineer" those bonds.

First, everyone knows how to spot phony. If you try to force multi-ethnicity in your church just by singing a few culturally different songs now and again, or hiring one or two people that look different from the majority of your church, the people you're trying to reach will probably appreciate the effort at some level, but they're not going to feel "at home," and therefore they're not likely going to settle at your church. The truth is, people feel most at home where it doesn't require obvious *effort* to make them feel "at home." Home is where you don't stand around waiting to be invited to take a seat; you just flop down on the couch. It just fits; it just is.

Second, bonds created around a reverse-engineered culture, by their nature, simply aren't going to be very strong. That's not true only in the context of multi-ethnicity, either. Many churches have learned the hard way over the years that if the only or primary reason people are coming together is for a shared musical taste, or a shared love for a certain preacher, or even for a shared "church culture," that makes for fragile bonds. Change the music a little bit, let the pastor resign for some reason, put a little pressure on the culture, and you see really quickly that the church wasn't gathered because they love each other and Jesus; they were there because they loved something else. What you want, instead, is a church that gathers primarily because they love each other and Jesus, and therefore they'd keep gathering even if the "look" of things changed pretty dramatically.

Third, there's wisdom in the saying, "What you win them *with*, you win them *to*." If your church exists because of a certain kind of music or a certain ethnicity of staff member, then at root you're creating a

church whose love and attraction are centered on those kinds of things rather than on Jesus. If you win them with sugar, they're going to love and pursue sugar. If you win them with Jesus and the Word, they're going to pursue Jesus and the Word.

So if you don't build a multi-ethnic church through reverse engineering, how do you do it? Two things: First, remove obstacles. If your church is doing things that are inherently offensive, insensitive, or off-putting, stop doing them. It's really that simple. Second, and more importantly, do the things that Christians do. Preach, sing, talk about Jesus, pray, and love. Those aren't White, Black, Latino, Eskimo, Arab, or Asian things to do—they're *Christian* things, and *Christians*—regardless of their ethnicity—will be drawn to them. That may be a slow process, yes, but it's one that brings people to one heart with each other, not just into one room.

—Greg Gilbert is the senior pastor of Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. You can find him on Twitter at [@greggilbert](https://twitter.com/greggilbert).

First, I don't claim to be an expert on multi-ethnicity. My experience is limited to the Pentecostal church that I grew up in (which was extremely diverse with a predominantly white staff), the last church I served in (Blueprint Church), and the church I presently pastor (Cornerstone Church), both of which are in Atlanta. Plus, I have a number of conflicting thoughts on the topic. I hope as I share mine, it doesn't come off as if I'm seeking to invalidate the opinions of others, who, like me, are really just sharing their convictions based on past experiences.

I tend to think of the *ethnicities* that compromise my or any church in the same way I think of the *number* of people in a church. When we walk about numbers, we realize that the size of our churches are determined by many factors—the quality of the preaching, the friendliness of the congregation, space, quality of the children's ministry, systems that are in place to shepherd the church and handle growth, and so many other spiritual dynamics. Most fundamentally, however, we know the size of a church depends upon the sovereignty of God.

That means, if a pastor of a 100-member church asks a pastor of a 1000-member church how to make his church grow, the pastor of the 1000-member church should know to be very cautious and not over-promise: "If you do what I did, you, too, will have 1000 members!" The pastor of the 1000-member church might offer helpful principles. But both pastors should know that, even if the pastor of the smaller church executes those principles flawlessly, his church may never grow beyond 100. And if he does not get the results he hopes for, it doesn't necessarily mean that he is doing something wrong. It may just mean that God intends for him to pastor a church of 1,000 members. It is no indictment on his faithfulness as a pastor or their faithfulness as a church.

I tend to see diversity in the same light. So many factors impact a church's ethnic diversity—location of the church, history of ethnic relations in the city, the plethora of healthy churches led by qualified and gifted men of all races in different denominations that people in a particular city can choose from (which is something that wasn't present in Ephesus or Galatia as Paul was writing those letters).

Some “rules” for multi-ethnicity seem broadly true. For instance, if the lead pastor belongs to the majority culture, it is less likely the church will be diverse, unless his staff is diverse.

But those rules are not always true. My present and last church have been extremely diverse and multi-ethnic, but they became that way with elders who were only young African-American men. It has been things like this that have made me realize that it’s pretty hard to prescribe objective principles to grow a diverse church, because the most diverse churches I’ve been a part of have broken some of the most basic and cardinal rules.

Not to mention, so many other churches did so much more to be multi-ethnic than we did, and they didn’t achieve the results that they hoped for. Again, it’s not that they were doing anything wrong; it’s simply that there are many factors at play, most significantly, God’s sovereignty. Even if you do everything “right” by the conventional wisdom of the day, no results are guaranteed.

So to answer the question: Can you manufacture a multi-ethnic church programmatically, pragmatically, or consumeristically?

I think that you can reverse engineer a multi-ethnic church about like you can reverse engineer a mega-church. As I look at Scripture, I think it’s our responsibility to ensure that we are tearing down any walls that would leave people thinking they have to adopt any particular cultural form in order to adopt the gospel. However, as far as results are concerned, I think those are up to God and shouldn’t be something that creates discontentment in a pastor who is doing all he can to remain faithful.

What I’m not saying is that there is nothing that you can do to contribute to seeing diversity grow in your church. There are many other guys with lots of footnotes and research that can provide helpful pieces of advice and best practices. Just know that those best practices don’t guarantee a thing. Be faithful, get honest critique about what your church is like and how you may have unnecessarily clothed the gospel in your own cultural garb, and do all you can to remove those stumbling blocks. And then, rest in the fact that God will make your church what he means for it to be.

—John Onwuchekwa is the lead pastor of Cornerstone Church in Atlanta, Georgia. You can find him on Twitter at [@JawnO](#).

Whenever it comes to some aspect of church ministry, we must always begin with the Romans 4:3 question: “What does the scripture say?” We must align that topic with the Bible to be sure that it is actually part of a God-honoring, eternally fruitful church.

Having determined that it is, we are then free to find out from other churches what practical wisdom they can give us as local church leaders that will help us be more faithful in that area. Ministries like 9Marks thrive in both aspects: showing biblically what are aspects of healthy church life, and giving practical insights from many local church settings that may or may not be immediately applicable in your situation. So there is no aspect of biblical ministry that can be manufactured programmatically, pragmatically, or consumeristically. But if the Lord has revealed in scripture that something should be

part of a fruitful local church, we can have good confidence that the power of his Holy Spirit will be there to cause it to flourish in its own unique way in every setting on earth.

Concerning multi-ethnic church life, the elders at FBC have determined from the Bible that it is greatly glorifying to God and powerfully effective for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our church membership to reveal a “surprising unity” to our surrounding community. The phrase “surprising unity” refers to a unity in Christ that defies cultural and historical norms and can only be explained by the power of the gospel in the lives of individuals. We believe that when two groups of people in a community are usually bitterly at odds with each other, and when in a local church in that community, individuals from each of those factions clearly love each other deeply from the heart, the gospel will spread much more powerfully in that community. I first saw it in John 17:23 where Jesus prays that the people who believe in him through the word of the apostles will be “brought to complete unity to let the world that you sent me, and have loved them even as you have loved me.” This work of ever-increasing unity between sinners can only be achieved by the gospel, by justification followed by increasing sanctification. As that happens, more and more people will know that Christ is God and will find life in his name.

We have found this to be both extremely desirable and remarkably difficult. In our setting (the American South), there is a long heritage of bitter racism that is not easily overcome. We regularly seek out ministry ideas for outreach and church life from other healthy, multi-ethnic churches. We filter what they do through our own gift-set and community setting. So we do not seek to “reverse engineer” but rather be inspired by God’s unique activities in other settings. This is how the universal Body of Christ can best aid one another in growing toward an ideal of heaven-like unity here on earth.

—Andy Davis is the pastor of First Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina.



By Gustav Pritchard

Lessons Learned from South Africa about Multi-Ethnicity in Churches

I grew up as a “coloured”¹ boy in South Africa during the latter days of Apartheid. Born after the 1976 Soweto Uprising, I was spared much of the horrors of life in South Africa under white Afrikaaner rule. I did however experience the hatred of white racists, and I recall those beaches and public areas that were for “whites only.” But I also remember watching the dismantling of Apartheid, the dissolution of its systematic oppression of non-white people. I remember clearly when the Group Areas Act was repealed in 1991 because my parents bought a home in a previously ‘white neighbourhood’ while I was still a young boy.

Currently, I live in Johannesburg, South Africa, where I pastor a local church in what was previously a white part of the city. Like most pastors in South Africa, I have been forced to think about what it really means to have a multi-ethnic church united in the gospel. I still have more questions than answers, but let me offer the following seven suggestions to fellow pastors. My prayer is that these encouragements would help us all shepherd God’s flock more faithfully in light of the diversity of his sheep.

1. REMIND YOUR PEOPLE THAT THEY ARE NEW PEOPLE

Fundamental to our new life in Christ is the acquisition of a thoroughly new identity. No longer are we defined in an ultimate sense by our social status, skin colour, nationality, marital status, or anything else. Rather, believers are now defined by God’s love for us through faith in Jesus Christ. We have been saved into a family, a people, a race (1 Pet 2:9-10), and those relationships define our identity in Christ.

Further, it is the local church where this new familial identity is lived out, where our new identity as brothers and sisters is displayed. Pastors should therefore help their people view themselves as redefined by their relationships with the other members of their local church.

2. USE ONE LANGUAGE IN YOUR CHURCH

During my seminary days I was part of a church that aimed to reach Francophone refugees from Africa. To this end, the church hired a pastor from Ivory Coast, and to some extent the ministry to these people was quite fruitful. But when we tried to host combined services in a display of being one church, the cracks began to show. As much as we observed our people trying to love and understand the culture of our French-speaking brothers and sisters, the language barrier was real.

There is at least one barrier that won't be overcome until the last Day: language. Until that Day, it is best to plant separate churches for different language groups. Furthermore, in the cases where there are multiple languages spoken among the members of one church, it's neither wise nor biblical to have people preach, read, sing, or pray in a language that is not shared by every member (1 Cor 14:16-17). Life comes through the Word, and so people must be able to understand the words in order to find life.

3. DON'T FEEL YOU MUST LOOK LIKE THE SHEEP

In recent years, more and more non-white people have moved into, what were white neighbourhoods during apartheid. In reaction to this, I have heard some well-meaning white Christians suggest that a black pastor needs to be placed in churches in those areas so as to better serve incoming non-white families. I have heard black Christians say they feel better when a black person is upfront, preaching or leading.

I don't want to downplay the real cultural differences among various ethnicities. Nevertheless, this line of reasoning wrongly views ethnicity as an insurmountable relational barrier. (see Eph 2:16ff). Indeed, such reasoning is contrary to the way Jesus thought about crossing the ethnic divide: the man he chose to take the gospel to the Gentiles was not himself a Gentile, but "a Hebrew of Hebrews." While it may be easier to befriend someone who shares my culture, what is most needed in gospel-ministry are under-shepherds who truly love the Chief Shepherd and who are utterly committed to serving his sheep (Jn 21:15ff).

4. HELP THE OPPRESSED TO TURN FROM HATE

"I think you are being racist." That is what my wife said to me when we were still dating. She was referring to my attitude when grading the work of black students in my university tutorials. And she was right! I admit that when I saw a black (Zulu or Xhosa) name on the paper, I immediately thought, "This is probably not going to be very good." My own racist heart shocked me, especially since I despised Apartheid. Interestingly, when I recently shared my past racist behavior with black Christian friends, they were able to reflect on their own racist tendencies toward white people.

Here's the point: racism, which is really just one form of human hatred and sinful favoritism, is not the sin only of one ethnicity. Favoritism and hatred comes rather easily to all of us, even when we have been on the receiving end of racism. Church unity requires the loving, humble efforts of all involved. And unity is hindered if some sheep see themselves as incapable of racism. Shepherding those who have been victims of racism means, in part, helping them guard their own hearts from responding to evil with evil (1 Pet 3:8-12).

5. ASK YOURSELF THE HARD (RACIST) QUESTIONS

Not everyone is a racist. Many I hope are not. Nonetheless, I think it's wise for every pastor to ask himself the hard question, "Do I have a racist heart?"²

First, it is not uncommon to harbor racist attitudes without being aware of them. And to the extent that the broader culture is racist, as was the case during Apartheid, it's very difficult not to be negatively influenced.³

Second, if you discover some racist tendencies in your heart, and if you diligently turn to Christ for help, this experience affords you the opportunity to speak personally of the redeeming power of the gospel for your racism. It is always helpful for Christians to hear testimonies of the gospel's work in others' lives, including its work against the sin of racism.

6. BE CAREFUL OF IMPORTING THE WORLD'S VOCABULARY

The unbelieving world around us struggles to address the pain and evil of racism in a way that is constructive and useful. Current politics in South Africa are too often characterized by emotive rhetoric that does little to foster attitudes of forgiveness and nation-building. For this reason, pastors need to be careful about importing terms like "white guilt" and "white privilege" without carefully scrutinizing such vocabulary in light of the Bible. It's easy for the unbelieving mindset and heart attitudes attached to these terms to be imported into the dialogue of the church. And this in turn may allow sinful attitudes like hate, unforgiveness, and pride to sneak into the discussions, sometimes even driving them.

Pastors therefore ought to help their people think about racism in light of the Bible, particularly in the terms of sin, God's sovereignty over evil, forgiveness, and Christian stewardship.

7. PREACH GOSPEL-COMFORT FROM THE JUDGMENT DAY

All evil cannot and will not be dealt with sufficiently by human courts or councils. Full and lasting justice will only come on the last Day, including the justice for the many atrocities committed by racist groups and individuals.

Therefore, those who have been hurt by racism need to be reminded to look beyond this world for justice. They should hear that God sees our hurt and will one day give back to those who injure his people (2 Thes 1:5-7). This should help those who suffer to not become angry and embittered, but to pray for God's mercy even over those who hate us (Matt 5:44-45). After all, it is Jesus Christ alone who saves us from the coming Judgment, not our works of (racist-free) righteousness.

¹ The Coloured people comprise the ethnic group of people who originated in the Cape, whose ancestry is diverse, including Khoisan, Xhosa, European Settlers, and slaves imported from the Dutch East Indies. Coloured people are considered a distinct ethnic group from black groups in Southern Africa, e.g. Zulu people.

² I trust it's clear that exploring this question means asking more specific questions, e.g. "Would I welcome a son-in-law (or daughter-in-law) from another ethnicity?" It also probably means having this conversation with someone who knows you well, and will speak honestly to you.

- 3 One example of this is found in the Coloured community in South Africa. For many years coloured parents were more pleased to have babies who were fairer-skinned and whose hair was 'straighter,' i.e. babies who looked more 'white.' Clearly this preference was instilled by the broader racist culture.

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By Jeffrey K. Jue

Does the Asian American Church Need an Adjusted Gospel? ¹

Some would say it is very easy for a bunch of upper-middle class, highly educated, white, male, Christians from North America, to stand up and proclaim that the church universal needs an Unadjusted Gospel. Some would say this is an arrogant proclamation, revealing an ignorant and desperate attempt to cling to the past, while postmodernity has shifted the intellectual ground beneath us beyond recognition.² Moreover, the exponential growth of global Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, is quickly making these Western leaders and their representative constituents irrelevant.³ In other words, many will say, this “white Western gospel” needs to be adjusted, or it will become obsolete.

Within this discussion, how does the Asian American Evangelical church answer this question? On one hand, Asian American Evangelicals share many of the core theological commitments that groups like Together for the Gospel or The Gospel Coalition hold to. On the other hand, many Asian Americans who have labored in Asian American churches have had very different experiences in comparison to what goes on in churches like First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi or Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Does the Asian American church need an unadjusted gospel as well?

ADJUSTING THE ASIAN-AMERICAN GOSPEL

Some Asian American theologians have adjusted the gospel significantly. Their comparative religious studies have led them to a position that no longer affirms the exclusivity of salvation in Jesus Christ. Substantively, what they argue for is a form of universalism, and by doing so they have adjusted the gospel in a radical way. They have allowed their rejection of Western theology to reshape their understanding, and instead they replace the gospel of Jesus Christ with something fashioned in their own image. What do I mean by this?

Asian American theologians, in an attempt to be indigenous, turn from a focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ, to the experiences of Asians in America as the foundation for building a theology. One such theologian, Fumitaka Matsuoka, argues that the universal religious experience which serves as the basis for theology also includes distinctive ethnic experiences. Subsequently, ethnicity is a legitimate expression of the universal religious experience and, thus, careful recognition of ethnic diversities contributes to the development of theology. In other words, for Matsuoka as an Asian American, ethnic experience is one voice in a chorus of human experiences upon which theology is built.

It's easy for conservative evangelicals to see the glaring errors in this approach and quickly dismiss these theologians. However, when you examine the experiential themes that Asian American theologians explore, much of what they express resonates with even conservative Asian Americans.

MARGINALITY

Arguably, the most common theme that Asian American theologians discuss is the experience of marginality. The history of Asian Americans can be described as a history on the borders, “betwixt and between,” and never quite fully assimilated into the American mainstream. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (which excluded Chinese from becoming American citizens), the Japanese American internment camps during World War II, pre-1965 U.S. immigration quotas (which discriminated against Asian immigrants)—all reinforce the notion that Asian Americans have been and will be perpetually foreign.⁴ I am sure that many Asian Americans have had the common experience when asked: where are you from? I’m from Philadelphia. No, where are you *really* from? Nevertheless, Asian Americans are resilient. The perpetual foreigner syndrome runs parallel with the model minority stereotype, where Asian Americans are seen as highly-intelligent, industrious, and successful, but without the racial militancy accompanying other minority groups.⁵

This Asian American experience of marginality is sometimes seen as reflective of the Christian pilgrim experience, and therefore the theme of marginality serves as a constructive foundation for an Asian American theology. And while marginality is undeniably a part of the Asian American experience, the gospel should not be re-defined according to our experiences. Inevitably, if we give a normative place to experience, we will adjust the gospel to suit those experiences.

The irony in this approach is that in seeking to construct a unique theology, free from Western colonial influences, Asian American theologians have adopted a method that is identical with what modern Western theologians have been employing. In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of German Liberal theology, espoused a theological method that likewise reduced theology and the gospel to experience. Schleiermacher contended that all religions were simply the experiences of human beings expressing a common feeling of absolute dependence. Each experience, and thus each religion, is equally valid because the foundation is the same: the feeling of absolute dependence. The gospel again was reduced to experience, with devastating results for the church.⁶

PREACHING THE UNADJUSTED GOSPEL TO THE ASIAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

I believe that many of the concerns expressed by Asian American theologians are valid. The history of the Asian American church intersects with the history of systemized discrimination and racialization in

America, and it has had a significant impact. However, to follow what these theologians are teaching would lead to the death of the Asian American church. Thankfully, a majority of Asian American churches are conservative and do uphold an unadjusted gospel, in which salvation is found in Christ alone. But upholding the gospel and *preaching* the gospel may not be necessarily the same thing. For Asian American Evangelicals, our experiences still influence how we understand the gospel.

Much of evangelical preaching can be described as moralistic preaching, without a proper understanding of the grace of God given through Jesus Christ. In some ways, Asian culture is particularly suited for moralistic preaching. Asian culture has been heavily shaped by Confucianism, with its goal of moral perfection, and it's very easy to exchange Confucian moral standards for Christian ones. Yet, the gospel does not begin with moral standards, but rather with the assertion that we are morally bankrupt (Romans 3:23). So, then, how do we preach an unadjusted gospel that avoids destructive moralism?

I am convinced that we must pay careful attention to the context of the biblical gospel. By context I am not referring to the situation of the audience, nor am I referring to the Ancient Near Eastern or Second Temple Judaic context of the Old and New Testament. The context that we must consider first when we preach the gospel is the canonical context. The Bible is an organic unity that reveals the redemptive plan of God, beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation. This is a supernatural revelation that tells us how God intends to save the lost, and the climax of that history is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Everything that came before Jesus Christ pointed to him (Luke 24:27), and everything that comes after explains what he did and how the benefits of his work are applied to us. Consequently, whatever passage you preach from the canon of the Bible points you to Christ, and the gospel of God's redemption. This is the cure to moralism, because in Christ there is nothing that we can earn, live up to, or boast about. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is purely given through the grace of God in spite of our rebellion and sin, and not because of what we have accomplished. I believe the church, including the Asian American church, needs to be reminded of this unadjusted gospel every week.

KNOWING THE HISTORY OF ASIAN AMERICANS

Like the Apostle Paul, we are to preach Christ, and nothing but Christ (1 Cor. 1:23). Still the gospel of Jesus Christ addresses a host of issues, including the issue of ethnicity. Feelings of disgrace, shame, marginality, discrimination, etc., can be healed by the power of the gospel. Those who minister to Asian Americans need to understand something about these common experiences. In order to understand these needs, I would suggest that it is important to read about the history of Asian Americans and to talk to older generations of Asian American Christians. You will learn about their struggles and, for example, how the establishment of the single-ethnic Asian American church was not simply the consequence of language barriers, but was often the result of subtle segregation.² Likewise you will learn of the Asian American church's vital role in providing assistance for recent immigrants, when no one else would. This history is important for understanding the needs of and ministering to those in the Asian American community.

Knowing the history of Asian Americans also serves another purpose. The gospel calls us to speak truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). While Asian American churches uphold and strive to preach an unadjusted gospel that is the same for all evangelical churches, it remains necessary to address issues of discrimination and falsehood, even within evangelical Christianity. False and hurtful Asian stereotypes

found in such things like the Rickshaw Rally Vacation Bible School material or the Deadly Viper publications have been well publicized. But sometimes these issues are more subtle, and I admit are often accompanied by the best of motivations. This makes it more difficult to address, but speaking the truth is still a requirement. Let me give you two examples.

SUBTLE DISCRIMINATION AND MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCHES

A common trend today within many of our denominations is to encourage the growth of multicultural or multiethnic churches, particularly in urban centers where the cultural or ethnic diversity is the greatest. Justification for this takes on various forms. Sociologically, some of these church leaders still hold to the old “melting pot” paradigm, in which all cultures will be assimilated into the generic American culture.⁸ Others, whom I would regard as more nuanced, would see the sociological shift towards a post-ethnic America as the grounds for multi-culturalism.⁹ Culture, they claim, is more fluid today.

If you have worked in youth ministry with Asian Americans, you’ve probably witnessed this phenomenon. Many young Asian Americans have adopted the African American hip-hop culture with its music, language, and style of dress.¹⁰ Biblically, these church leaders argue that the kingdom of God knows no ethnic distinction (Galatians 3:27-29; Revelation 7:9).¹¹ In fact, I remember hearing one church planter boldly state that God is *more pleased* with multiethnic churches! Regardless of the justification, the method for multicultural or multiethnic churches usually follows a model where diversity begins with the leadership. Therefore, it is important to have a Caucasian pastor paired with an African American, Asian American, or Latin/Hispanic American pastor. My own denomination defines multiculturalism in these exact terms.¹²

But do color lines always demarcate cultural or ethnic boundaries? What if I planted a church with Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese members? According to the common definition, this would not qualify as multicultural or multiethnic. But who defines these terms? They are usually defined by someone who cannot tell the difference, or worse do not recognize that there are differences between various Asian ethnic groups. This is a subtle form of stereotyping.

Another form of stereotyping—again, which often comes with good intentions—occurs when some attempt to identify cultural traits in order to connect the gospel with these traits. Asian cultures are commonly described as “shame-based cultures,” and the concept of shame is said to be more familiar than guilt.¹³ I have seen some pastors and theologians insist that the gospel, when presented to Asians and Asian Americans, should be framed solely by the notion of shame before God, excluding any discussion of guilt. Put simply, they claim that guilt is a Western cultural characteristic, while shame is more of an Eastern cultural characteristic. Again, this is subtle adjustment, with the admirable intention of communicating the gospel more effectively. In my opinion, however, you cannot preach the gospel without discussing the guilt of all sinners before the judgment of God (Romans 6:23). And guilt is not the same thing as shame. Moreover, guilt is not a foreign cultural concept for Asians. Arguably, legal codes in Asia and the Middle East pre-date those in the West. A violation of the emperor’s edict in Ancient China for example, would result in guilt and punishment. Again, this is a subtle form of stereotyping that requires careful attention.

3 WAYS THE ASIAN-AMERICAN CHURCH CAN HELP ADVANCE THE GOSPEL

God has created us and called us to be his children, with our various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, all of which he created. Does the gospel call us to leave behind culture and ethnicity? Sometimes it does. After the Fall, our cultures and ethnicities are not immune from sin. Yet I remain convinced that culture and ethnicity are not inherently evil, and that God uses these things now to extend his gospel to a lost world. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 Paul writes, “Now there are a variety of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are a variety of ministries, and the same Lord; and there are a variety of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons.” As such, I’m convinced that the Asian American church has a unique role in the work of the gospel. Here are three ways.

First, the Asian American church can help the wider evangelical church see that the gospel is more than ethnicity. Let’s be honest, while America has made progress, racial tension still exists, even in the church. The Asian American church can help unite the body of Christ by sharing its resources with those outside of the Asian community. Asian Americans are disproportionately wealthy compared to other ethnic groups. However, Asian Americans are disproportionately under-represented amongst philanthropic donors. The Lord has blessed many Asian American churches with tremendous wealth, but do Asian American churches share that blessing with others? Of course they do; but usually, it is only for missionary work directed at those who are of the same ethnicity. The gospel, of course, is more than ethnicity, and by sharing the resources that God has given to some Asian Americans, the wider church will be blessed and greater unity will be built, all for the sake of the gospel.

Second, for those who have received the gospel, we must remember that we have been united to Christ (Ephesians 2). Union with Christ is a major theme in the New Testament. We are united to Christ by faith, and the benefit of being united to him includes our justification, adoption, and sanctification.¹⁴ In addition, as we are united to Christ, our lives are to be conformed to the pattern of Christ’s life. This is the pattern of suffering before glory, as Christ suffered and died before he was resurrected and entered into glory in his ascension (John 16:33, Galatians 2:20). Now suffering may not be unto death like Christ, but it maybe like Christ a suffering that includes sacrifice. We may be called to suffer through sacrificing our own comforts, desires, and needs.

If I might be a little critical at this point, this is not the common attitude among many Asian American churches that are looking for the next innovation for ministry, whether it be updating technology, changing worship styles, or initiating new programs. Instead, on one hand, a sacrificial attitude may mean teaching our younger second and third generations to sacrifice their comfort for the sake of unity and growth with the first generation. On the other hand, the first generation must be willing to share the leadership of the church in order to encourage young leaders to grow and develop. This could take various different forms from maintaining a single church with first- and second-generation congregations, or launching a new second-generation church which intentionally maintains a relationship with the parent church. Perhaps I am being too simplistic, but I am convinced that a Christ-centered gospel that recognizes Christ’s pattern of suffering before glory as our pattern as well, can avoid the “[silent exodus](#)” of children who grow up in Asian American churches abandoning those churches or even the faith when they leave home, as Helen Lee so famously documented in her article for *Christianity Today*.¹⁵

Finally, the Asian American church can play a strategic role in this age of globalization. Philip Jenkins, in his ground-breaking book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, describes how Christianity in Africa, Asia, and South America is growing exponentially, while it is declining in Europe and North America.¹⁶ I have read and heard reports from churches in China, South Korea, Uganda, and Brazil that would confirm Jenkins' research.

As this trend continues, the frontline of Christian ministry will not be in the West. As a result, some claim that the Western church will have no significance in the next few decades. I disagree. Churches in the West still have resources, both financial and practical, to share with the growing church in other parts of the world. However, for churches in the West to interact with churches in Africa, Asia, or South America, it will require cross-cultural sensitivities.

Who better to aid this effort than those who have lived their entire lives in a bi-cultural context? Most Asian Americans are just as comfortable eating with chopsticks as with a fork and knife, they often can speak more than one language, and they are able to navigate cultural nuances and practices that others would overlook. Being Asian American and working in a Western seminary, I am frequently called upon to be a cultural translator in order to connect my institution with partners in Asia, as well as other parts of the world. I admit, sometimes it can be frustrating because you feel like you have one foot in each world, while never being fully comfortable in either. But the opportunity to connect two worlds can result in extraordinary partnerships that could have significant impact for the work of the gospel.

CONCLUSION

It was a surprising and sad moment when as a first year seminary professor I led a seminar in which we discussed the unique role the Asian American church can play in extending the gospel. One of my Chinese American students came up to me afterwards and said, "I always thought being Chinese American was a hindrance. This is the first time that someone has told me that being Chinese American can be an advantage."

God has created us with individual gifts, including the gift of our culture and ethnicity. Often, that gift can be hidden by sins both committed and committed against. But, to quote Amy Tan, "It may look worthless, but it comes from afar, and carries with it all my good intentions."¹⁷ Even better, James 1:17 states, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

¹ Material from this article was first presented at the: Asian Americans Building Healthy Churches pre-conference seminar hosted by Project Antioch at the 2010 Together for the Gospel conference.

² For postmodern claims see: Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (2001); John Franke, *The Character of Theology: A Postconservative Evangelical Approach* (Grand Rapids, 2005); Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (2001).

³ Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, 2009).

⁴ See Mia Tuan, *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today* (Rutgers, 1999).

⁵ Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York, 2001), p. 7; Frank Wu, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (New York, 2002), p. 40-41.

- ⁶ See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford, 1980); D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Baltimore, 1994).
- ⁷ Timothy Tseng, "Asian Pacific American Christianity in a Post-Ethnic Future," *American Baptist Quarterly* 21 (2002), pp. 277-292.
- ⁸ See David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, 2005), p. 93. For a defense of the assimilationist model see: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Return to the Melting Pot," in Ronald Takaki (ed.), *From Different Shores: Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America* (Oxford, 1994) pp. 293-5; and Takaki's response, 'At the End of the Century: The "Culture Wars" in the U.S.,' *ibid.* 296-9.
- ⁹ See David Hollinger, *Post-ethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (1996); Michael Angrosino, *Talking About Cultural Diversity in Your Church: Gifts and Challenges* (Walnut Creek, 2001).
- ¹⁰ Joel Kotkin and Thomas Tseng, "Happy to Mix it All Up," *Washington Post* (June 8, 2003).
- ¹¹ Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, 1996); Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques, *Cultural Change & Your Church: Helping Your Church Thrive in a Diverse Society* (Grand Rapids, 2002).
- ¹² "Ministering Among the Changing Cultures of North America," Mission to North America, Presbyterian Church of America (October 2005), pp. 20-21. Found at: www.pcamna.org/about%20us/resources/CulturalAssimilationPaperOctober132005.pdf.
- ¹³ Ken Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl: A Comprehensive Resource for Multi-Asian Ministry* (Valley Forge, 1999), chapter 5.
- ¹⁴ The Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 69 states, "The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him."
- ¹⁵ Helen Lee, "Silent Exodus: Can the East Asian church in America reverse the flight of its next generation?," *Christianity Today*, 40:12 (August 12, 1996).
- ¹⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, 2002); also see Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, 2003).
- ¹⁷ Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (New York, 1995), pp. 3-4.

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By Juan Sanchez

One Example of Reaching Your Multi-Ethnic Neighbors

When I first came to High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, in August of 2005, in addition to fulfilling my regular responsibilities as pastor of the English-speaking congregation, I preached a Spanish service on Sunday mornings before our regular gathering. We began with a handful of brothers, but, by God's grace, the gathering grew beyond my ability to shepherd.

Eventually, High Pointe decided that the best course of action was to plant a Hispanic church. Several years have passed since the plant, and as with most ethnic-language churches, many issues arose. Mainly, I learned that ethnic-language churches tend to lose the second generation.

This limitation led me to rethink ethnic-language church planting, but it wasn't until I was confronted by my small view of the church that I realized we needed to reconsider how we were approaching ethnic-language ministry. Our newly fortified theological convictions led us away from planting ethnic-language churches. Instead, we have begun to emphasize reaching the diverse peoples around us through the regular ministry of our members.

THE CHURCH IN GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

Working through Ephesians help me understand the place of the church in God's eternal plan. The apostle Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians that God's eternal plan is to unite all things in Christ "things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). One of the things God is uniting through Christ is a diverse, multi-ethnic humanity (2:11-22). As we preach this gospel, we are calling Gentiles (and Jews) to repentance and faith in order that they might enjoy the unsearchable riches of the Jewish messiah (3:8). As these formerly hostile peoples come to faith in Christ, God's plan to unite all things in Christ is made known to the watching world (3:9). And as repentant Jews and Gentiles come together in the church,

they display to the cosmic powers the multi-faceted wisdom of our God (3:10). So, the church participates in God's eternal plan to unite all things in Christ through the preaching of the gospel and the gathering of repentant sinners in a local gathering of believers.

Likewise, in 1 Peter, the apostle reminds us that, through the gospel, God has created a new race (2:9): a unified people from multiple ethnicities, cultures, and generations living together as family. This is why Peter urges Christians to "love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (1:22; 3:8; 4:8; 5:14). As we live together in love as a local church, we show the world the wisdom of our God and the power of his gospel to change people who formerly isolated themselves on the basis of ethnicity (race), age, or socio-economic background. If this is all true, it should affect how we live as a local church.

RE-THINKING ETHNIC-LANGUAGE CHURCH PLANTING

These glorious gospel truths fortified my convictions about a local church being composed of multiple ethnicities and cultures, including ethnic-language church planting. God is greatly glorified as a diversity of peoples (Jew/Gentile, male/female, rich/poor, young/old, black/white, Hispanic/Asian, etc.) is brought together by the gospel, and as they live together as a church. I'm not saying that a church that is not ethnically diverse is in sin; I am only saying that if we are a faithful witness where God has placed us, then the make-up of our churches should reflect the make-up of our local communities.

For us, that includes ethnic diversity. According to the 2012 U. S. census data, within 3 miles of our building, 73.5 percent of the population are non-Anglo. Because 51.2 percent of that population is Hispanic, we needed to prioritize outreach to the Spanish-speaking population. In addition, while the Asian population only makes up 10 percent of the population in our area, it's one of the fastest growing groups, particularly the Vietnamese. Our main questions, then, were how to reach people in the community where God had placed us and how to live together as a church in order to display God's glory and wisdom.

A CULTURE OF EVANGELISM

Our newly fortified theological convictions led us away from planting ethnic-language churches. Instead, we emphasized reaching the diverse peoples around us through the regular ministry of our members. Most importantly, we continued to stress the importance of a culture of evangelism in which having regular gospel conversations with friends and neighbors of all cultures and ethnicities is normal. We wanted to communicate that God is able, through faithful church members, to reach the diverse populations around us in spite of our weaknesses.

That meant we continued doing what we were already doing—spreading the good news as the Lord granted us opportunities. We hoped to cultivate a culture of evangelism by encouraging one another to build relationships with neighbors in order to speak to them about Christ. We celebrated these opportunities with one another and prayed for one another. It has been very encouraging to see how simply celebrating gospel conversations, and not just gospel conversions, has encouraged us to be faithful in taking advantage of daily opportunities for witness. As we faithfully share God's good news about Jesus, we are taking part in God's eternal plan to subject all things under Christ. Yet we knew we had to take additional steps.

CHURCH PLANTING IN OUR AREA

Since the majority of our members live over 5 to 10 miles from our building, it makes it difficult to reach those closest to where we gather. In an effort to better care for our members and to have churches that reflect our local communities, we agreed to plant English-speaking churches in the furthest parts of the Austin metro-area where the largest concentrations of our members live. In January 2011, we sent out about 35 members and two elders to plant Covenant Life Fellowship in Elgin, over 20 miles from where we meet. By God's grace, they have steadily grown and are a reflection of that rural bedroom community. Presently, we have about 30-40 members from the Cedar Park/Leander area who travel more than 30 minutes to gather with us on Sundays. In February 2016, we hope to send out about 40 members and another two elders to plant Cedar Pointe Baptist Church in that area. We pray that these brothers and sisters will be able to live together in love and reach their neighborhoods with the gospel, reflecting the communities in which they gather and displaying the wisdom and glory of God to their neighbors.

Planting these churches in the furthest extremities of the Austin metro-area will allow us to concentrate our outreach efforts closer to where we meet. Still, we have members who live over 5-10 miles from our meeting place. We have encouraged them to move within our five-mile radius, if at all possible. Some of our younger members have moved into apartments that are close-by, while some of the more adventurous members have moved into homes closer to our church building. For many, however, it's not financially feasible to move closer, so we still face some challenges to reach our neighbors.

REACHING OUR NEIGHBORS

Rather than plant ethnic-language churches, though, we have sought to add ethnic-language pastors to our staff who will help us reach the ethnic-language populations around us. In 2011, an Ethiopian pastor approached us about a meeting space for their church plant. We informed him of our convictions, and he embraced the picture of God's church that we described from Ephesians. Instead of looking for a place to meet, the Ethiopian group of about 35 people decided to join High Pointe, and their pastor became a full-time member of our pastoral staff. Each and every individual went through our membership process, and we care for them in the same way we do all our members. They currently have a separate Lord's Day gathering in Amharic, but our hope is to eventually merge the two gatherings into one.

Our highest priority, though, remains the significant Spanish-speaking population around us. So in 2013, we added a pastoral assistant to our staff to help us reach that population. He began with a small Bible study in his home. Now, he teaches an ongoing Spanish Sunday school class. These Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters join us in our regular gathering, where we offer translation in Spanish via headsets. Also, we project the lyrics to our songs in both English and Spanish simultaneously. By God's grace, we are beginning to see a growing number of Hispanic brothers and sisters, along with inquirers, who have begun to attend our gatherings. We pray that this outreach will continue to grow. We also have a strong desire to reach the growing Vietnamese population around us. So, clearly, we have much left to do.

CONCLUSION

In no way do I intend to imply that this is *the* way to do ethnic-language ministry. This is how the Lord has led us as a church to seek to be faithful in showing the world the unfolding plan of God as he unites

a diversity of peoples under Christ to display his manifold wisdom to the cosmic powers. If this is the place of the church in God's eternal plan, then, perhaps, we ought to rethink how we do church.

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By John Smuts

The Joys and Challenges of a Multi-Ethnic Church

Rayners Lane Baptist Church (RLBC) is a multi-cultural church in a suburban multi-cultural area. Last time we counted, we had 40 different nationalities present on a Sunday. The most common are white British, Tamil (Indian and Sri Lankan), African, and Caribbean. The church is situated in the London borough of Harrow, which is now the most ethnically and religiously diverse council area in the UK.

Harrow used to be a white, middle-class suburb of NW London. Massive immigration has changed that. I have only been here for two years (and so did not witness the demographic changes within the church) but I think the following factors led to the church becoming so multi-cultural:

1. A clear vision for the church as multi-cultural that is embraced by the whole church.
2. The previous pastor moved to Rayners Lane from a black-majority church and brought that experience (and some Africans and Jamaicans) with him.
3. Multi-culturalism is intentionally modelled from the front by getting people from different nationalities to lead services, preach, and so forth..
4. Previous assistant pastors have been from differing nationalities.

It is well documented that the only area in the UK where the church is growing significantly is in London and that this is related to immigration. However, in my experience, most of this growth is still in churches with a monochrome culture. There are plenty of white, black, or brown majority churches but few that are genuinely multi-cultural. Although we have a long way to go, our aim at RLBC is to become a church of all nations for all nations. More than that, as we read Ephesians 2, we see that homogeneous churches (in multi-cultural areas) actually undermine the gospel.

THE JOYS

Ministry in a setting like this is a great joy. The melting pot of cultures brings with it such enthusiasm and dynamism. Hospitality is so important to Tamil and African cultures that it's a wonderful antidote to Western individualism. For example, even if I visit an African family in the middle of the afternoon I must not eat lunch because I will be given a full meal regardless of whether I have already eaten!

It's much easier to maintain a focus on world mission because everyone already has a global vision, and it's no coincidence that we have sent out new mission partners every year for the past three years. Since most Brits are very cynical about authority, it's refreshing that most immigrant cultures have a strong respect for leadership, where it is more readily seen as an honour and not a chore to serve in the family of God.

But the greatest joy of all is our congregation's clear witness to the gospel. Our last baptismal service consisted of four people: an African, an Italian, a German, and a Scot—aged 20 to 80. Our next one is shaping up to be an African, a British Indian, and a white Brit. Preaching at a service like that is a piece of cake. I just point to them and say, "Only the gospel can do this!"

THE CHALLENGES

What about the challenges of a multi-ethnic church?

First and foremost, language and communication are obviously taxing. During many services the annoying whispering that can sometimes be heard is my wife translating key bits into Italian. Since the gospel is a message to be proclaimed, there is a greater scope for mistranslation. We do have a Tamil fellowship that meets on a Friday evening (where Tamil is spoken and Tamil food consumed) but we make it clear that this is more like a Home Group and is not a separate congregation. Connected with this, there are many different cultural assumptions about ecclesiology. For example, many Jamaicans grow up viewing the Baptist church almost as a "state church." This is a great opportunity for evangelism because they see us as "their church" even if they only went to Sunday School 30 years ago. But it's also a challenge when they arrive for "christenings" (as some Jamaican Baptists will say) or weddings.

Additionally, at the moment it feels as if our dominant culture is British and that others are welcome so long as they "do it our way." A good example of this is our attendance at members' meetings. It's currently very white and not at all representative of the membership as a whole. Inevitably, there needs to be some assimilation, but we need to think more about doing it in a way that embraces aspects from immigrant cultures, too.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

As you can see, the joys and the challenges are mostly two sides of the same coin (e.g. leadership is an honour, but my motivation may be status rather than service.) We have to keep coming back to the gospel where all our cultural assumptions are challenged. And surely that can only be a good thing.

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By Isaac Adams

Why White Churches Are Hard for Black People

*We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.*

*Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.*

*We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!*

— Paul Laurence Dunbar, premier nineteenth century black poet

In 1896, Dunbar etched those words to explain the struggle of black people in a white world. In 2015, those same words summarize the struggle of black people in white churches. The reasons why are below. Praise God, these reasons aren't true for every white church or for every black person. But I pray these words lead to graceful and authentic conversation, to prayer, to action, and to joy in our Lord.

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **Many white brothers and sisters don't work against, much less acknowledge, racism, whether subtle or blatant.** Meanwhile, the world readily admits that white supremacy resounds today and that subtle racism skulks in ways more difficult to discern. Some white folk in the church act as if, according to one writer, "any mention of 'racism' is a racial slur directed at them." Responding to this perceived slur, some whites speak only to defend themselves instead of listening to die to themselves; conversation then becomes a tool for imposition—not understanding. Others go mute because of their discomfort or because they don't know what they don't know. But the church is to bear one another's burdens (1 Cor. 12:26). Where are the loving brothers and sisters who want to pick up some weight? In Galatians 2, Peter's racial prejudices acted against the gospel—not an implication of the gospel but the actual gospel.

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **Lots of white people have privileges blacks don't.** Whites have the privilege to ignore issues that haunt and hurt black people, issues which black people cannot ignore. Yet because the privileged don't have to think about these issues, many of them don't—and living with whites who are blinded to their privilege is discouraging. On any given Sunday, blacks attend churches where the majority of the members and the leadership are woefully undisciplined on issues that shape black experiences, black fears, and black families. These issues affect our spiritual state. But the white majority treats these painful truths—if they acknowledge them at all—as black people's feelings, not everyone's facts. Ultimately, these the majority dismisses these truths, and blacks' feelings go invalidated.

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **It feels like the majority doesn't want to hear what it feels like to be black.** All it takes it to be told once by a white brother or sister to just "get over" the issues of race to feel like those in the majority are opposed to understanding you, to loving you. That's all it takes to feel lesser than, and to not feel as if there's a superiority complex effused by the majority.

For example, when white members of the majority culture accuse black churches of carnal "emotionalism" in their praise—that rings of a superiority complex. It seemingly presumes that theologically rich songs birthed by the Word only have one cultural expression. Perhaps God claps to the B3 Hammond and sways to the Steinbeck just the same.

Yet too often it feels as if many whites refuse to imagine what it feels like to be the minority or to love the minority. White church's church planting strategies sometimes reflect this refusal. While it is wonderful that many white churches seek to put young black men in leadership, many forgo sending that young black man back into a black church context. Beware of the temptation young black brothers have to leave the black church—where they must pay their dues—for a white church that will rush them to prominence. It sometimes feels as if some white churches consider black churches and black church practices to be unsound—or at least as not as biblically faithful—as a matter of course; I feel this way when white evangelical leaders make offhand comments about the apparent lack of Reformed theology in black churches. But countless black churches have believed and honored a Big God for a long, long time now. And countless black churches need their young men to stay within them.

But some white people hold the institution of the black church in contempt. They accuse its supporters of “dividing the body of Christ!” They don’t realize that when blacks speak of the black church, we’re not just talking about a sociological but a supernatural phenomenon—a bunch of black folk faithfully worshipping God. Some white folk, who decry the black church’s existence, don’t realize that their grandpas, who wouldn’t let blacks worship with their white folk, created the black church.

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **They think they have a safe space for blacks, but some don’t.** There’s no space for blacks to be righteously angry about issues that affect us, lest we arouse the ever-feared “angry black person” stereotype. Along with our own sin, we’re constantly battling stereotypes in white churches; and that battle makes it hard to hope for all things (1 Cor. 13:7). Blacks don’t want space simply to be righteously angry; we’d just like some space simply to be ourselves.

But black churches are the only space where many blacks find it safe to be Christian and black. Sometimes blacks forgo that space for good reasons. Yet many whites think it unfathomable to visit an all-black church, much less join one. I remember suggesting a church to a white sister who was moving to a new city. She interrupted me and said, “Wait—this church isn’t, like, a black church, right?”

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **Many people do not understand the black experience to be both corporate and individual.** Black people share many common experiences, and these experiences build a unique solidarity among us. This is why a racial injustice in Florida can shake black people in Washington State. But often folks think that means that every black person feels the same way about every issue, which isn’t the case. As a black individual, it’s exhausting to feel as if you’re constantly representing all black people.

Yet many white people assume they know what it means to be black, and that everyone shares their concept. Anyone who doesn’t match their definition of black is not “really” black. Enslaved in that narrow definition, many black brothers and sisters live in fear and shame; they’re not free to be who God made them. And so we “code-switch”—we adjust our culture [our ‘code’] to fit the majority’s. I code switch often when I shake your hand instead of dapping you up. Code-switching all the time exhausts the switcher to the point of acculturating them altogether.

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **Sometimes blacks feel like projects instead of peers.** Some white churches do not think of blacks as those who can minister to others; we’re only to be ministered to *by* others. In other words, we feel like objects of ministry, not those encouraged to initiate it. But it was not without reason that the Good Samaritan was the colored character of the story. Yet blacks seem to only get opportunities to minister or educate if it’s about race or our experience.

And when white people ask us about our experience, they sometimes sound more interested in their own enlightenment—not the lightening of our burdens. Their well-meaning questions only begin with them: “I would like to know. . . . Tell *me* more about . . .” They seem more interested in anthropology than applying their theology, like when a white sister asked to touch my mother’s hair. If conversations

are only pursued to an educational end, it feels like the friendship has an agenda. Faux friendship is no friendship. When did you last warmly greet someone of a different ethnicity who was visiting your church simply to know them—not to know about them, but to know them?

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **“Gospel-unity” ain’t always gospel unity.** Some whites assume that befriending someone who is culturally the same yet physically different is necessarily gospel-unity. Sometimes that’s true—depending on the circumstances. Other times, there’s a selection bias for the sake of tokenism, not Calvary. Thus goes the defense, “I have a black friend!”

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **Blacks are often only seen as “other.”** Black people still fight to be embraced as people who bear the same image of God as our white brothers and sisters. Some whites speak of their churches becoming “multi-ethnic” once “other” ethnicities come. But acting as if your church has no ethnicity or is ethnically neutral makes blacks feel that your church isn’t for them. Vanilla is a flavor of ice cream like the others.

Many people try to fix this by being colorblind, which they equate to racial reconciliation. They think they’re ministering by not seeing brother so-and-so “as their black friend,” but only “as their friend.” But that ignores realities that are both God-ordained and good. You can read more about colorblindness [here](#).

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **The hall of faith seems white washed.** The theological, historical narrative passed on in white churches and white seminaries often only speaks of white theologians and heroes of the faith. Can we please remember that Augustine was from Africa and spoke of a pervasive depravity long before Calvin? Can we please stop saying Adoniram Judson was the first American missionary when George Lisle, a slave born in Virginia, went out 30 years before him? Can we please hear of the faithful black preachers in history and hear them quoted in sermons, too? Can we please not say the American church hasn’t been persecuted when the black church has known extreme persecution—Charleston and arson being the most recent exhibitions?

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **Black sisters are seen as second-class.** Perhaps no one is passed over more than black sisters in white churches. They’re rarely asked out on dates, if ever. Brothers have told them, “I’m just not attracted to black women.” As a result, they have felt ugly.

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **All-white leadership doesn’t advocate for blacks in some white churches.** All-white leadership might react to racial problems, comforting blacks with words. But blacks want a proactive advocate—one who will condemn and challenge preferential treatment and privileged silence. One who will joyfully speak about diversity like Revelation 5 does. Instead, many blacks do not physically or representationally see themselves in leadership.

But in the name of “keeping the main thing the main thing,” many white pastors forgo any reference in a prayer or sermon that might minister specifically to blacks. We’re not asking for a special shout out every Sunday. But preacher, do you really believe the gospel applies to everyone? Your church may not be as gospel-centered as you think.

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **It’s easy to be black and lonely in a white church.** Some whites assume black people in white churches aren’t lonely if there are other black people with whom they hang out. But even if there’s a ton of black people, one can still feel very lonely. As one sister said, “Our hair is different, our color is different; we are —all in all—different. And when making that comment to other white women, it feels like that feeling is quickly dismissed; and again, we feel alone.”

White churches are hard for black people because...

- **When some white people call for “dying to yourself,” they in effect mean, “assimilate or leave.”** Undoubtedly some reading this article will retort, “But Paul gave up his Hebrew-ness for the sake of the gospel! We are called to lay ourselves down at the church door so that Christ may be all in all!” I’m not making allowance for total assimilation, as blacks too often die more to themselves than whites in white churches, but I heartily agree with that. I’ve shed much ink on that [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

But it’s a lot easier to exhort people to that Pauline gospel sacrifice when yours is the majority culture. Are we really going to disregard why some things in white churches are hard for blacks? That refusal may be the biggest reason some white churches aren’t getting easier for black people. That refusal may be why Dunbar said, “long the mile” that we have yet to go. Long the mile, brothers and sisters, but our God will see us through to glory.

Whether black or white, we are *Christians*—which means we should not give up on one another because God in Christ has never given up on us. Perhaps you're wondering what to do now having read this article. On this long mile, here's a few places to start: Pray regularly for your eyes to open wider on these issues. Pray regularly for those of other ethnicities. Pray regularly to be sensitive for opportunities to love those unlike you. One of those opportunities just might be sending them this article and saying, “Hey—could we talk about this piece?”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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By Tim Chiang

Being Asian American in a White Church

“Where are you from?” he asks.

“I’m from Indiana,” I say.

“No, where are you *from-from*?” he follows up, this time with a sincere hand gesture.

I know what he’s asking, and I can tell he means well. But I’m not going to give it to him, not yet. “I was born in Columbia, Missouri,” I respond.

I can tell from his face that I didn’t give him enough information. What he heard does not match what he sees: black hair and an Asian face. But he’s reluctant to ask more. I let the awkwardness marinate a couple seconds. I’ve had this conversation enough times to know what he wants. So I continue—“but my parents are from Taiwan.”

Ah, the introduction is salvaged and now this kind brother is telling me how much he loves Thai food.

What if I told you this conversation happened at church? Now, I recognize that this individual was making an earnest attempt at understanding who I am, and where I’ve been, and I’m not sure if there is a significantly better way for him to ask about my ethnic background. But the encounter was another reminder of my identity as an Asian-American, where the “American” part inherently comes with distinctions attached to the Asian qualifier.

I should start by stating there is no singular Asian American experience, no more than there is a singular American experience. Opening up a comprehensive discussion on Asian American issues would necessitate a broad array of historical and ethnic contexts. You could ask, “What do you mean by ‘Asian’?” Entire dissertations can be written on the origins of Korean nationalism, or the impacts of Filipino Catholicism. Aren’t the Taiwanese basically Chinese? No, but also yes. Why is it that, in *The*

Clash of Civilizations, Samuel Huntington puts Japan out on its own, not really as Asian or Western or Orthodox, but as its own cultural supergroup? You could also rightfully ask, “What do you mean by Asian-American? The immigrant first generation? The second generation children born to immigrant parents? The 1.5 or 1.75 generation?”

Despite the breadth of experiences, though, one can refer to certain shared cultural values of many Asians, and how they are often distinct from those usually associated with White Americans. Specifically, I want to make a few observations about what those cultural expectations mean for those of us who grew up in this dual-culture environment—and what they mean in the context of the local church where the majority culture is non-Asian.

I am the eldest son of immigrant parents who left their homes in Taiwan to pursue graduate studies and a new life in America. I was raised in the Midwest. My home and church were Chinese/Taiwanese, while every other setting placed me in White America.

AN ASIAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

A few years ago, Wesley Yang wrote an article for New York Magazine titled “Paper Tigers” (May 8, 2011). The title itself was a nod toward Amy Chua’s book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, and in it Yang explores several stereotypes about Asian Americans and several uncomfortable truths often attached to those stereotypes. Yang describes how many Asian immigrants sacrificed much to provide a better life for their children. They wanted the second generation to inherit the American dream, even if the playing field has not been even. So they push their children to excel in academic studies. This approach to success works until these children graduate and leave university, where the real world rewards a skill set and values different than what they were groomed for at home and in the classroom, such as creativity, risk-taking, and self promotion. He talks about how those stereotypes fuel a perception of Asians that are often imposed on individuals regardless of what is true about that individual. Yang’s article, though a bit crude at times, is worth the read. While written from a non-Christian Asian American point of view, he provides insight into some of the issues many Asian Americans face, even in the church.

In *Paper Tigers*, Yang is primarily concerned with communicating how Asian Americans confront internal and external pressures to satisfy often-competing cultural expectations. For instance, many have been taught to strive for academic success and professional stability as a means of honoring the sacrifices of their immigrant parents. They’ve been taught to not question authority, to avoid asking for help lest they become a burden, and to listen and not speak when in the presence of an elder or superior. But these values are different than what’s valued in the professional spheres of American life. There you should be critical of authority and rules. You do speak up in the meetings and offer your thoughts unprompted. And you do put yourself out in front to be seen.

I can relate. By all accounts, I grew up in a very White environment. Greenwood, Indiana is about as white as it gets. The 2000 census showed a demographic of 96.5 percent white and 1.4 percent Asian. I was in Boy Scouts, played in the marching band, and ran on the track team. I did pretty much everything any normal kid growing up in White Americana did. Yet I have received neither the treatment nor experience of a White American. At work, I began hearing the counsel to “put myself out” in front of leadership more. I didn’t think I needed to since I was performing pretty well. But somehow the

perception was that I didn't engage with leadership. I understand how positioning for visibility in the workplace is a professionally good thing to do, but internally it felt so wrong and arrogant.

Yang's interest is in the American marketplace, where many Asian Americans confront their cultural duality with various degrees of sensitivities. But there's something to be said about experiencing such a challenge in a context where it might not be expected – in the local church.

ASIAN AMERICANS IN NON-ASIAN LOCAL CHURCHES

As Asian Americans who identify with both cultures wrestle to harmonize these often-dissonant cultural values, Asian American Christians have the additional burden of sorting through which elements of these two cultures to reject.

Here's an example: Let's say the pastors of a large and majority-White church regularly teach the members to fold their lives into the life of the church, in part, by making themselves known to an elder or elders. An Asian American member will feel convicted that the humble and faithful thing to do will be to approach his pastors and initiate conversations. But this will also feel very arrogant and uncomfortable. He would rather be summoned by a leader than initiate engagement. Is his discomfort a product of his cultural values? Or is it the product of his sin? It's probably a mixture of both, but how much of which? Ultimately, how he acts will require him to examine his heart. Now consider that his dual/mixed cultural baseline is not assumed, but is largely misunderstood by his church. He'll have to do this mental calculus in nearly all other areas of his church life, like leadership, serving, discipling relationships, and so forth.

To the majority white, and even non-Asian minorities in a church, you should try to understand certain things about Asian Americans when you see us. The discrimination Asian Americans face is often subtle and unrecognized. It's not characterized by violence or shown on TV. It's not frequently discussed on the radio or in most reconciliation dialogues. It can involve typecasting ("All Asians are quiet"), but often it's a subtle overlooking or forgetting of anything that makes us distinct. So Hollywood made a movie about a Hawaiian Asian American, and they cast a Caucasian actress for the character. The assumption that the majority culture makes is that Asian Americans are pretty much of the same culture as the majority white culture.

For years, Asians in America had been touted as the "model minority," unobtrusive to the majority, prioritizing education and employment, largely characterized by these stereotypes, and not much else. It's a falsely positive label that is deeply racist toward Asian Americans and all other minorities. However, you likely won't hear much protest from Asian Americans because many of us have been conditioned to not vocalize our grievances. We don't ask for help because this could imply shameful inadequacies. We don't speak up to authority figures because that would be disrespectful. We don't volunteer ourselves for leadership because doing so is a prideful demonstration of arrogance. The truth is, Asian Americans, like everyone else, come from a multifaceted cultural experience. The difference is, to non-Asian Americans, it's difficult to understand all the other dimensions that make up the Asian American experience beyond what's captured by "model minority." It's difficult because it's different.

I do not believe that an elder board must be a 1:1 reflection of a church's demographic. That requirement is not found in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1. Biblical qualifications for church office are colorblind.

But if our churches are healthy, faithfully feeding and discipling all its members, wouldn't we expect to eventually see elders raised up that closely reflect the demographic of the church? Are the elders cultivating brothers who show potential to be recognized as future elders, and doing so with men who are like-minded in doctrine but also different in culture? You might do this analysis and conclude that your church's elder recognition-practice is fine, and if that's the case, then great! But you might also find that you are overlooking men who are already eldering in your church without a title because they're not like you.

TOWARD A GOSPEL CULTURE

An ah-ha moment came for me shortly after college. Like I mentioned earlier, I grew up in a very white community. But once I stepped foot onto that large state university, I discovered that there were literally thousands of other Asian Americans who could identify with the same dual-culture experience that I had. Soon, I was involved with the Asian American Club, joined a Gospel-preaching Asian American church, and found myself aggregating with other Asian Americans on a campus environment that facilitated and encouraged such aggregating. It was just easier and more comfortable that way. Several years later when I joined a decidedly non-Asian church, it meant checking many cultural preferences at the door. I bet that's the same for all members of a minority culture. But I also hope that is the case for those of the majority culture. We desire to see congregations built of believers identifying so strongly with who they are in Christ that it is the gospel that aggregates us together, not shared cultural experiences however strong they may be. We should all be checking preferences at the door to better love and serve our brothers and sisters in Christ.

You know how it's easy to hang out with people who share the same interests as you? But what do we do when we are called to share our burdens and sorrows with one another—and some burdens and sorrows seem odder than others? We all want to be understood, and it's just easier to understand people who are similar to you. If you take an inventory of your discipleship relationships and accountability conversations and find that they all appear to deal with the same kinds of problems as you, then perhaps you're avoiding people who are different. Learning to understand someone else's challenges that seem incomprehensible is a lot of work, and often frustrating, and many people selfishly would rather not deal with it. But it's part of a gospel outlook and a healthy church.

Gospel culture should be the dominant culture of our churches, regardless of ethnic or cultural makeup. We see that one day, the church will realize this perfect unity. In chapter 5 of Revelation, we see every tribe and nation worshipping Christ without cultural barriers or divisions. In fact, these passages tell us that ultimately there is no cultural barrier too great or too strained for God to reach through and save. So we shouldn't be surprised that on this side of eternity, we'll merely glimpse this ultimate unity in our local churches. But let us seek to display it better and better, even if imperfectly, to a watching world.

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By Patrick Cho

Helping Asian Churches Become Multi-Ethnic

Many who have grown up in Asian churches understand that addressing the relationship between church and culture can be really tricky. There are sometimes strong differences of opinion about whether ethnic churches are healthy or helpful. Some Christians argue that ethnic churches should not exist because our ultimate identity is in Christ and in him all believers are unified. It is easy to use passages like Galatians 3:28 as prooftexts to claim that there really should not be any ethnic churches. There are others, and especially those who have grown up in ethnic churches, who understand that the greater issue may not be as much about being divisive as it is about fulfilling a need.

What complicates matters further is that different Asians will have varying degrees of opinion about how important it is to maintain a sense of ethnic culture in church (or even about what an ethnic church is). It is most important, generally speaking, to the first generation of immigrants. Many of these people came to the United States for their children, to offer them greater opportunities in life. In this sense, they did not necessarily come for their own personal reasons or to assimilate into the American culture. When the first generation comes together for worship, it is typically in their native language, and maintaining their Asian heritage is essential to their identity.

With each subsequent generation, the issue of ethnicity becomes more convoluted. The second generation, those who are born in the United States but have immigrant parents, experience an array of cultural influences. Some parents understand that they are in a new setting and that their children will lose some sense of ethnic identity. It's inevitable. Other parents feel threatened by this potential loss for their children. It seems unbearable. Of course, all of this is highly oversimplified and generalized, and there are innumerable factors when thinking about what all this means for church from an ethnic point of view.

One of the realities about church ministry in an Asian-American context—whether you find this unfortunate or not—is that people of a particular ethnicity tend to congregate with others of the same ethnicity. This is why you so often find not “Asian” churches but more specifically Korean churches,

Vietnamese churches, Chinese churches, Taiwanese churches, Japanese churches, and so on. For many of these churches, the goal is not to create ethnic divisions. It is to provide a context of ministry that targets their particular culture and/or language.

Because of these factors, having a truly multiethnic church can be difficult because the way to go about it may not necessarily be to ask people to lose their sense of cultural identity. I think this is the problem many churches have with becoming multiethnic. They attempt to create a sort of melting pot where every cultural identity demands little importance. The problem with this approach is that those who are from different ethnic backgrounds are often unwilling to lose their cultural and ethnic identity. It's akin to asking them to forfeit a part of who they are. It's not surprising, therefore, that most churches that assert themselves to be "multiethnic" are on the whole predominantly Caucasian with a spattering of other races.

Instead, in order to achieve a truly multiethnic and multicultural church, it seems there needs to be greater cultural sensitivity. The leaders in the church, in particular, must understand that most cultures do not want a melting pot as much as an acknowledgement of cultural identity. To use a culinary analogy, perhaps a truly multiethnic church would look less like a monochrome chowder and more like a varicolored minestrone. This is understandably difficult to maintain, which is probably why so many churches remain in their ethnic circles. That is simply easier than learning about other cultures and how to work around their cultural differences.

In application, I appreciate the apostle Paul's approach to ministry. In 1 Corinthians 9:19, he writes, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more." He continues that to the Jew, he became like a Jew, and to those outside the Law, he was "as without Law" (9:21). The Apostle Paul said that he became all things to all people that he might save some. I do not think it is a stretch to say he made room for cultural sensitivity so long as it did not violate God's truth. He did not insist that everyone be pressed into one particular cultural mold.

There are churches made up primarily of Asian-Americans whose desire is to become more multiethnic. Throughout our short history at Lighthouse Bible Church in San Diego, our membership has been predominantly Asian-American. Though we began as an almost exclusively Korean-American congregation, a greater percentage of our membership is now Chinese American, along with significant representation from other ethnicities. White Americans may not realize it, but that is multiethnic. We have been encouraged to see the greater diversity and the unique dynamic this brings to the fellowship of the church.

So, how can a church with a particular ethnic identity strive to become more multiethnic? Here are eight principles to consider.

1. PREACH THE WORD.

This has always been supremely imperative for the church (2 Tim. 4:1-2). God-honoring churches will not allow cultural identity to become their primary ministry concern. They recognize that all believers need constant spiritual nourishment to foster healthy growth and development, so they provide solid exposition for their congregation. True believers desiring to grow spiritually will seek out churches that teach God's Word regardless of secondary factors like a church's racial profile. Sadly, good churches

committed to the truth of God are not always easy to find. Teach God's truth, be committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and, Lord willing, people from all backgrounds and cultures will come to know the Lord and grow to appreciate your ministry.

2. KEEP THE MAIN THINGS THE MAIN THINGS.

In other words, make sure the members of the church understand from the outset of their involvement that biblical principles and God's truth will take precedence over and against cultural norms and preferences. Make it clear that this is something the church refuses to compromise. A God-honoring church will be deeply committed to the authority of Scripture and its members will submit to that authority regardless of competing cultural ideals.

3. EVANGELIZE EVERYONE.

Some Asian churches have so narrow an evangelistic focus that they only target people of their own ethnicity. They write into their bylaws that they exist to reach their specific ethnic group. Obviously, this stands in the way of developing a multiethnic church. For these churches, evangelizing those of other races and ethnicities might be additionally challenging and uncomfortable apart from the normal challenges of evangelism. But this is our mandate. We know that Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19), and that God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

4. MAINTAIN A UNIFIED LEADERSHIP.

When it comes to your church's ministry philosophy, make sure the leadership is all pushing in the same direction. The leaders must be unified in regards to philosophical convictions. Can all the elders and deacons clearly communicate what the church is seeking to accomplish? As it relates to the pursuit of a more multiethnic ministry, do all the leaders agree with that direction? Can they all clearly explain why the church desires to head in that direction?

5. DEVELOP A MULTIETHNIC LEADERSHIP.

This is not to say that leaders should be appointed based primarily on the color of their skin. I am not advocating the appointment of church leaders by affirmative action. Anyone who is nominated for church leadership must meet the biblical qualifications and be recognized by the church as an example of humble servant leadership (cf. 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1; 1 Pet. 5). However, if your ministry is not open to people of other races or ethnicities for positions of leadership, both staff and non-staff, it will be very difficult to develop a multiethnic church.

6. BE SENSITIVE TO OTHERS.

Be sensitive to people of other cultures and races. This is in line with the principles of Philippians 2:3-4. With humility, consider other people's interests before your own and consider them as more important than yourself. In the preaching of the church, it would be good not to overemphasize issues relating to your own particular culture if you know there will be some who do not identify with that culture.

7. PRAY TOWARDS THE GOAL.

It is Christ's church so it makes sense to go to him to see what he wants to do with it. I suppose this principle is so basic that it should be assumed, but it is wise for churches to make sure that they are thinking in accordance with God's will and not operating solely by human wisdom and understanding. This is particularly true when you desire for your church to have a different sort of ethnic makeup. Surely there are many concocted strategies by "church growth experts" to achieve a more multiethnic church. But clearly, the best strategy is the Great Commission—to make disciples of all nations. Since salvation belongs to the Lord, we need to pray constantly for grace that people would be saved.

8. REMIND YOURSELF OF HEAVEN.

We want people to come to know God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Praise God that there are not different gospels for different races. There truly is no Jew or Gentile, but all are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). God made all men equally in his image. Subsequently, all men equally fell into sin and stand condemned before our holy God. All men equally need the grace of God to save them from eternal condemnation. All men equally must be saved by the one Spirit's working through the one message of the gospel.

When we get to heaven, praise God that we will not have various ethnic ghettos or communities where people of particular races reside together. In heaven, we will finally experience a truly multiethnic environment that is focused on the glory of God. One people together worshipping the one true God because of their common salvation in Jesus Christ. May our churches grow to reflect this truth more and more even here and now.

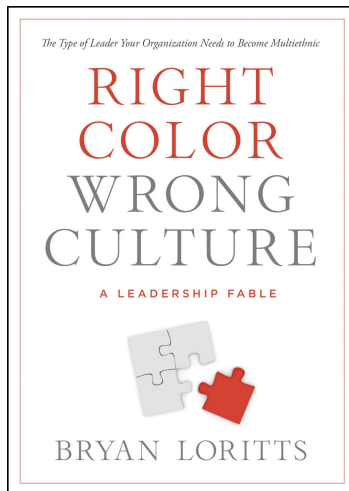
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CHURCH
REVITALIZATION
CONFERENCE

CAN OLD CHURCHES GAIN

NEW
LIFE?



BOOK REVIEW:

Right Color, Wrong Culture

Reviewed by Sam Lam

Bryan Loritts. [*Right Color, Wrong Culture: The Type of Leader Your Organization Needs to Become Multiethnic*](#). Moody Publishers, 2014. 208 pps.

Here are three quick questions for you:

- What are the demographics of the location in which your church building is located?
- What are the demographics of your church?
- What are the demographics of your elders?

Are any of those substantially different from each other? Then *Right Color, Wrong Culture* could be a good book for you to read. Bryan Loritts has written an engaging “leadership fable” that helps church leaders consider how to be more sensitive to ethnic realities so that they can better care for their churches.

Why should we care? Unfortunately in the US, Loritts writes that only 2.5 percent of churches are multiethnic (defined as where one ethnicity does not make up more than 80 percent of the church). Though whites are roughly 80 percent of the US currently, the US is forecast to be majority minority by 2050 given factors such as immigration, higher birth rates among minorities, etc. Thus, we should

prepare for this coming diversity by cultivating churches that are welcoming for people of different ethnicities.

Loritts' main thesis is that there are three types of people depending on how they relate to other ethnicities:

- C1: person from one ethnicity who has assimilated into another (e.g., Hellenistic Jews of Acts 6 or, in another of Loritts' examples, Carlton Banks of the TV series "Fresh Prince of Bel Air")
- C3: people who are culturally inflexible (e.g., Pharisees, or Al Sharpton)
- C2: people who are "culturally flexible and adaptable without being ethnically ambiguous or hostile" (e.g., Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 when he talks about being all things to all people, or Denzel Washington)

Loritts states that each type can have a place in church leadership, but that it is essential to have a C2 leader "at the highest echelons of any organization if they want to be multiethnic." Otherwise, a C1 leader will not be able to lead people from their own ethnicity and C3 people will not be able to lead people from other ethnicities.

WHAT I LIKE ABOUT THE BOOK

The book is arranged in terms of a story, which is interesting for the reader and helps get Loritts' points across in a non-polemical way. It's a good read.

Second, Peter, the protagonist of the story, is an African-American consultant and former pastor. He is also a good model of someone who engages issues of ethnicity boldly and winsomely. He's a helpful "third way," as many people are tempted to err one of two sides: not engaging at all or being too belligerent.

Third, Loritts has an excellent treatment on white privilege throughout the book that is helpful and illuminating. In one section, he writes (in the words of Peter the main character):

I believe most white people don't see themselves as being white. And this is a huge disconnect in our society, because minorities are constantly in tune with their ethnicity, while you're not in tune with yours. It would be like me pointing out to you that you have two arms. You'd shrug as if to say, *Big deal*. You don't see yourself as having two arms, and neither do you see yourself as being white. But now imagine I had only one arm, and was constantly made aware that I was different in a two-arm society. If we're going to get along, you're going to have to understand what life is like for me having only one arm. That's the disconnect between whites and minorities. We live in a white world—a two-armed society, so to speak—but we minorities have only one arm. Life as a minority can feel like you're handicapped at times when compared to our white brothers and sisters. (159)

Fourth, Loritts' C1 to C3 grid is also a helpful one. It's useful in considering different types of people and why they may be more or less suitable for church leadership. It's also helpful in understanding church members and for building unity; for example, when there are ethnic jokes, minorities will be less offended if they're told by people who are C2 than if they are C3.

Fifth, the grid can also be useful in an international church setting where the determinant might not be ethnicity but rather socio-economic background or citizenship. For example, in Dubai it could be easy for Americans or Westerners to spend time together regardless of ethnicity, but harder for the Asian-American to spend time with the Malaysian Chinese or the Filipina.

MY MAIN CONCERN

That said, the C1 to C3 grid is useful but it shouldn't be seen as the most important determinant in selecting church leaders. At times, it seems that Loritts' grid is a bit deterministic and that a leader's placement along this grid trumps other considerations (e.g., their preaching, how they love others, whether they've demonstrated fruitfulness, etc.). I would suggest that this grid should be one factor to consider among others. For example, I can think of someone who was probably a C3 who came to a multiethnic situation and, given his deep love for people in general, has become a wonderful pastor in his multiethnic church.

The grid is also a bit simplistic, though this is probably just to explain Loritts' helpful points. For example, C2 is probably more a continuum, with some who are more or less able to empathize with others. Therefore, I wouldn't want a C2 to be complacent in the fact that they are C2, but we should desire for all people to grow in their ability to love others not like themselves for the simple reason that they are united by the gospel.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

Loritts' book provides helpful thoughts for future consideration on a couple topics.

Elders

I propose that in an elder board of a church that desires to be multiethnic, the majority of elders should be C2, or actively desirous of becoming more C2 (every member of Loritts' church's leadership team is C2). Being an elder involves being a shepherd, watching over the flock, and being eager to serve them (1 Peter 5)—all of which are difficult to do if we are culturally inflexible. Certainly, whether a man is a C2 or not should not be the only consideration but it should be an important one. In my own congregation, we desire to see elders who have shown that they are able to care for a variety of people, whether of different ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, or life situations (e.g., singles, marrieds, families).

Affirmative Action

Loritts also introduces the concept of affirmative action in the church, which is worthwhile to consider. Affirmative action can be an emotional issue politically, but we need to separate what may or may not make sense politically with what we should consider in the context of a church.

Consider the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3; they do not say that elders must be the absolute best in each of the qualifications compared to all their peers. Practically speaking, when we've recognized elders in our church, we haven't compared prospective elders to each other. Instead, we ask whether elders are qualified or not. In other words, we do not see the qualifications as a measuring stick, for example in baseball where we might award an MVP to the player with the highest OPS (combination of slugging percentage and on-base percentage). Instead, we see the qualifications as binary considerations, such

as whether someone is able to be naturalized as a US citizen (e.g., must be over 18 years old, be able to read, write, and speak English, etc.).

Therefore, when recognizing an elder, to the extent there are multiple potentially qualified individuals, it can be helpful to proactively consider minorities who are qualified and underrepresented. Perhaps their leadership gifts are less apparent than others' because they are exercised differently in their culture than in a majority one. Or perhaps adding them could help the elders know how to better care for members in that particular minority.

This is where a focus on just “preaching the Word” yourself might not be enough. Doing so assumes that you have a culturally neutral perspective. In these cases, it's helpful to have others challenge you. For example, in Galatians, Peter probably did not think what he was doing was wrong when he stopped eating with the Gentiles until Paul opposed him.

For Those in Majority Culture

Read this book because it can help you understand minorities better and how you can care for them.

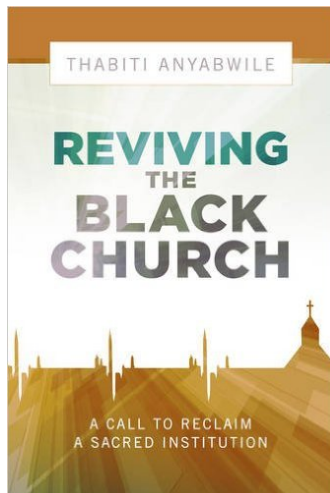
For Those in Minority Culture

Read this book so you can consider how you, too, can care for others better. For example:

- If you are a C3, consider how you can learn to reach out to other minorities or to the majority culture.
- If you are a C2, think through how you can continue to grow in caring for others not like you—and ask yourself whether there are minorities that you have overlooked in the past.
- If you are a C1, consider how you can serve people in your ethnic group better.
- Consider how you might essentially be part of a majority culture even though you may be a minority (e.g., Westerners in Dubai are a minority numerically but they would have the privileges in church associated with a typical majority culture).

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BOOK REVIEW:

Reviving the Black Church

Reviewed by Jemar Tisby

Thabiti Anyabwile. [*Reviving the Black Church: New Life for a Sacred Institution*](#). B&H Books, 2015. 288 pps.

Talking about the Black church is the literary equivalent of telling a “your momma” joke. In any group of friends, all jabs are fair game, at least until you start talking about someone’s mother. Then the situation gets serious. Mothers are sacred. They are the life-givers, the nurturers, the oracles. No one better talk about “your momma.” For many African Americans, the Black church is their spiritual mother. That’s why it takes courage to write a book like *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution*.

Many readers will know the author of *Reviving the Black Church*, Thabiti Anyabwile, for his public ministry. He maintains a blog for The Gospel Coalition called “[Pure Church](#).” He also co-founded and writes for [The Front Porch](#). [Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons](#) and [The Gospel for Muslims](#) are just two of the numerous books he has penned. For several years, he pastored a church in the Grand Caymans, but now he leads a new church plant called Anacostia River Church in Washington D.C.

SUMMARY

In *Reviving the Black Church*, Anyabwile diagnoses the state of the Black church and prescribes medicine from the Scriptures. He enters into the conversation by responding to an article entitled, "[The Black Church Is Dead](#)," which was written by Princeton professor of religion and Chair of African American Studies, Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. While the article caused a vigorous debate among Black theologians and clergy, Anyabwile focuses on other questions. He writes, "Amidst all the autopsies, coroner reports, and death announcements, two questions often go unasked. What makes a church 'alive'? And, can a 'dead' church live again?" He spends the rest of the book offering biblically faithful responses to those questions.

Pastor Anyabwile divides his work into three parts. The first part explains why God's Word in the Bible should be the "source and guide" of all that the Black church is and does. The second part "calls for a revival of pastoral leadership" in the Black church. In this section he includes explanations about biblical qualifications of church leaders, the process of discipline for ungodly leaders, and thoughts on pastoral training. The final section emphasizes membership and mission as hallmarks of a healthy church.

ASSESSMENT

A few sections of the book deserve special commendation. Chapter three offers an outstanding apologetic for why expositional preaching is not "white" preaching as some have labeled it. He titles the chapter, "Reform Black Preaching, Part 2: A Defense of Exposition in Non-White Contexts." Having made the case for the effectiveness of expositional preaching in chapter two, Pastor Anyabwile responds to some critiques of the style in the next one. He writes, "If you're an African-American, and you are committed to exposition, chances are you have had someone say something like this to you: 'You preach like a white man.'" Pastor Anyabwile parries attacks on expositional preaching such as: exposition is culturally inappropriate, you can't "whoop" in expositional preaching, it's not relevant to the needs of black communities, and expositional preaching is too intellectual. The chapter will bring an "Amen!" from Black expositional preachers and challenge those who aren't.

As the reader strides through the book, Pastor Anyabwile drops nuggets of cultural insight along the way. Few books about the health of the church from a Reformed theological perspective will mention Bishop Eddie Long, James Cone, and Gardner C. Taylor. But Anyabwile's does. Each chapter opens with an anecdote about Anyabwile's experience growing up in the Black church or some other aspect of Black church life. Many who pick up this book may be surprised that he was arrested and nearly went to jail on a felony misdemeanor. But his pastor, Reverend Betts, put in a good word with the judge to drop the charges. Equally memorable are passages that describe the church "nurses" who help people when the Spirit "falls" on them, and the discussion about how singing can be both congregational and conversational in Black church settings.

ONE VULNERABILITY

The book has one great vulnerability, though, and that comes in the set-up. A title like *Reviving the Black Church* invites controversy. The Black church is the Mother Church of African Americans. Many will interpret any critique as an attack on the cradle of faith and the cornerstone of the African American community. The Black church needs evaluation, just like all churches, but Pastor Anyabwile could have spent more time in the introduction calming fears of an assault on the Black church. The book is not a

betrayal of the institution, and Pastor Anyabwile acknowledges his indebtedness to it. He writes as an insider, not an uniformed observer, a fact constantly reinforced by insights throughout the work. But as the most sacred institution in Black culture, a book that exposes her flaws needs to gain the reader's trust at the outset.

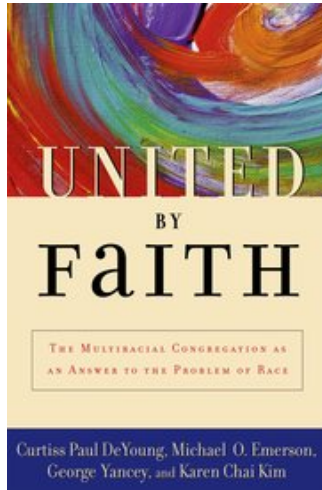
CONCLUSION

This book had to be written. As difficult as it is to define, there is such a thing as “the Black church” — and wolves have crept in. Yes, this is true of every church, no matter its ethnicity. But the particular threats are distinct in each church tradition. With clarity and care, Pastor Thabiti points out the leaven in the Black church and provides solidly Scriptural responses. Every reader, no matter his or her race, will find simple, biblical ecclesiology expressed in this volume. Pastor Anyabwile borrows heavily from the 9Marks model of church ministry, so those who are familiar with this body of work will navigate the content easily. But he also provides everyone who reads the book with insights about the Black church rarely known by anyone who isn't part of it.

But not only did this book have to be written, it had to be written by Thabiti Anyabwile. In spite of his public platform, Anyabwile has been a consistent model of humility and gentleness when it comes to engaging those who hold different opinions than he does (see, for example, his [exchange with Douglas Wilson](#)). Every Christian can learn from Pastor Anyabwile's example of taking on potentially explosive issues with a firm, but delicate hand. Writing any critique of the Black church, no matter how loving and respectful, will evoke passionate responses from people who see themselves as defenders of the tradition. Only a man with a pastor's heart and a theologian's mind is apt for the task. This is Pastor Thabiti, one who is seasoned in ministry and spiritually mature. Whatever your opinion on the vitality of the Black church, *Reviving the Black Church* will move you to esteem Christ's bride more highly.

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BOOK REVIEW:

United By Faith

Reviewed by Russ Whitfield

Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, Karen Chai Kim. [*United By Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race*](#). Oxford University Press, 2004. 240 pps.

As racialized incidents continue to flood headlines, sincere Christians wonder how they can bring biblically faithful solutions to this conflict that plagues American society. Local churches have tried to implement new programming to address the issues. Local pastors have attended conferences, read articles, and tried to raise awareness through social media. Many Christians desperately feel the need to do *something* about the problem.

However, these efforts have barely made a dent in the dividing walls that defy cross-cultural community. Scripture clearly communicates that the scope of God's kingdom includes people from all nations. But what are we to do about the nagging racial tensions that persist in our cities and neighborhoods? How can we participate in the healing of these divisions? For the authors of *United By Faith* there is at least one viable way forward: "Christian congregations, when possible, should be multiracial." Stated plainly, *United By Faith* proposes that Christian individuals and communities can participate in addressing the problem of race by building a multiracial vision into their own local church.

To some, this may appear to be an overstatement or the result of “politically correct” ideology creeping into the Christian faith. However, in roughly 240 pages, this multiracial team of writers gathers interdisciplinary insights that lend compelling support to their thesis. *United By Faith* is an easy, thought-provoking read. The work is written with an irenic tone and the authors advance their case for multiracial congregations.

OVERVIEW

There are four major sections in this book. The first aims to develop the biblical arguments. The remainder of the book builds upon these foundational principles with historical and sociological analysis. Primary emphasis in the first section comes from two major themes: 1) how the Gospel writers frame the life and example of Jesus, and 2) how the life and example of Jesus came to be expressed in the congregational life of the “New Testament church.”

Particular attention is given to detailing how this multiracial framework, present in both the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church, shaped how early Christians encountered various challenges to gathering a diverse Christian community in a socially sectarian context. The authors conclude that the cultural inclusivity modeled in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ developed into a culturally diverse church, a “house of prayer for all the nations.”

After establishing these biblical grounds, the second section of this book takes a decidedly historical and sociological turn, exploring the differences between the cultural composition of these New Testament churches and American congregations established between the years of 1600-2000. Given the vast historical period that is covered here, the authors give a relatively brief overview. Nevertheless, this whistle-stop tour is very well done, providing an accessible narrative that helps to make sense of the racialized past and present of the American church. There are thoughtful, clarifying moments in these pages that give the reader a better understanding of how these over-arching themes played out within localized situations and particular denominations.

For example, readers may be surprised to learn that “segregation by race with whites in the dominant position was not predetermined to become the identifying feature of social life throughout the history of the United States.” Instead, the authors identify race-based chattel slavery as the practice which institutionalized this rupture, eventually developing it into a full-blown racially prejudiced worldview—the effects of which we still feel today.

It should also be noted that the authors do a fine job of navigating the tension between heartbreaking stories of violent racism in God’s church and hopeful moments of reconciliation that pointed to restorative possibilities. This section closes with an analysis of four contemporary multiracial congregations. The main function of this contemporary analysis is to simply demonstrate to the reader that the multiracial congregation, even if flawed in its various expressions, is indeed *possible and desirable*. In addition, the authors are demonstrating here that there is “no set formula or ideal setting for developing multiracial congregations,” which pastors will find to be freeing.

In the third section, the authors do the reader a great service by providing an insightful sociological development of *why* the American church is segregated and *how* a multiracial perspective effectively addresses and rebuts argumentation for maintaining racially segregated congregations. They categorize

arguments in favor of racially segregated congregations into five broad categories: 1) pragmatic reasons, 2) theological reasons, 3) cultural reasons, 4) activist reasons, and 5) sociological reasons. Of particular note in this section is how the authors thoughtfully expose and dismantle the homogeneous unit principle espoused and advanced by the church growth movement and made popular in the writings of Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner. The reader will appreciate the detailed, winsome, and thoughtful responses that the authors give to each of the five kinds of arguments advanced in favor of racially segregated congregations.

In the final section of *United By Faith*, the authors recap their core belief in a “theology of oneness,” which they suggest should be the fundamental reorientation of all Christians as they consider what the racial make-up of their local congregations ought to be. They aim to provide a sort of roadmap for new and existing congregations to begin heading in the direction of becoming a multiracial community. Here, they draw from three years of intensive research on multiracial congregations across the country in order to answer key questions on the basics of this commitment.

Based on their research, they create three helpful categories for analyzing congregational culture and the degree of racial integration:

1. *Assimilated multiracial congregations*—“in which one racial group is obviously the dominant group” and non-dominant groups assimilate.
2. *Pluralist multiracial congregations*—in which “physical integration has occurred in the sense that members of different racial groups choose to gather in the same church and the same worship service” but “members do not move beyond coexistence to real integration of social networks.”
3. *Integrated multiracial congregations*—the “theological ideal” in which the “congregation has developed a hybrid of the distinct cultures that have joined together in one church . . . the new hybrid culture is an expression of the congregation’s unified collective identity.”

The reader will find these categories helpful in addressing true and false senses of racial progress and discerning what next steps a congregation may need to take in order to express these commitments in a healthy way.

It should be noted that the authors admit three valid exceptions to their thesis, adding explanatory comments. These exceptions to multiracial congregations are valid when:

1. Only one racial group lives in your area. Yet, they suggest that churches should still work for ethnic diversity.
2. When there is a lack of a common language, though they suggest that affordable technical possibilities for simultaneous translation may eliminate this exception in the future.
3. In unique circumstances of first-generation immigrant groups. The authors allow for the possibility that challenges of crossing cultures may be too great for the first generation living in the United States.

They also leave room for unique situations that might qualify as exceptions, but they note that these special cases are a small percentage of total churches.

EVALUATION

I hope that it has become clear through this review that there are many good and fruitful components to this work. Nevertheless, there are two major weaknesses that should be noted.

First, the biblical and theological groundwork in this book leaves much to be desired.

A quick perusal of the authors' biographies is very telling. Three of the four demonstrate expert-level facility in sociology while zero of the four authors demonstrate expert-level facility in theology. This is not to say that Christians who are trained in sociology are incapable of penetrating theological reflection, nor am I suggesting that a PhD in theological studies is required to understand this discussion doctrinally. However, the theological depth of this book does not come close to its sociological depth. 28 thin pages out of 240 are devoted to expositing the biblical and theological antecedents of their thesis and the vast majority of those pages are devoted to discussing the *example* of Jesus Christ rather than the *gospel* of Jesus Christ. The priority given to Christ's example over his gospel results in a sort of "What would Jesus do" motive for cultivating multiracial congregations, a mere emulation of Jesus that lacks the power to sustain this labor.

The problem with this surface-level theologizing does not come in what is actually said, but with what is left *unsaid*. What the authors say is indeed true: we should follow the example of Jesus and obey his teachings. No Christian would disagree here! But to paraphrase B.B. Warfield, if we center our vision on Jesus as an exemplar, he shows us what we ought to be, but could never actually become due to our weakness and sin. However, when we center our vision on Jesus, not just as our example, but as our Savior, we see in him not only what we should be, but what we shall be by faith and transforming grace.

In the same way, when the authors come to describe the church in the book of Acts as a model for contemporary churches, they leave us with a simple command to follow the multiracial *discipline* of the apostles, but they leave the multiracial *doctrine* of the apostles largely untouched. To my mind, this is a massive oversight.

The outworking of our faith in multiracial community building should not rest upon the social emulation of the apostles, though this can be instructive at times. Rather, the outworking of our faith in multiracial community building should rest upon the *christological exposition* of the apostles. The explanation for why we see cross-cultural and multiracial phenomena in the book of Acts is explicitly related to, and drawn from, the apostolic understanding of the cosmic realities that took place in the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session of Jesus Christ who, even now, sits at the right hand of the Father pleading the merits of his blood for people from every tongue, tribe, and nation!

The apostles issued the *imperative* of reconciliation to the church because of the *indicative* of our reconciliation with God the Father. The apostles issued the *imperative* of peacemaking in the church because of the *indicative* of our peace with God through the cross. The apostles issued the *imperative* of border-crossing love to the church because of the *indicative* of Christ's border-crossing love for us. Furthermore, the apostles proclaimed the indicative of our corporate solidarity and identity within the

body of Christ. We have been called to corporately express, in sanctification, who we are by virtue of our justification. Added to this is the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ in the life of the church for the sake of continuing the cross-cultural ministry and mission of Jesus Christ through the church. Sadly, these truths were left largely untouched, save for a few short lines in the beginning and end of the book. The authors include a chapter entitled “The Truth of the Gospel” but they fail to mine the riches of the gospel that strongly support their conclusions. They would have done much better to root their convictions in a more robust exposition of the cross.

Second, the authors fail to make the explicit goal of diversity clear.

Most people in our culture are calling for diversity and would consider it a goal. Sadly, news media, institutions of higher education, and major corporations are actually more vocal about diversity than the church. However, there should be one primary distinction between the world’s vision of diversity and the church’s vision of diversity and it is this: *the church is to pursue diversity distinctly through doxology and for the sake of doxology.*

It’s through rightly ordered affections and rightly centered worship that diversity is to result, and it is *explicitly* for the glory of God that we are to pursue it. Diversity without doxology is of limited value and will have limited staying power. The fact of the matter is that diversity was never meant to be an end in and of itself. Diversity is an important *means* to the chief end of man: “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” Given the pervasive lack of clarity in the cultural discussion on race and multiculturalism, the authors should have explicitly stated what the intended goal of diversity should be in the church.

That said, to be fair, the authors state at the very end of the book: “We are not claiming that becoming multiracial should be the primary goal of the church, but it must be a goal, or perhaps better yet, a means to reach its larger goal.” Nonetheless, they simply leave this “larger goal” ambiguous.

CONCLUSION

To put it gently, the amount of biblically healthy, theologically incisive, sociologically nuanced, and historically reliable literature on cross-cultural and multiracial matters within Christianity is underwhelming. Yet, although it leaves much to be desired in terms of theological depth, *United By Faith* is a very welcomed contribution and a worthy read, particularly for American Christians.

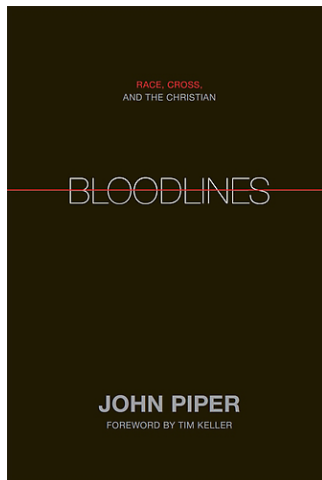
Though published in 2003, there is still plenty of value in the thought-provoking ideas presented within these pages, and certainly their research is still relevant. The sociological and historical analysis of racial segregation in American congregations presented here is worth the price of the book. In addition, one can appreciate the accessibility, tone, and clarity with which the authors handle the subject and, in my estimation, they convincingly support their thesis: “Christian congregations, when possible, should be multiracial.”

The tension at the intersection of our ever diversifying culture and the pervasive homogeneity of American churches is not going away. But the question remains: will American Christians and churches embrace the eschatological vision of all nations gathered around the throne of God, allowing that future reality to refashion our present pursuits, passions, and policies? I commend *United By Faith* to all who need a clearer understanding of the dynamics involved in advancing the multiracial vision of Christ within

their own local church. This book will serve as a helpful guide, providing rich insights for individual and community reflection.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Russ Whitfield is the pastor of Grace Mosaic Church in Washington, D. C.



BOOK REVIEW:

Bloodlines

Reviewed by H. B. Charles

John Piper. *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian*. Crossway, 2011. 304 pps.

Even if your head is in the proverbial sand, you cannot ignore the matters of race and racism in American culture. There is no hiding from this critical and ongoing issue. It's in the water. Racial perspectives and prejudices affect every one of us, to one degree or another, and unfortunately, the church is not exempt.

The Lord Jesus prayed that all who believe in him would be one (John 17:20-21). This is not an unanswered prayer. We are one in Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6), and our oneness in Christ encompasses every tribe and language and people and nation. The gospel is big enough to embrace our diversity. But we must not shrink the gospel down to our size. The grace that has gripped us compels us to embrace all who have been gripped by the grace of God.

This is the glorious vision of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not, however, the reality on the ground in many Christian circles. The epidemic of race and racism that plagues society has also infected the church. It's an unavoidable and accepted fact that we have to live with people that are different than us. We live and go to school and work and even play together. But then we retreat to social, cultural, and racial comfort zones when it is time to worship.

The church has a long way to go to live out true Christian unity before the watching world. And our progress is hindered by the fact that we seem unable to talk about the issues, much less work together to address them. Thank God for giving John Piper the courage to push this subject higher on the agenda by writing *Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian*.

John Piper, founder and teacher of Desiring God Ministries, has written arguably the most important Christian book on race and racism in our generation. With deep conviction, pastoral wisdom, and gospel-centered theology, Piper challenges the church to put the cross before race and to see racial issues through the lens of the atoning work of Christ. Piper states the burden for this work as follows: “It is the aim of this book to encourage you to pursue Christ-exalting, gospel-driven racial and ethnic diversity and harmony—especially in the family of God, the church of Jesus Christ. I have tried to argue from the Scripture that the blood of Christ was shed for this. It is not first a social issue, but a blood issue. The bloodline of Christ is deeper than the bloodlines of race” (227).

SUMMARY

Bloodlines is divided into two major sections. The first is “Our World: The Need for the Gospel.” Piper begins by retelling the story of the Civil Rights Movement, focusing on the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. Yet the heart of this first section is the story of Piper’s own journey from racial superiority to a cross-shaped view of race. This change was clearly evident in Piper’s pastoral leadership of the Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, where he sought to flesh out his gospel convictions.

The second section of *Bloodlines* is “God’s Word: The Power of the Gospel.” This latter section is longer and more theological than the first. Starting with the story of William Wilberforce and his gospel-informed efforts to abolish slavery, Piper confronts the sin of racism in light of the accomplishment and application of the gospel. Chapters in this section bring the issues of race to the foot of the cross, where God redeemed sinners by the blood of Christ and created a brand new race of humanity in him.

ANALYSIS

Piper’s well-known passion for the glory of God is evident throughout *Bloodlines*. To read his application of that passion to this important subject is greatly encouraging. Yet *Bloodlines* is not heat without light. Piper’s call to racial reconciliation is deeply rooted in God-exalting theology. He simply applies his biblical convictions about the gospel to the perplexing dilemma of racial division and disharmony. Piper calls sin what it is: “The heart that believes one race is more valuable than another is a sinful heart. And that sin is called racism. The behavior that distinguishes one race as more valuable than another is a sinful behavior. And that sin is called racism” (18-19). And the only solution for the problem of sin is the cross of Jesus. Racism cannot be fixed by any other means than the gospel.

Although unabashedly theological, *Bloodlines* maintains a pastoral tone throughout. This heart of the true pastor is put on display through a high view of the church. Racism cannot be fixed without the gospel. Therefore, racism cannot be fixed without the church. Piper argues: “The church is not called to be responsible for the way unbelievers run their lives. But we are called to be responsible, by the power of the Spirit and for the glory of Jesus, for the way believers live and the kind of relationships that are cultivated in the fellowship of the church” (46). This theological work is also practical. Sections

addressing such hot-button topics as interracial marriage and the pursuit of ethnic diversity in the local church make important statements about how to live out our Christian faith in spiritual unity.

Bloodlines focuses primarily on racial tensions between blacks and whites. Of course, race matters in the church transcend these two groups. But you have to start somewhere. With the history of slavery, segregation, and civil rights struggles in America, this is the most obvious place to start for Americans. Some who do not share Piper's Reformed convictions may be turned off when they get to the latter, theological section of the book. But to dismiss this book as just a defense of Calvinism is to miss the point and rob yourself of the biblical and pastoral insights it provides.

CONCLUSION

To be sure, *Bloodlines* won't solve all the problems or answer all the questions you have about race matters in our society and in the church. But you will find essential solutions and vital answers. This is a wise, clear, and faithful treatment of racial ethnicity and biblical Christianity that you should be read widely. May the Lord use it to spark a revival of gospel-transforming unity to the glory of God!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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