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because we have two sides who are viewing the same incident from two very different perspectives. A lot of people are talking, yet precious few are listening; so neither side seems to hear the other at all. Eventually the talking and protests simmer down and little has been changed. The cycle repeats as we all wait for another situation to once again stir the embers lying just beneath the surface.

TWO SIDES IN EVERY STORY

In the beginning, God created a man. Within the seed of that man rested all of the components, DNA, and characteristic trademarks of all people today. *In the beginning, we were one.* Scripture tells us in the book of Acts, “He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (17:26). Thus, sharing a common origin in Adam, any form of division or oppression predicated on race is illegitimate, because we all emanate from the same source.

Racism in our society as well as in the church came about as a result of a divergence from this key biblical truth. It was not only supported by false theology, but it was also reinforced by pseudoscience, which was used to justify slavery by suggesting that people of the black race were inferior to those of the white. When theology joined hands with science, this created a double problem in the church by giving both religious and scientific support to the dehumanization and dividing process. Only with a return to biblical truth as our overarching standard by which all else is measured will an accurate view of racial unity be seen and actualized.

A major obstacle to overcome in understanding and engaging in racial unity, though, is the question of who's in charge: the Bible, science, or one's culture? This leads to a multiplicity of issues, one of which is the hindrance that is caused when authority is given to cultural diversity over biblical truth.

For example, some black Christians so mix the tenets of black culture with their faith that they frequently fail to make the necessary distinction between the two when it comes to critiquing ourselves. Many times racial hindrances are blamed for blocking forward progress either academically or vocationally. While these hindrances should be acknowledged and addressed, we must also take responsibility for ourselves, in spite of obvious hindrances, and find a way to execute at the level that we should in order to overcome them.

Conversely, whites will often leave the Bible when it is culturally convenient to do so in order to protect their traditions. This is seen most clearly in the sacred cow of interracial dating and marriage. When these issues are discussed, the argument of culture comes up as well. Questions such as: *What about the kids* and *What will the relatives think* surface much quicker than questions of what the Bible says.

On one side we have the complicated effects of traumatic and systemic grief stemming from the oppression of a people group throughout the better part of our history as a nation. The effect of this oppression is an unhealed wound that becomes easily irritated and reopened when there are acts—either actual or perceived—that resurrect or serve as a reminder of what initially caused it in the first place.

On the other side, we have a generation of people who did not participate in the evil of overt racism, and who do not control the systems that may be continuing to keep it alive today. They argue that it is unfair to pass the hostilities of these histories on to them. And they also wonder why such a huge response is made with regard to Trayvon Martin while hundreds continue to die by gunshot wounds in Chicago—sometimes more than a dozen weekly—while no collective outrage is heard.

There are questions on both sides.

In the midst of these questions, we also find those who have either been warped by whiteness or those who have become blinded by blackness to such a degree that even listening to the other side seems nearly impossible. We are left in a stalemate with regard to a strategic plan for a solution.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

It is my contention that the fundamental cause of racial problems in America lies squarely with the church's failure to come to grips with this issue from a biblical perspective. And it is also my contention that the strategy to solve it lies within the church as well.

The truth that has been missed is that God chooses much of what He does predicated on what His church is or is not doing (Deuteronomy 4:5–8, Ephesians 3:10). In the same way that God's purpose, presence, and power in the Old Testament was to flow from His people and through the temple into the world (Ezekiel 47:1–12), even so today it should flow

from the church into the broader society. When the church fails to act in concert with God's prescribed agenda, then God often chooses to postpone His active involvement until His people are prepared to respond. Our failure to respond to this issue of racial unity has allowed what never should have been a problem in the first place to continue for hundreds of years.

What has clearly been lacking in American Christianity is our collective ability to clearly understand and function from a kingdom perspective. A kingdom perspective urges us to open our eyes, hearts, and minds in order to take what we learn about ourselves, and from each other, with regard to the strengths inherent within each of us, and merge these together to form a more productive union.

Far too often, we have tried to *achieve* oneness through marginalizing racial distinctions rather than *embracing* them. This is because Christianity has made reconciliation its own goal. However, the purpose of reconciliation encompasses more than merely being able to articulate that we are one.

Reconciliation is not an end in itself.

Reconciliation is a means toward the greater end of bringing glory to God through seeking to advance His kingdom in a lost world. Therefore, authentic racial unity manifests itself through mutual relationship and service, not in seminars.

The church of Jesus Christ has on a large scale, with some exceptions, missed our calling. I would like to suggest that the church, while building great ministries and great buildings, has missed the kingdom.

If Christians can ever merge strength with strength in order to create a more complete whole, there will be no stopping the impact we can have not only in our nation, but in our world. Conversely, the absence of a unifying purpose that is larger than ourselves, a kingdom agenda,² will continue to keep us from having a transforming influence. This is because we will remain focused on each other, or ourselves, as the end result rather than on how we can amalgamate our uniquenesses and gifts together in order to accomplish our goal.

WRAPPING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE AMERICAN FLAG

For far too long white Christians have wrapped the Christian faith in the American flag, often creating a civil religion that is foreign to the way God intended His church to function. Our nation's founding fathers are frequently elevated to the level of church fathers in the arguments for the United States having been founded as a Christian nation.

While we should celebrate and affirm the Judeo-Christian worldview that influenced the framework for the founding of our nation and the Constitution, we must also be careful to judge our nation's founders by their application of that same worldview. Our founding fathers' failure to apply the principles of freedom that they were espousing to the area of race is a prominent reason why many minority individuals today are less than enthusiastic to join in with those in our nation who want to exalt or restore America's history and heritage.

Further, what is often missing in our appeal to return to the heritage and faith of our founding fathers is an acknowledg-

ment and reversal of a major theological contradiction that many held—that of proclaiming justice for all while denying it for many. While much in our national history reflects the call to a biblical worldview on the rights endowed to us by our Creator, we have often appealed to that heritage while simultaneously ignoring the moral inconsistencies that were prevalent in its application.

This has also led to a failure to be fully informed about a major aspect of American history in general, and church history in particular. It is common, for example, for Christian colleges to teach church history with limited or even no meaningful reference to the black church at all, thus keeping students from getting the whole truth about the history of our faith and of our nation. It is also common for our secular institutions all the way down to elementary schools to leave out critical pieces of history which reinforce strengths within the African-American culture, outside of Black History Month.

I am convinced that many of the social issues plaguing the black community today are due to the vast majority of blacks who have never heard the truth regarding our racial origins, development, and historical accomplishments. When people do not fully know who they are and where they come from, they become more vulnerable to allowing someone else to define these and like issues for them. Also, when members of other ethnic groups do not fully know the value of black culture and black church history, they are left with a limited definition steeped in stereotypical generalizations of who we are as people.

WRAPPING THE CHRISTIAN FLAG IN BLACK CULTURE

While white Christians have frequently wrapped the Christian faith in the American flag, black Christians have also merged tradition with faith by wrapping the Christian flag in black culture. At times, this has been done to such a degree that it has led to a failure in making the necessary distinctions that should reflect a kingdom-based approach to life. How else can you explain the overwhelming acceptance of musical and comedic artists who have some of the most lewd lyrics and degrading statements in their performances about the opposite sex while concurrently thanking their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? What's worse is the amount of applause that comes from this overwhelmingly "Christian" audience, both live and at home, at this illegitimate union of faith and culture.

It is this absence of accountability and righteous judgment that keeps many in the black community from experiencing and fully realizing God's kingdom purpose for us in spite of the mammoth amount of God-given talent and creative genius with which our Creator has endowed us. The disconnect between what is professed on Sunday and what is lived out from Monday through Saturday limits our individual and collective progress.

While some of the challenges we face in the black community truly stem from the past and its personal and systemic aftermath, there are also many challenges that stem from our failure to properly take responsibility for and be held accountable to our actions, morality, families, the quality of services that we provide as well as the proper management of our

human and financial resources. Wrong is to be judged and changed, not applauded and excused with no consequences.

I acknowledge that racism is real, and it is also systemic. But it is not an excuse for irresponsible behavior, family abandonment, or not taking advantage of what is available in creating steps for moving forward. Just like an offense on a sports team can't use the defense as an excuse not to try to score, a person cannot use racism as an excuse not to call a better play in their own life choices.

While not seeking to diminish the impact of racism upon a culture, I also want us to recognize that illegitimate or continual cries of racism are self-limiting and self-defeating. They simply foster a victim mentality that reinforces a pathology of dependency. Victimology can be defined as *nurturing an unfocused strain of resentment rooted in a defeatist identity through which all realities are filtered, rather than viewing challenges as opportunities to overcome*. It is virtually impossible to be a victor and a victim at the same time. In God's kingdom, victimology negates the foundational theological truths of sovereignty and victory in Christ (Romans 8:28, 37).

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE

It is my contention that at the core of the problem of racial disunity in America is the failure to understand and execute a kingdom-based theology on both righteousness and justice. Righteousness refers to personal responsibility in keeping with God's standard while justice refers to that same standard in our relationships with others. A balance between the two is