

In light of the uproar in our country in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd, it seems good to consider the nature of the response that the church should take in these difficult times. With pressure on all sides and with a myriad of opinions fighting for validity in the public square, it is the churches job to seek the counsel of God from the pages of Scripture and to wisely implement the principles that apply. These principles must be relevant, not simply to this one, most recent incident, but to the foundational response of the church to the core issues involved.

First, we need to think through a response to the protests which are taking place. There have been two kinds of demonstrations – unlawfully violent and peaceful. Unlawful protests are the easiest to respond to. Those who have responded to Floyd’s death with violence and lawlessness are clearly violating the principles of Scripture and this must be condemned. First, the law of love does not allow for unloving behavior towards others (looting their stores, destroying their property, killing them – all of which has taken place) in retaliation for harm done. It certainly does not allow for the violent taking up of the offense of another to harm those who were not even remotely involved. *“For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:9-10)”*. This principle of love holds for the believer as well as the unbeliever (even though the unbeliever can never truly love in a Biblical way since they never desire to glorify God through Christ).

Second, the biblical law of authority states that all men (and certainly believers) are to be in subjection to the governing authorities, because those authorities have been established by God. To oppose the authority of government is to oppose God. *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves (Romans 13:1-2)*. We can appeal to governing authorities, we can vote an individual in an out or power, but in the end we are to submit to their authority. It is important to note that an injustice committed by someone invested with government authority does not validate unlawful responses (regardless of whether the system itself is generally “just,” or “unjust”). It does seem clear that Floyd’s death involved a grievous, brutal, unjust, and unlawful response by a governmental official. However, since all governments are unjust to some degree, they are to be submitted to even when they have allowed injustice. Remember that Paul wrote the instructions in Romans thirteen to those who were governed by some of the most evil and unjust men who ever lived. But what about the fact that many people with black skin have been abused by government in both the past and present? The Bible is clear here. There is no biblical principle of justice which allows for setting aside of the law of love or authority when one has personally been treated unjustly or when another has been unlawfully harmed. Past oppression, injustice, and lack of love never justify present lawlessness and lovelessness. Certainly no church can join violent protest, affirm it, or make excuses for it. Additionally, the church should call on the government to punish evil doers and give praise and protection to those who are doing right. This would be to bring justice to George Floyd’s killers and to prosecute those who break the law while responding to his death. *Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of*

*evildoers and the praise of those who do right (1 Peter 2:13-14). Certainly we can and should affirm that justice should prevail and all necessary steps taken to limit (for it will never be eradicated) abuses of power, but to use the power of the mob is never an appropriate way to accomplish this. Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men (Titus 3:1-2).*

The churches response to those who are protesting peacefully is much more complex. Under the laws of our nation, peaceful protests are legal and so we may not condemn them as a violation of the law of government. Additionally, they do not violate the law of love. However, if we do not condemn peaceful protests, are we required to recognize them as a biblical solution or perhaps even to join them as is being urged by many evangelical leaders today? The answer, biblically, is no. In all of the New Testament there is not a single instance of the church mobilizing a protest against the evils of the day – which were far more rampant than then in 2020. Neither Jesus nor the Apostles called on the church to join the protests movements of the world – instead, they called upon us to make disciples. *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20)*

To reaffirm the Scriptural understanding of the churches mission is not to ignore injustice. We should be quick to affirm that what the world calls “racism” – the hatred of a person simply on the basis of his race (as generally represented in skin color) - does in fact exist, and it exists within the church. Additionally, before we throw out slogans like “there is no such thing as race,” and “the problem is sin,” we must affirm that fact that in the history of our country, some races of people have been, and continue to be treated more harmfully than others. To ignore this is to rightfully open ourselves up to the accusation of being uncaring and unjust. Additionally, to overlook that fact that the destructive treatment of those in our country with black skin by those in power has left a legacy of pain and injustice is also harmful and disingenuous. In recognizing this truth of the fallen world we live in, we are weeping with those who have had many occasions to weep. *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation (Romans 12:15,16).*

Thus, this tragedy should cause us to search our own hearts and carefully consider the theology and philosophy of ministry of our church to see if there is any incipient “racism” to be found. We are certainly not required to agree with the current voices that maintain that there has been no progress in racial inequality. This is demonstrably not the case. We also need to be able to recognize that many, if not most, who are protesting today have been the beneficiaries of the tremendous strides forward that this county has made on the issue of race (a fact which seems entirely absent in the current discussion). We must not be bullied by our culture into getting “woke” and agree that all non-black people are inherent racists (which in and of itself smacks of overt racism). This “white=racist” argument is not true of unbelievers (regardless of the claims of the intersectionality movement). Although partiality and hatred (racism) are endemic to the sinful human nature, no one is racist because of their skin color – it they hate others because of their race it is a personal choice they have made to violate God’s law. It is definitely a

misrepresentation of true believers who have been transformed into new creations by Christ. We may struggle with racism, but we are not at the core, racists (if a person remains racist to the core – they cannot be a believer – 1 Cor 6:9-11). *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come (2 Cor. 5:17).*

With this expressed, it is appropriate to broaden out our appeal for every person (regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status) to be treated fairly under the laws of our country. The Bible does not use a term like “racism” but condemns all forms of hatred and partiality as wicked in the extreme. To hate any man, and to harm him as a result of that hate, is condemned as a sin that Christ came to die for. *“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell (Matt 5:22).* However, we must always move from this affirmation of justice to a call for all men everywhere to repent. Although the Biblical record certainly acknowledges the barriers that exist between races, genders, socioeconomic groups, etc., the same solution is always provided. Christ came to break down those barriers and to bring unity to all who repent and take hold of His sacrifice. Only the Spirit of God can bring true unity by placing every believer into union with Christ so that we become His family, His body. *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28).* Finally, we must proclaim that the greatest barriers are not between various groups of human beings, but between all man and God himself. This barrier of sin can only be overcome through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

Above all, we must affirm that to join hands with those who are calling for peace and justice apart from Christ (or with an inclusive Christ who does not require repentance and faith) is antithetical to the mission of the church. While the church affirms a desire for all people to be treated justly, she understands that the only true, lasting, and guaranteed justice comes from a right relationship with God through Christ. The ability of human governments to provide justice and safety is short lived and precarious at best. The only guarantee of true justice that the church can offer is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This comes only through the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel to a lost and dying world. The church must not succumb to pressure to abandon its primary mission – to see true righteousness permanently established - in order to strive for an unattainable temporal righteousness that would only result in eternal destruction in the end. *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls (1 Peter 2:21-25).*

Additionally, for the church to partner with those who hate Christ in an attempt to bring a peace apart from Christ is to denigrate the sacrifice of Christ and dishonor the God who sent Christ. Certainly Satan does not mind which way he distracts people from eternal hell – either through inciting them to violent, harmful protests or calming them into benign peaceful rallies, both of which leave those protesting, and those being protested for, dead in their trespasses and sin. Certainly an individual within the church may choose to peacefully protest, as his conscience allows, in order to express a desire for earthly justice to be accomplished. However, he or she must be very careful not to imply that their motivation and desires are the same as unbelievers who protest in a similar fashion.

As a church, then, we long to provide a godly, biblical, compassionate, and truthful response to this very present crisis. This will not happen as we exchange heated words on social media, wring our hands in despair while listening to Fox news, or cave in to culturally pressured solutions. We need to press forward in the mission of the church to make disciples of all the nations. We must communicate our love and care for those harmed by the evils of the world by introducing them to Jesus Christ, the only one who can provide healing and lasting peace.

*“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful (John 14:27).*