

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT

***RACISM?***

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What does the Bible say about racism?

**“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love.” —*Nelson Mandela***

Trauma surgeon Dr. Brian Williams was in charge of the emergency room at Dallas’s Parkland Hospital on July 7, 2016. That night, fourteen police officers were shot in the line of duty; five of them died. It was the deadliest attack on law enforcement in the United States since September 11, 2001.

Seven of the officers were brought to Parkland. Dr. Williams choked back tears as he described how three of them died at the hospital: “I think about it every day, that I was unable to save those cops when they came in that night.”

But there’s more to his story. As an African American, he has a unique perspective.

Dr. Williams told the Associated Press that he has been stopped by police over the years and was afraid each time that he could be killed. At one traffic stop, he ended up “spread eagle” on the hood of the cruiser. A few years ago, he was stopped by an officer and questioned as he stood outside his apartment complex waiting for a ride to the airport.

After describing his grief over the officers who died, Dr. Williams made this statement: “I want the Dallas Police Department to see I support you. I defend you. I will care for you. That doesn’t mean I will not fear you. That doesn’t mean that when you approach me, I will not have a visceral reaction and start worrying about my personal safety.”

In his Associated Press interview, Dr. Williams said he couldn’t help but wonder why he was working that night. He was in Parkland’s emergency room only because of a last-minute schedule change.

He said, “I wonder if this was the reason that in the midst of all this racial tension and dead black men and violence against cops—was I the one put there to experience this and tell my story and get the conversation started?”

## **Racism in America**

In 2019, Pew Research Center reported that “a majority of Americans say race relations in the United States are bad, and of those, about seven-in-ten say things are getting even worse.”

A generation after the 1954 Brown school desegregation decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, racial discrimination continues in our country. According to the FBI, 57 percent of hate crimes are racially motivated. Hate groups are active in every state in America.

## **Racism and indigenous Americans**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines racism as “prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior.”

By this definition, mistreating people of a particular race is “racism” to the degree that the perpetrator considers his or her victims to be racially inferior. We find such attitudes on the part of Anglos toward non-Anglos since Europeans first landed in the New World.

Many European explorers characterized the indigenous peoples they encountered as “heathen” and considered their race and culture to be inferior by nature. Many claimed that such people could be transformed by the introduction of Christianity and European customs.

One colonist described native Americans as “having little of Humanitie but shape, ignorant of Civilitie, of Arts, of Religion; more brutish than the beasts they hunt, more wild and unmanly than the unmanned wild Countrey, which they range rather than inhabite; captivated also to Satans tyranny in foolish pieties, mad impieties, wicked idlenesse, busie and bloody wickednesse.”

## **Racism and Africans**

Many who supported the enslavement of Africans likewise viewed them as inferior to white people. An Anglican minister in Barbados claimed that “Negro’s were Beasts, and had no more Souls than

Beasts.” Africans were considered intellectually and morally inferior to whites; some declared that they were descended from apes.

Such horrific claims were used to justify the system of chattel slavery (the personal ownership of a slave) that enslaved millions of Africans. Many slaveholders convinced themselves that slaves, due to their supposedly inferior nature, were better off and better cared for in bondage than in freedom.

This racist ideology led directly to America’s “original sin,” the institution of slavery in the New World. The first group of African slaves—four men and women—arrived at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619.

Planters quickly realized that enormous profits could be gained from importing enslaved laborers.

Africans could be made to work much longer and harder in the fields. Since they were so far from Africa, they could not easily escape and return home. In addition, African slaves came from a variety of nations and cultures and thus could not easily communicate with each other to organize resistance.

Most slaves came from West Africa, where some tribal leaders were willing to capture and sell other Africans for profit. Slaves became especially important to the economy of the South, where the climate and topography were more suitable for tobacco and cotton plantations.

By 1860, the United States was divided into “slave” and “free” states. That year, census takers counted 3,950,540 slaves in America.

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While the Declaration of Independence claimed that “all men are created equal,” the US Constitution determined that enslaved persons would be counted as “three-fifths of all other Persons” for purposes of government representation and taxation (Article I, Section II, Paragraph III).

The Constitution permitted importing slaves until 1808, with a tax of \$10 per slave (Article I, Section IX, Clause I). And it required those living in free states to return escaped slaves to their owners (Article IV, Section II, Clause III).

Slavery was legal in America until 1865 and the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment. The Fourteenth Amendment (1868) guaranteed the same rights to all male citizens; the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) made it illegal to deprive any eligible citizen of the right to vote, regardless of color.

However, segregation in schools was not made illegal until *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Jim Crow laws enforcing racial segregation were overturned by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

## **Racism and Asians**

Asian immigrants have faced racial prejudice in the US as well. Those who came to America to work in mines, farms, and railroads were willing to accept lower wages, which enraged white residents.

As a result, Asians became the victims of riots and attacks. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 Asian Exclusion Act barred additional immigration. These acts also declared Asians ineligible for citizenship, which meant they could not own land.

## **Racism today**

Studies show that racism persists in America:

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- People with “black-sounding names” had to send out 50 percent more job applications than people with “white-sounding names” to get a callback.
- A black man is three times more likely to be searched at a traffic stop and six times more likely to go to jail than a white man.
- If a black person kills a white person, he or she is twice as likely to receive the death sentence as a white person who kills a black person.
- Blacks serve up to 20 percent more time in prison than white people for the same crimes. Blacks are 38 percent more likely to be sentenced to death than white people for the same crimes.

Racism persists in America’s churches as well:

- Only 32 percent of white pastors strongly agree that “my church is involved with racial reconciliation at the local level.” Fifty-three percent of African American pastors strongly agree with this statement.
- Only 56 percent of evangelicals believe that “people of color are often put at a social disadvantage because of their race.” Eighty-four percent of blacks agree with this statement.
- A recent study showed that 86 percent of America’s churches are composed of one predominant racial group.
- While 90 percent of Protestant pastors say their congregation would welcome a sermon on racial reconciliation, only 26 percent say leaders in their church have encouraged them to preach on the subject.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was right: Sunday morning worship services are still the most segregated hour in America.

## **Slavery in the Bible**

When my family moved to Atlanta in 1994, we quickly fell in love with the Old South. Being from Texas, I thought something was historical if it happened while Tom Landry was coach of the Cowboys.

Southern history goes back to the Revolutionary War and colonial times. I was especially fascinated by the Civil War (though Southerners will say that “there was nothing civil about it”).

But there’s a dark side to the story. While traveling one day in the beautiful city of Charleston, South Carolina, my wife and I came upon a “slave-trading warehouse.” This was the horrific place where slaves were brought to America on ships and then sold at market in chains.

I can still remember the crumbling limestone building and my revulsion upon seeing it. I believe that racism is the greatest sin in America, the failure which keeps us from addressing our other failures. Racism makes crime in south Dallas a “black” problem and drug abuse in north Dallas a “white” problem when they’re both our problems.

Given our tragic history with racism, thinking about the subject of slavery in the Bible is a bit repugnant for most of us. However, since many say the Bible was wrong on this issue, we must discuss this painful subject briefly.

## **Slavery in the Old Testament**

It is an unfortunate fact that slavery was an accepted part of life in the ancient world. No early society or literature questioned its existence or necessity.

People in Old Testament times became slaves in a variety of ways: they were born to enslaved parents (Genesis 17:23), purchased as slaves ( Genesis 37:28), or sold themselves to pay a debt ( Leviticus 25:39–55). Breaking into a home was punished by enslavement (

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Exodus 22:3), and prisoners of war were commonly enslaved (Joel 3:6). The children of Israel enslaved the Canaanites they conquered in the Promised Land (Judges 1:28).

Slaves in Israel were considered property to be bought and sold (Exodus 21:32). However, they were granted protection against murder, permanent injury, or undue physical labor (Exodus 21:20, 26; 23:12). Hebrew household slaves were included at religious meals (Exodus 12:44). Such privileges and protections were extremely rare in the ancient world.

But why did the Old Testament not condemn this practice?

In many ways, it did. There were several ways a Hebrew slave could be freed (a process called “manumission”). An individual could be purchased and set free (Exodus 21:8). A slave permanently injured by his master was to be set free (Exodus 21:26). Hebrews were to be held as slaves for no longer than six years (Deuteronomy 15:12). The Jubilee Year, which occurred every forty-nine years, was to free all Israelite slaves (Leviticus 25:50).

But still we ask: Why did the Old Testament sanction this practice at all? Its rules minimized this evil, protected slaves from physical harm, and provided for their eventual freedom. But the New Testament gives us God’s complete word on the subject.

## **Slavery in the New Testament**

In the Old Testament era, people were enslaved primarily through war. But in the first century AD, the procreation of slaves swelled their numbers enormously. And many people actually sold themselves into slavery to improve their lives.

Owning and using people as slaves was so common in the Roman Empire that not a single Roman writer condemned the practice. But this acceptance of slavery would begin to change with the growth and influence of Christianity.

Slavery in the Roman era was dramatically different from the despicable practice in American history. If you walked through any first-century Roman city, you would not be able to tell

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most slaves from free people. Slaves performed manual labor, but they were also doctors, nurses, household managers, and intellectuals. They managed finances and cities. They were often given an excellent education at the expense of their owners, with the result that philosophers and tutors were typically slaves.

Even more amazing to us, it was common for people to sell themselves into slavery to secure such privileges. A person who wanted to be a Roman citizen could sell himself to a citizen and then purchase his freedom. For many people, slavery was more a process than a condition.

While there is no doubt that many slaves were abused physically, sexually, and socially, many were part of the more privileged strata of society. The total dependence of the Roman economy upon the labor of slaves made it impossible for the ancient world to conceive of abolishing this institution. If an economist were to propose that we refuse all goods and services imported from outside America, we'd be equally surprised.

As a result, no New Testament writer attempted to end slavery itself, as this was not possible in their time. But several other facts should be noted as well.

### **One: Paul abolished all racial and social discrimination for Christians:**

In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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 (Galatians 3:26–28). Every believer is our sister or brother. None in the Christian family are to be viewed as slaves.

### **Two: Free Christians viewed slaves as their equal.**

Paul appealed to Philemon to see his slave, Onesimus, “no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother” (Philemon 16).

Clement, a friend of Paul, wrote in his letter to the Corinthians (ca. AD 90), “We know

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many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others” (ch. 55). Ignatius (died AD 107) wrote to Polycarp: “Do not despise either male or female slaves, yet neither let them be puffed up with conceit, but rather let them submit themselves the more, for the glory of God, that they may obtain from God a better liberty.”

### **Three: The New Testament church gave those who were enslaved a family and a home**

This was one reason why so many of the earliest believers were slaves. Pastors and church leaders came from the ranks both of slaves and free. Christians made no distinction between the two, for their Father welcomed all as his children.

### **Four: Not a single New Testament leader owned slaves, even though many had the resources to purchase them.**

Their example inspired William Wilberforce and countless other Christians to do all they could to abolish slavery, and we thank God that they were successful.

## **Racism and the Bible**

The Bible clearly condemns all forms of racism and views every person as equally valuable. Let’s look at what God’s word says about our subject, then we’ll consider some common questions people ask about the Scriptures and racism.

Six theological facts

### **One: We are all created by God.**

The human story begins in Genesis 1, where God “created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (v. 27). Every person is created intentionally by God in his own divine image. Thus, every person is sacred and equally valuable. Every form of racism, by definition, is to be rejected.

**Two: We are all descended from the same parents.**

Every human being is descended from Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28). As a result, “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20).

As Scripture notes, the Lord “made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). Because of the Flood, all of humanity can trace our ancestry to Noah as well (Genesis 9:1).

**Three: Every person is equally valuable to God.**

As noted earlier, Paul stated boldly: “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” (Galatians 3:28). This at a time when many Jews considered Greeks to be unclean and inferior. Some claimed that God made Gentiles so there would be “firewood in hell.” Many refused even to look upon a Gentile in public.

For their part, Gentiles persecuted the Jewish people across nearly their entire history. The Jews were enslaved by Egypt, attacked by Canaanites and other surrounding tribes, destroyed by Assyria, enslaved by Babylon, and ruled by Persia, Greece, and Rome. The Roman Empire destroyed their temple in AD 70 and disbanded their nation after the Bar Kochba revolt in AD 132–135. Nonetheless, Scripture teaches that “there is neither Jew nor Greek” in the eyes of God.

“There is neither slave nor free” was also a revolutionary claim. As we have seen, slavery was endemic in the first-century world. Many viewed slaves, especially those who came from foreign lands, as inferior to Romans.

“There is no male and female” was a radical statement as well. Romans considered women to be the possession of men. A female belonged to her father until she belonged to her husband. Women were either wives or concubines, with few rights of their own. Galatians 3:28 sounds the clarion call that every form of racism known to Paul’s day was invalid and sinful. The God

who made us all loves us all.

Paul repeated his assertion to the Colossians: “There is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3:11). To summarize: “God shows no partiality” ( Acts 10:34).

**Four: Each person is equally welcome to salvation in Christ.**

God loves all sinners and wants all to come to faith in his Son: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Our Lord “is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

As Paul noted, God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” ( 1 Timothy 2:4). That’s why the apostle could testify: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

Our Father’s saving love is available to all: “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him” (Romans 10:12). His grace is universal: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

When we trust in Christ, we become one people: “He himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14). As a result, “In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Peter told his fellow Jewish Christians that God “made no distinction between [Gentile Christians] and us, having cleansed their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). As a result, we are to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). “Nations” translates

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ethnos, meaning people groups. We get “ethnicity” from this word. Every person of every ethnicity is to be brought to Christ through the ministry of the church.

### **Five: All people will be equally valuable in paradise.**

John was given this vision of heaven: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (Revelation 7:9).

### **Six: We are to love all people unconditionally.**

God’s word is blunt: “If you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:9). “Partiality” translates *prosopolempsia*, meaning to show favoritism or prejudice, to treat one person as inherently better than another. Such prejudice is “sin.”

God told his people: “You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:34).

Jesus taught us: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). We are to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39, quoting Leviticus 19:18).

Peter testified to the Gentiles who sought to hear the gospel: “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean” (Acts 10:28).

## Three common questions

### One: What about the “mark of Cain”?

After Cain murdered his brother, God sentenced him to be “a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (Genesis 4:12). Cain protested that “I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me” (v. 14).

God replied, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold” (v. 15a). Then, “the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him” (v. 15b).

The Hebrew word translated “mark” is *ot*, referring to a sign or token. It is used eighty times in the Old Testament; not once does it refer to skin color. Nonetheless, some have identified this “mark” with being black. Since Cain was cursed for his sin against his brother, it was claimed that those whose skin was black were his descendants and were cursed by God. This claim was used to justify the enslavement of Africans.

This line of reasoning is completely wrong. As noted, the “mark” of Cain had nothing to do with his skin color. In addition, Cain’s family line probably died in the Flood.

And note that Moses married a “Cushite woman” (Numbers 12:1). Cush was a region south of Ethiopia; its people were known for their black skin (Jeremiah 13:23). When Moses’ brother and sister spoke against him for marrying his Cushite wife, God rebuked them (Numbers 12:4–15).

Clearly, the “mark of Cain” has nothing to do with black people.

### Two: What about the “curse of Ham”?

Ham was one of Noah’s three sons. Ham had four sons: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan (Genesis 10:6). Ham is considered the father of black people, since some of his descendants settled in Africa. According to tradition, Cush settled in Ethiopia, south of Egypt; Egypt

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(also known as “Mizraim”) settled in the land of Egypt; Put settled in Libya; Canaan settled above Africa and east of the Mediterranean Sea.

The Bible tells us that after the Flood, Noah became drunk (Genesis 9:21). Then “Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside” (v. 22). Shem and Japheth “covered the nakedness of their father” (v. 23). After Noah awoke, he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers” (v. 25).

Note that Noah cursed Canaan, not Ham. Thus, his curse was irrelevant to Ham’s sons who had settled in Africa and their descendants.

Also note that Noah’s curse was specifically directed at Canaan, with no mention of his descendants. If Noah’s curse was applied to his descendants, it related to the Canaanites living in the land that became Israel. It had nothing whatever to do with black people.

Nonetheless, the Old Scofield Reference Bible of 1909 (often considered the authoritative Bible of fundamentalist Christians) interprets Genesis 9:24–25 to teach: “A prophetic declaration is made that from Ham will descend an inferior and servile posterity.”

With his typically brilliant exposition, Dr. Tony Evans addresses this issue, noting that biblical curses are limited to three or four generations (Exodus 20:5) and are reversed when people repent and return to obedience (Exodus 20:6). As Dr. Evans shows, Scripture consistently rebukes and rejects the claim that black people (or any other race) are inferior to any other.

### **Three: Didn’t slavery proponents use the Bible to justify their position?**

Tragically, many who supported slavery in the antebellum South used the “mark of Cain” and “curse of Ham” to justify their position. They also noted biblical statements encouraging slaves to obey their masters.

As we saw in the section on slavery, the Bible deals realistically with the practice where

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necessary, but it clearly endorses the intrinsic sacred value of each person. The biblical emphasis on the sanctity of life was one of the key motivating factors for William Wilberforce and others who worked so sacrificially to abolish slavery.

Like any other book, the Bible can be misused by those who misinterpret and misrepresent its teachings. For instance, when chloroform was developed, some were resistant to using it for women in childbirth since Genesis 3:16 teaches “in pain you shall bring forth children.”

When oil wells were first dug in Pennsylvania, many New York ministers opposed the project on the grounds that it would deplete the oil stored for the predestined burning of the world (2 Peter 3:10, 12). And winnowing fans were rejected by Christians who thought they interfered with the providence of God since “the wind blows where it wishes” (John 3:8). (For these and other examples, see John P. Newport and William Cannon, *Why Christians Fight Over the Bible.*)

When a doctor misuses medicine, we blame the physician, not the science. When an attorney misrepresents a legal statute, we blame the lawyer, not the law.

In responding to racists who misused the Bible to justify slavery, we should blame the racists, not the word of God.

### **Practical responses**

God’s word clearly calls us to love every person as unconditionally as he loves us. How do we put such love into practice today?

#### **One: Search your own heart**

A recent survey reported that 64 percent of Americans consider racism a major problem in our society and politics. Only 3 percent say it once existed but no longer does; only 1 percent say it has never been a major problem.

Why is racism so pervasive and perennial in our culture?

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C. S. Lewis: “If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed” (*Mere Christianity*).

I think his logic applies to the issue of racism as well.

One reason racial discrimination is such a perennial problem is that it appeals to the core of our sin nature. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent promised the woman that if she ate of the forbidden fruit, “you will be like God” (Genesis 3:5).

From then to now, our desire to be our own god is at the root of all our sin. As Friedrich Nietzsche noted, the “will to power” is the basic drive in human nature.

Here’s my point: Racism is a way to feel superior to others on the basis of immutable realities. If I’m white and you’re black, I will always be white and you will always be black. If I delude myself into believing that being white is superior to being black, I will therefore always feel superior to you.

This temptation is alluring on levels we often don’t recognize. In fact, I think Satan wants us not to acknowledge our discriminatory inclinations, lest we admit and repent of them.

It is therefore a good first step in confronting racism to check ourselves. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any unstated attitudes or assumptions that are discriminatory. Ask him to reveal to you any thoughts, words, or actions that are racist.

Pray regularly for such discernment. And where necessary, repent.

### **Two: Take the cultural initiative**

“In some ways, it’s super simple. People learn to be whatever their society and culture teaches them. We often assume it takes parents actively teaching their kids, for them to be racist.

The truth is that unless parents actively teach kids not to be racists, they will be.” This is how

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Jennifer Richeson, a Yale University social psychologist, explains the continued pervasiveness of racism.

She continues: “This is not the product of some deep-seated, evil heart that is cultivated. It comes from the environment, the air all around us.” Eric Knowles, a psychology professor at New York University, adds: “There’s a lot of evidence that people have an ingrained even evolved tendency toward people who are in our so-called ‘in group.’”

What is the solution? “The only way to change bias is to change culture,” according to Richeson. “You have to change what is acceptable in society. People today complain about politically correct culture, but what that does is provide a check on people’s outward attitude, which in turn influences how we think about ourselves internally. Everything we’re exposed to gives us messages about who is good and bad.” Such change starts with us. Christians are “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13, 14). If food lacks salt, the fault is not with the food. If a dark room lacks light, the fault is not with the room.

You and I must set the standard in our churches, communities, and families. We must be the change we want to see. We must take proactive, positive, initiatory steps to model the inclusive love of Jesus.

### **Three: Be the church**

On July 12, 2016, President George W. Bush spoke at a memorial service held in Dallas for police officers who had been killed in the line of duty. He made this remarkable point:

“Americans, I think, have a great advantage. To renew our unity, we only need to remember our values. We have never been held together by

blood or background. We are bound by things of the spirit, by shared commitments to common ideals.”

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President Bush is right. Many nations find their unity in a monolithic racial heritage, culture, or history. But America has never been about such uniformity. From the beginning, we were home to Protestants and Catholics and Jews, immigrants from across Europe and around the world.

As a result, our truest unity will never be horizontal, only vertical. President Bush: “At our best, we honor the image of God we see in one another. We recognize that we are brothers and sisters, sharing the same brief moment on Earth and owing each other the loyalty of our shared humanity.”

In other words, the closer we draw to our Father, the closer we draw to each other.

That’s why the gospel of God’s reconciling love is the only transforming answer to the challenges we face. Legislation and the civil rights movement were essential to improving the lives of those who faced legalized discrimination. But laws cannot change people. Only the Spirit can do that. As a result, Christians are on the front lines of this spiritual battle for the soul and future of our nation.

Writing for *The Washington Post*, legendary Dallas pastor Dr. Tony Evans traced our racial challenges “directly to ineffective Christians” and stated, “One of the real tragedies today is that the Church as a whole has not furthered God’s light, equity, love and principles in our land in order to be a positive influence and impact for good in the midst of darkness, fear and hate.”

He called for churches to unite in a “solemn assembly” with prayer and fasting, to train our members to be verbal and visible followers of Jesus, and to unite for good works in our communities. This is our “God-given role of influencing the conscience of our culture.” Without it “our country will keep spiraling downward into the depths of fear and hate.”

The time has come for the church to be the church.

## Conclusion

As pastors and Christian leaders, it's vital that we model what we ask our members to believe and do.

- What relationships can you build across racial lines in your community?
- What common causes can you embrace and advance with leaders from different racial demographics?
- What ways can you find to bring your faith community into community with other congregations?
- What messages can you preach that call your members not only to proper theology but also to personal engagement?

As we lead on this vital subject, let's remember that every person of every race was created by the same God in his image. Every one.

Early Christians believed this transforming truth. In the second century, Justin Martyr said of his fellow Christians: "We who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies."

Clement of Alexandria described the true Christian: "Through the perfection of his love he impoverishes himself that he may never overlook a brother in affliction, especially if he knows that he could himself bear want better than his brother."

An early Christian named Minucius Felix told the Romans, "We love one another . . . with a mutual love, because we do not know how to hate." Tertullian, a second-century theologian, reported that pagans said of Christians, "See how they love one another."

Now it's our turn.