

A Conversation on Race

Bernard Bell • 2012.07.12 PBCC

OT: Israel called out of the nations for the nations

- The Table of Nations (Gen 10): The sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, spread abroad on the earth after the Flood, “by their clans, by their languages, in their lands, in their nations.”
- The Call of Abraham: “Go from your *land*...to the *land* that I will show you. And I will make of you a great *nation*...and in you all the *clans* of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen 12:1-3)

NT: the Church as Jew and Gentile together in Christ

Disciples: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)

Jesus: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (1:8)

The expansion of the church (Acts 8-11):

- Samaritans (Acts 8:4-25)
- Ethiopian eunuch from Cush (8:26-40)
- Cornelius, a Roman centurion (10:1-40)
- Gentiles in Antioch (11:19-26); “in Antioch the disciples were first called *Christians*.”

Paul’s expansive Christian imagination:

- 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*. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:28-29)
- Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. (Col 3:11)
- For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one...that he might create the two *in himself* into one new man, so making peace. (Eph 2:14-15)

The Age of Discovery

Portugal

Papal Bull *Dum Diversas* (1452)

We grant you by these present documents, with our Apostolic Authority, full and free permission to invade, search out, capture, and subjugate the Saracens and pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ wherever they may be...and to reduce their persons into perpetual servitude. (Pope Nicolas V to K. Afonso V).

Papal Bull *Romanus Pontifex* (1454): confirmed Portuguese dominion over all lands south of Cape Bojador.

Spain

1492: Columbus’s voyage; Fall of Granada; expulsion of Jews.

- Papal Bull *Inter caetera* (1493): granting all lands west of a mid-Atlantic line (Pope Alexander VI to Ferdinand & Isabella).
- Treaty of Tordesillas (1494): Portugal and Spain agreed the mid-Atlantic line.
- Treaty of Saragosa (1529): Portugal and Spain agreed the line on the other side of the world (antimeridian).

America

1619 first slaves arrived at Jamestown in the Colony of Virginia.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” (US Declaration of Independence, 1776)

Dred Scott decision: black people “are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’

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in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States...a perpetual and impassable barrier was intended to be erected between the white race and the one which they had reduced to slavery.” (SCOTUS, *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, 1857)

Biblical justification for black enslavement to white masters:

“Cursed be Canaan: a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers...

May God enlarge Japheth...and let Canaan be his servant.” (Gen 9:26-27)

Japheth = white Christian Europe; Ham = black heathen Africa.

The Reconstruction Amendments:

13. abolished slavery
14. grants citizenship to blacks
15. prohibits denying a citizen the right to vote based on race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Why should we care?

- concern for justice, both civil and biblical
- show love, kindness, goodness, gentleness—the fruit of the Spirit
- compassion for a community in deep pain

Hindrances to caring:

- individualism
- fear
- power
- nostalgia

What should we do?

- Listen
- Learn
- Lament
- Leverage

Two types of justice:

- retributive justice: truth-telling condemns.
- restorative justice: truth-telling liberates; leads to forgiveness, reconciliation.

Our founding narrative: Christ Jesus (our founder and pioneer) “did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather,...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:6-8).

Resources

Read

Miles McPherson, *The Third Option: Hope for a Racially Divided Nation* (Howard, 2018)

John Piper, *Bloodlines: Race, Cross and the Christian* (Crossway, 2011)

Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2020)

Ken Wytmsa, *The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege* (IVP, 2019)

Watch

movie: *Just Mercy* (2019): based on Bryan Stevenson's 2014 memoir of same name; founder of Equal Justice Initiative.

movie: *Selma* (2014): about the Selma to Montgomery marches (1965).

documentary: *13th* (Netflix, 2018) on YouTube: about the mass incarceration of blacks.

video series: Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise* (Zondervan): companion to his book. Free on Amazon Prime.