How Do We Respond to Calls to Discuss Justice in the Church?

How do we respond to calls to discuss justice in the church? Not only is this a hot issue right now, but it is a critical issue to discuss. Because it is crucial, we need to address it in the church.

Approaching the Conversation

Primarily, we need to be intentional about how we approach the conversation (and yes it should be a conversation, not just one person teaching or giving a monologue). First, we need to be extra intrigued as to why others think differently than we do. We need to let them talk and accept their reactions as genuine. We need to stay away from rejecting what is being told by attributing a bad intention.

Second, we need to take note of whether we are processing the information as facts, filters, or identity{1} on our part individually, but as well look to know where others are coming from and why. Our goal should always be understanding, not only of issues but also of other people's perspectives.

Third, we need to be interested and ask questions, *not to beat the other person but to seek reciprocal knowledge* regarding why we differ or where the disagreements and pressure points are.

Fourth, we need to learn reflective listening, to correctly rephrase what we hear others to be saying in the tricky moments in a manner that reassures the other person: "This is what I hear you saying. Did I get it right? Do I understand you correctly?" The importance at this point is that the other person gets to decide whether he/she is being understood. By

engaging in these approaches, what is hopefully conveyed to others is that the fundamental purpose of our discussion is to dialogue—to understand each other, not only find out who is correct.{2}

Defining Terms

As with almost any discussion today, I think it is necessary to define terms. This discussion especially calls for defining the term "justice" before we can even begin. For instance, when having this discussion are we saying merely "justice", or the now popular term "social justice", or a seemingly Christian claim to "biblical justice?" This alone takes up a good chunk of the discussion. Read how one popular journalist describes this dilemma: "I put on my prospector's helmet and mined the literature for an agreed-upon definition of social justice. . . . What I found," he bemoans, "was one deposit after another of fool's gold. From labor unions to countless universities to gay rights groups to even the American Nazi Party, everyone insisted they were champions of social justice."{3}

The word *justice* in Scripture means to prescribe the right way, {4} and the two key metaphors used in Scripture are level scales and an even path (Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Isaiah 1:16-17; Amos 5:21-25; Matthew 23:23). Now any variation of justice could refer to Christian attempts to eradicate human trafficking, help the inner-city needy, creating hospitals and orphanages, overturn racism, and safeguard the unborn. I propose we call this *biblical justice* and use a definition provided by pastor, speaker, and author Dr. Tony Evans: "The equitable and impartial application of the rule of God's moral law in society."{5} He arrives at this definition because God's ways are just (Deuteronomy 32:4) and He is the supreme lawgiver (James 4:12), therefore His laws and judgments are just and righteous (Psalm 19:7-9; 111:7-8). Furthermore, they are to be applied with no partiality (Deuteronomy 1:17;

Leviticus 19:15; Numbers 15:16).

What is social justice then? Recently, *social justice* has brought on an exceptionally charged political meaning. It turned into a brandishing poster for groups like Antifa, which finds physical aggression against persons who believe differently as both morally justified and tactically successful, and praises its underreported verbal beatings. Social justice is the brandishing poster for universities across the country where the "oppressor vs. oppressed" narrative of Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt School (Note: *Oppression* is a biblical term. The prophets precede these authors by millennia! The term or its presence in the world is not automatically in this area.), the deconstructionism of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and the gender and queer theory of Judith Butler have been inserted into the very definition of the term.{6}

As Evans summarizes,

> *Social justice* has become a convoluted term meaning different things to different people. It is often used as a catchphrase for illegitimate forms of government that promote the redistribution of wealth as the collectivistic illegitimate expansion of civil government, which wrongly infringes on the jurisdictions of God's other covenantal institutions (family and church).{7}

However biblical the roots of the term *social justice* are, it has been hijacked (still as some might criticize what is going on for other reasons). There is a concern labels can oversimplify matters and make binary classifications. Pitting "biblical justice" against "social justice" brands is making binary means of seeing ideas and dangers, creating a false dichotomy. Certainly, there are things that the "social justice" group is doing that is other than the biblical response to advocating justice. However, several of the concerns that they are raising are reasonable. One of the

troubles is that they are recommending political solutions to problems that are beyond complicated and in the end need God's divine change of individual hearts. But labels can also clarify distinctions between various models. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I propose when we are discussing *justice,* we aim for the meaning of *biblical justice*. After clarifying and defining terms, we would want to check and make sure all interested parties are on the same page.

CRT

Now I we need to address Critical Race Theory (CRT) because I believe these ideas are a problem that infiltrate Christian thinking and the church. Legal scholar and law professor Richard Delgado defines CRT:

> The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. {8}

I think we can all agree racism is bad, and because CRT has been pushed to the forefront and claims to deal with the issue of racism, it has been extremely easy for Christians to adopt a terrible framework with good intentions. This needs to be corrected. Otherwise, it remains an elephant in the room especially for Neo-Fundamentalist Evangelicals and Mainstream Evangelicals (as defined by Michael Graham here).

As pastor and theologian Dr. Voddie Baucham points out, the movement has several qualities of a cult, including keeping near enough to the Bible to prevent instant exposure and concealing the truth that it has a different theology and a novel lexicon that deviates from Christian orthodoxy. In traditional cult style, they steal from the common and acknowledged, then immerse it with different connotation. {9} The worst part about this theory is there is no final solution to the problem. CRT just offers an endless cycle of division and racism at worst. At best, it draws attention to the sin of racism.

There is much more that can be said on this, and I would suggest anyone who wants to explore this more read the books listed in my bibliography below. Most of them cover CRT in some fashion.

Does Focusing on Biblical Justice Get Us Off Mission?

I want to address the concern of whether focusing on biblical justice gets the church off mission. I think the mission of the church is to equip the saints and make disciples. That is a broad vision. The question is still whether focusing on biblical justice is part of that mission. If it is not already clear in the definition of the term above (even the name *biblical* justice supplies a hint to this answer), I would like to clearly and explicitly answer whether this is part of the mission of the church.

The responsibility of the church is to perform biblical justice for the poor, orphans, widows, foreigners, enemies, oppressed, hungry, homeless, and needy. Scripture concerns biblical justice particularly to these parties as a main matter; for it is these parties that best denote the powerless in the world and take the burden of injustices. The church is not to harm or ostracize the poor (James 2:15-16), or to have

status and racial prejudice (Galatians 2:11-14). Instead, the church is appointed to take on the basic needs of the disadvantaged. I would also point out (particularly for the Evangelical Christians) this does not mean promoting reckless handouts, which the Bible rigorously forbids (2 Thessalonians 3:10; Proverbs 6:9-11; 10:4; 13:18; 30-34).

Furthermore, Probe Ministries President Kerby Anderson made a marvelous point (to me over email) regarding Christians in the workforce: "ALL Christians are to be salt and light. But believers who are CALLED to positions related to justice (judges, lawyers, law enforcement, political leaders) are to use their gifts to promote justice. Not only is that not OFF MISSION, but it is exactly their mission in their job."

Ultimately, *doing justice* satisfies the two highest commandments granted to us by Jesus: to love God and love others (Matthew 22:37-40). "Biblical justice is a foundational part of fulfilling the purpose of the church as intimated by the heart of God. It is a result of God's people becoming one through being what God has called us to be and participating in what He has called us to do—*justice*."{10}

Asians and Other Minorities

Usually, at least in our environment, the discussion about racial friction is likely a black/white discussion, although lately it has come to be obvious that this is not only a black-and-white discussion. Often, people of Asian background are not being addressed in any way. Now the COVID pandemic ignited some racial prejudice and hatred against Chinese individuals and other Asian individuals. What we are getting more in the news and social media is that for Asians, issues have shifted, and matters appear to be extremely different for them. So, you look at these events and, I believe for certain individuals, they are living with more concern since, whether they have faced that sort of prejudice, they are watching it being discussed in the news and on social media. So, for those

that are reading this and even considering this for the first time, I want to point out what is truly a shortage of emotional quotient in the sense we relate with each other. Jesus speaks, “treat people the same way you want them to treat you.” {11} One of the shifts of philosophy demands that we manage to stop seeing people through a lens of stereotypes that we have, and see the one we are relating with individually. I believe it is extremely useful to think about our longing to develop the proper sort of community in our church. The further we take part and understand the various types of life encounters and experiences that individuals have, the richer we will be as we communicate with individuals.

Recommendations for the Church

As Tony Evans says, “Theology must never be limited to esoteric biblical conclusions void of practical strategies for bringing God’s truth to life through our obedience and good works.”{12} The church needs to take the lead in creating unity through clearly showing it in our lives. What I would recommend the church does is follow this three-point plan: {13}

1. *Assemble: Unified Hallowed Meeting*

Build a community-wide pastors’ group that meets consistently and holds a yearly sacred gathering (Isaiah 58:1-12; Ephesians 2:11-22).

a. Begin or enter a racially and denominationally varied community of kingdom-inclined pastors in our community region. A national group has already been formed at letstalklive.org/.

b. Come together consistently with kingdom-inclined pastors to improve relations, offer reciprocal support and to meet the demands of one another.

2. *Address: Unified Caring Tone*

Aggressively cultivate disciples who speak out with unified messaging, presenting biblical truths and answers on current social problems (John 17:13-23; Matthew 28:16-20).

a. Pursue common ground and common goals that encourage biblical answers to current problems needing to be tackled, instead of becoming caught on the areas of conflict. Demonstrate grace.

b. Hold conversation groups and prayer meetings to discover biblical responses to social problems.

3. *Act: Unified Community Affect*

Jointly organize our church to achieve a noticeable spirit of continuing good works enhancing the good of underserved neighborhoods (Jeremiah 29:5-7; Matthew 5:13-16).

a. Create a group for business leaders who would like to help in establishing work prospects and economic growth for underserved areas.

When we work together to *Assemble, Address,* and *Act* for God's kingdom in the public, we will create a larger effect as one. The extent of our unity will affect the extent of our influence.

Notes

1. Darrell L. Bock, *Cultural Intelligence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 54-58.
2. These approaches and intentions are adapted from Bock, *Cultural Intelligence*, 59-60.
3. Jonah Goldberg, "The Problem with 'Social Justice,'" *Indy Star*, February 6, 2019, www.indystar.com/story/opinion/2019/02/10/jonah-goldberg-the-problem-social-justice/2814705002/.
4. Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced* (Chicago, IL: Moody

Publishers, 2022), 328.
5. Evans, 329.
6. Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 4-5.
7. Evans, 328.
8. Richard Delgado, *Critical Race Theory*, Third Edition. NYU Press. Kindle Edition, p. 3.
9. Voddie T. Baucham Jr., *Fault Lines* (Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021), 67.
10. Evans, 335.
11. New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Matthew 7:12.
12. Tony Evans, *Kingdom Race Theology* (Chicago: IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 89.
13. Adapted from *Kingdom Race Theology*, 100.

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Race and Racial Issues – A Biblical Christian Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at the issue of race from a Christian worldview perspective. The Bible clearly teaches that all people are valuable and loved by God with no distinction based on race. As Christians, we are called to set an example by seeing all peoples as worthy of our love and our respect.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Race has divided people in our world for millennia, and the prejudice of racism is still with us today. So in this article we are going to focus on some important aspects of race and racial issues.

At the outset we should acknowledge that, although we will use the term "race" through this discussion, it is not a very precise term. First, the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups. But the Bible doesn't provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences.

The Bible teaches that God has made “from one blood every nation of men” (Acts 17:26). Here Paul is teaching the Athenians that they came from the same source in the creation as everyone else. We are all from one blood. In other words, there are no superior or inferior races. We are all from the same race: the human race.

Race is also an imprecise term in large part because it is not based upon scientific data. People of every race can interbreed and produce fertile offspring. It turns out that the so-called differences in the races is not very great. A recent study of human genetic material of different races concluded that the DNA of any two people in the world would differ by just 2/10ths of one percent.{1} And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. The remaining 94 percent is “within race” variation.

Let’s put it another way. All the racial differences that have been so important to people for generations are statistically insignificant from a scientific point of view. These differences are trivial when you consider the 3 trillion base pairs of human DNA.

A third reason the term “race” also lacks precision is due to interracial marriage. While it is probably true that the so-called races of the world were never completely divided, it is certainly true that the lines are becoming quite blurred today. Take golfer Tiger Woods as one example. His heritage is Thai, black, white, Chinese, and Native American.

Isn’t it ironic that at a time when racial lines are blurring more and more each generation, the government still collects data that requires individuals to check one box that represents their racial or ethnic heritage? A growing number of people are finding it hard to classify themselves by checking just one box.

The Curse on Ham

Sadly, one of the most destructive false teachings supposedly based on the Bible is the so-called “curse on Ham.” Ham was one of Noah’s three sons (along with Shem and Japheth).

In the past, certain cults and even some orthodox Christian groups have held to the belief that the skin color of black people was due to a curse on Ham and his descendants. Unfortunately, this false teaching has been used to justify racial discrimination and even slavery.

One group said, “We know the circumstances under which the posterity of Cain (and later Ham) were cursed with what we call Negroid racial characteristics.”{2} Another group argued that “The curse which Noah pronounced upon Canaan was the origin of the black race.”{3}

First, let’s clearly state that the Bible does not teach that people with black skin color are cursed by God. This curse was not the origin of the black race or black racial characteristics.

Second, it wasn’t Ham who was cursed but his son Canaan (Gen. 9:18-27; 10:6). Only one of Ham’s four sons (Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan) was cursed, so how could all black people be cursed?

As it turns out, the curse on Canaan has unfolded in history. The descendants of Canaan were perhaps one of the most wicked people to live on earth. They were the inhabitants, for example, of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Third, even if a curse is given, the Bible clearly places limitations on curses to three or four generations. In Exodus 20:5-6 God says, “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the

fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Notice that this passage seems to teach that curses based upon disobedience are reversed when people repent and turn back to obedience. So not only is a curse limited, obedience to God's principles can break it.

Fourth, the Bible teaches that the fulfillment of the curse on Canaan took place with the defeat and subjugation of Canaan by Israel (Joshua 9:23; 1 Kings 9:20-21). This had nothing to do with placing black people under a permanent curse.

Although the idea of "the curse on Ham" has been dying a well-deserved death, it is still important to remember that not so long ago people were misinterpreting a biblical passage to justify their racism and discrimination. No one race or people group is inferior to any other. In fact, the Bible teaches that preferences based upon race, class, or ethnic origin are sinful and subject to God's judgment (James 2:9-13). All of us are created in God's image (Gen. 1:27) and have value and dignity.

Racism

Racism has no doubt been the scourge of humanity. It usually surfaces from generalized assumptions made about a particular race or cultural group. While it is wrong and unfair to assign particular negative characteristics to everyone within a racial group, it is done all the time. The bitter result of these racial attitudes is intolerance and discrimination.

Often racism goes beyond just individual attitudes. These racial attitudes can become the mindset of a particular people group who may use cultural as well as legal means to suppress another race. These cultural norms and laws can be used by the

majority race to exploit and discriminate against the minority race.

Although racism has existed throughout the centuries, it gained an unexpected ally in the scientific realm in the nineteenth century. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous work *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection of the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. It was the last part of that title that no doubt furthered some of the ideas of racial superiority that flourished during that time.

It is not at all clear that Darwin meant to apply the concept of favored races in this particular book to human beings. In fact, he did write more on this subject later, but the provocative nature of the subtitle was enough to fuel discussions about racial superiority and inferiority. Later Darwinists took the concept far beyond what Charles Darwin intended.

So why do people hold racist attitudes? Three reasons are: feelings of pride, feelings of inferiority, and feelings of fear. Pride and arrogance fuel racism. When we are proud of who we are, we can easily look down upon those who are different from us and do not manifest the same characteristics that we do. We can start believing we are superior to another person or race.

Racism, however, can come from the opposite end of the emotional spectrum: inferiority. We may not feel good about ourselves. So in order to feel good about ourselves, we disparage another person or race.

Racism also results from fear. We fear what we don’t understand. We fear what is strange and foreign. Racial and cultural differences may even seem dangerous to us. Racial attitudes can surface if we don’t seek to know and understand those who are different from us.

We should stand strong against racism and racist attitudes wherever we find them: in the society, in individuals, even within the church.

Biblical Perspective

We have already noted that the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups, but the Bible doesn't provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences. The Bible teaches that God has made "of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26 KJV).

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority. In Philippians 2, Paul admonishes the Christians to live in harmony with one another. They are to have a gentle spirit toward one another, and to let this gentle spirit be known to others.

Christians are also admonished to refrain from using class distinctions within the church. In James 2, believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people. They are not to show partiality within the church. Showing favoritism is called sin and the one showing favoritism is convicted by the law. Surely these commands would also apply to holding views of racial superiority and inferiority.

Likewise Paul instructs Timothy (1 Tim. 5:21) to keep his instructions without partiality and to do nothing out of favoritism. This command would also exclude making racial distinctions based on a view of racial superiority.

Finally, we see that Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ. For example, he teaches in Colossians 3:11 that "there is no distinction between Greek and Jew,

circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." This is a significant passage because it shows that Christ has removed four kinds of distinctions: national distinctions (Greek or Jew), religious distinctions (circumcised or uncircumcised), cultural distinctions (barbarian or Scythian), and economic distinctions (slave or free).

A similar passage would be Galatians 3:28: "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." In Christ, our human distinctions lose their significance. No one is superior to another. A believing Jew is not superior to a believing Greek. A believing slave is of no higher rank than a believing free person.

Racism and racist attitudes are wrong. Christians should work to remove such ideas and attitudes from society.

Becoming Culturally Sensitive

Here are some suggestions on how to become more sensitive to differences in race and culture.

First, we need to take an accurate assessment of ourselves. Often our assumptions and predispositions affect the way we perceive and even treat others. A person who says he or she has no prejudices is probably in denial. All of us perceive the world differently and find it easier to accept people who are like us and harder to understand people who are different from us.

Our cultural worldview affects how we perceive others. It affects how we evaluate what others think and what others do. So an important first step in becoming more racial and culturally sensitive is to evaluate ourselves.

Second, we should try to empathize with others. We must start

learning how to look at life and our circumstances from the viewpoint of others. Instead of trying to make others think like us, we should strive to begin to begin to think like them. That doesn't mean we have to agree with their viewpoint, but it does mean that becoming empathetic will be helpful in bridging racial and cultural barriers.

Third, learn to withhold judgment. Tolerance (in the biblical sense of the word) is a virtue we should cultivate. We should be willing to put aside our critical thinking and judgment until we know someone better. Taking the time to listen and understand the other person will help build bridges and dismantle barriers that often separate and isolate races and cultures.

Fourth, do not consider yourself superior to another. One of the root causes of racism is a belief in racial superiority. Paul tell us in Romans 12:3 that a man should not "think more highly of himself than he ought to think." Differences in race and culture should never be used to justify feelings of racial superiority which can lead to racist attitudes.

Fifth, develop cross cultural traits. A missionary who goes overseas must learn to develop personal traits that will make him or her successful in a new and different culture. Likewise, we should develop these traits so that we can reach across a racial and cultural divide. Friendliness and open communication are important. Flexibility and open-mindedness are also important. Developing these traits will enhance our ability to bridge a racial and cultural gap.

Finally, we should take a stand. We shouldn't tell (or allow others to tell) racial and ethnic jokes. These are demeaning to others and perpetuate racism and racial attitudes. Instead we should be God's instrument in bring about racial reconciliation. We should seek to build bridges and close the racial and cultural divide between people groups and reach out with the love of Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. J. C. Gutin, “End of the Rainbow,” *Discover,* Nov. 1994, 71-75.
2. Bruce McConkie, “Apostle of the Mormon Council of 12,” *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake: Bookcraft,1958), 554.
3. “The Golden Age,” *The Watchtower,* 24 July 1929, 702.

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