

SEGREGATED SUNDAY:
ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES FOR A UNITED CHURCH

By

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B. S., University of Texas at Austin, 1981

A Thesis

Submitted to the faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Religion
at Reformed Theological Seminary

Charlotte, North Carolina
January 2011

Accepted:

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ABSTRACT
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Though much has been written on this subject, the unwavering lack of unity among black and white brothers and sisters during Sunday morning worship is appalling. Or is it? What does the Bible say about segregation during worship and prayer? Some Christians resolutely believe there is nothing wrong with all black and all white churches stating the ever-popular anthem, ‘birds of a feather flock together.’

Being Christian marks us all as one flock regardless of skin color. The state of ‘being one in the Lord’ trumps any differences we see with our eyes. Our spirits together testify that Jesus is God and therefore we miss out when we divide and split for sacred assembly. We have more in common than not. Yet in spite of the promised benefits God offers us when we are united in Him, we tend to stay put in our comfort zones. Isn’t taking risks, leaving our comfort zone and putting shoe leather to our faith part of what being a Christian is all about? Our Guide is reliable and trustworthy.

If you believe, as do I, that God wants the world to see Him through the unity of the brethren, you will do whatever it takes to create diversity in your church and life but especially on Sunday morning. By God’s design, we are a kaleidoscope of colors, shapes and sizes and by His design our souls are knit together with His and each other’s. There are many solutions for a united church, the problem seems to be applying and implementing them. There are a plethora of scriptures that support this case and give many good reasons for desegregating Sunday. Given our addiction to comfort in this great nation, it is easier

said than done but we need to work together with the goal of making it a reality. My prayer is that this thesis inspires you to pray and then just do something—anything— towards racial reconciliation. Every little bit helps.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Much has been accomplished in developing relationships between blacks and whites in business, politics and marital unions but integrating the two races for worship on the Lord's Day has remained relatively the same—segregated. Most churches today are primarily all black or all white. Why is that? Are Christians to blame? The Apostle John in the Book of Revelation gives us a picture of Heaven's unified church body where different nations, tongues and tribes are worshiping together (Rev. 7:9).¹ If Jesus asked his followers to pray for Heaven on Earth (in the Lord's Prayer, Matt. 6:9) why has this task been so difficult to achieve during the time set aside for the gathering of saints to worship their Lord? Is it needful and important for different races to worship together as Christians and if so, why? Exploration will begin with the history of the church in 20th century America and move into problem solving and possible solutions to integrate the races for Sunday morning worship.

As a white family, my parents did not mind mixing with other races except on Sunday morning when we attended an all-white Episcopal church. I am of Swedish, German, and English descent and was raised in New Orleans, Louisiana in the 1960's. My parents never minded us being the only white people in a crowd whether in a Popeye's Fried Chicken restaurant in New Orleans or at a public swimming pool in Pueblo, Colorado. Never did

¹ All scriptures are from the New American Standard Bible, (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1960).

I hear my parents say an unkind word about any race or nationality. A black girl in my neighborhood once stole my bicycle and my mom grabbed me and went to retrieve it. I don't remember how she did it but she did get it back but she never made a comment about the girl's race nor did she condemn an entire people group over it.

My sisters and I started attending the public schools in New Orleans but my parents became concerned when they learned that the lesson plan was nothing but coloring in coloring books and that we were not being taught to read and write. With the help of my grandparents, they enrolled us in private school. I remember two black girls attending my private school but I don't remember anyone being rude or cruel nor do I remember anything specific except noticing that their skin color was different than mine and that they were very pretty. (But I surmise they likely experienced some trying times because of their skin color—it was a common place experience in our country at the time.) I do wish my parents would have told me to reach out to them, that they were probably scared and needed a kind word but alas, my parents, it seemed were no different than most white families in America at that time. Therefore, my family was part of the problem and not the solution. There was no intentionality on their part to bring other races into our family's sphere of friends. They had no intentions of leaving the comfort zone of the status quo and in the words of *West Side Story*—“stick with your own kind.” But is this simply an example of the axiom, ‘birds of a feather flock together?’ A blogger on the subject of segregated Sunday mentioned that it is not racist to want to be with your own kind because she agreed, ‘birds of a feather flock together.’ She said that just because blacks like hanging out with blacks and whites with whites, does not mean that anyone is racist. Is this true and if it is, does it make it right? As Christians, we aren't to do what is comfortable or what comes naturally but we are to

conform and transform to God's way, not the world's way (1 Cor. 12:1, 2). Edward Gilbreath in his book, *Reconciliation Blues* quotes Ellis Cose, "People do not have to be racist—or have any malicious intent—in order to make decisions that unfairly harm members of another race. They simply have to do what comes naturally."¹ If God asks us to leave our comfort zone and reach across racial lines in the name of loving our brother then we are to do just that. As Christians, we are children of God first. We are all 'our own kind' in the eyes of God. As the children's song goes, 'red, yellow, black or white, we are precious in His sight.' My family ought to have tried to apply Biblical principles and God's teachings to help make it a reality here on Earth. I don't think we even knew what those principles and teachings were.

My family went to a Christian church and we called ourselves Christians but were we really? Were we part of the Invisible Church or just the visible church? You can stand in a garage and call yourself a car but does that make you a car? There are plenty of people who call themselves Christians and act like the devil and the truth of this is clearly seen in the treatment of the African-Americans in America's Christian churches. What was the imperative that Jesus gave His disciples in John 13? He said that this is how the world knows we belong to Him when we dwell and live in unity. He also tells them and ultimately us—the Church—that this is how the world knows that God sent Jesus when we reflect and radiate unity among the brethren (John 17). But what did the world see and still sees? It sees a segregated body of Christ.

In the 70's we moved to Houston, Texas and lost the diversity that was found in New Orleans. During high school, college at The University of Texas at Austin and graduate

¹ Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 19; Ellis Cose, *The Rage of a Privileged Class: Why Are Middle-class Blacks Angry? Why Should America Care?* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 4.

school in Los Angeles, California, never did I learn any black history or what 250 years of oppression can do to a person. It wasn't until I moved to Virginia that I discovered many open wounds still seeping sadness. I learned that in the hearts of many black people, most white people in the southern Christian church (and all throughout America) lacked education on African American history and issues. Thank God for some black brothers and sisters in my new cross-cultural church home—I got educated. I never hated or looked down upon any race or felt superior to anyone but what I did lack was awareness that not all was Pollyanna in the Church of Jesus Christ. What I lacked was a chance, an opportunity to connect at a deeper level, to empathize, to look into the heart of someone whose parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were bitterly oppressed in our nation's history. I learned through my church that even though I never owned a slave, as a white person I probably cashed in on the opportunities made available to me because of the color of my skin. When I learned this, I finally understood something very strange that was said to me in a Los Angeles hospital/clinic. I was freelancing in my job at the time and did not have health insurance and needed a procedure done so I went to the 'free clinic.' In the waiting room were many ladies of all shapes, sizes and colors—I didn't think anything of it. Two white doctors performed the procedure but before they did, they said to me, "you don't belong here." I thought that was strange because I did belong there—it is where you go when you don't have any money and at that time I didn't have any. But looking back, through not-so-naïve-anymore-eyes, I am sure they meant that because I was a blond, blue-eyed white woman, I shouldn't have to lower myself to the economic standards of the other women in the waiting room. This took place in 1993. I would say oppression is alive and well and we still have work to do.

I have since asked blacks at my church, my age and younger, older ones too, about their childhood and if they encountered mean spirited whites who used skin color as the reason for their behavior and the answer was yes. I was floored and my heart broke from my lack of knowledge about a time in our country's history where a race of human beings was treated worse than animals. I was saddened for my race's treatment of blacks and for my lack of compassion and sympathy as I lived my life happy-go-lucky not knowing the tremendous torture, physically and emotionally that took place in the lives of many beautiful, smart, talented, kind, black people and of my place in the world—one of privilege and opportunity. Why wasn't I taught this? Yes, I learned about slavery but it seemed so yesterday, so far away in the past. Many history books and novels have been written but why aren't white people made to read them in high school or college? It appears that only blacks are given reading assignments on African American studies in addition to history lessons of white people's contributions to America and the world. This nation did (and still does) a great disservice to all its citizens by neglecting to teach the magnificent worldwide history of African Americans.

I don't believe any church today in America purposely keeps any race out of their church but of course I could be wrong. But these well-intentioned brothers and sisters in Christ are not intentionally stressing the importance of preserving individual's cultures and acknowledging and appreciating the differences within the body of Christ. It is not a matter of assimilation. Dr. Sam Larsen maintains that the solution isn't a 'blender race'² but it is one of seeing the different races, languages, and cultures as a dynamic worthy to promote in our churches. This takes a purposeful, intentional crossing over barriers even if it is uncomfortable at first, relying on the Holy Spirit to teach and to guide knowing that diversity

² Sam Larsen, "The Church: Blender or Symphony?" *Reformed Quarterly*, Fall 2007, 12.

began in the garden way back in Genesis. We are all children of Adam and Eve and for that matter, Noah and his wife. The church ought to apply the principles God set forth in scripture. We have this responsibility and obligation to understand and obey.

Sin is in every heart. To look inside for possible problems is the first step. A problem must be acknowledged if a solution is to be found. I came to the realization that I needed to repent and change. I decided I would no longer listen to racial jokes nor would I tell them thinking they were harmless. I also decided to state publically before blacks and before God that I was sorry for not being a part of the solution and by not being intentional and reaching out across racial barriers; I was part of the problem. You see, as Christians, God calls us to live differently and I felt I had fallen far short in this area. At a church dinner between a few black and white churches in our area, I confessed my sins and asked forgiveness for my race and for my ancestors that owned slaves or who were cruel in any way to any race. I then did a ‘performance art’ to the DC Talk song, ‘Colored People.’ It was received well and I realized then how important it was to say ‘I’m sorry.’

I also was part of a round-robin discussion in my church on race relations. To my shame and in my ignorance I voiced, “We are all new creatures in Christ and we are to repent, forgive and move on.” This is all true but it leaves no room for empathy and understanding much less solutions for a unified church and its people who still feel the sting of the past. This is what a black man said to me while he gently corrected my statement—that healing takes time. It was the beginning of a journey to do anything and everything I could, with God’s help, to right a wrong and to help a people group succeed who had been demoralized and intentionally kept down for so long. This thesis is part of that goal.

Literary Review

Much has been written on racial reconciliation but few as prolific as author John Perkins. His two books, *Let Justice Roll Down* and *With Justice For All* are his most passionate pleas for American churches to be responsible for change. Christians are the force to stand for reconciliation across barriers of race. Another book of his, *Beyond Charity*, says that creating friendships between the races, being intentional, not just charitable, is a solution to the problem of segregated Sunday. He believes this is the problem; “Homogeneity does not mirror the image of God. It cheapens the people who proclaim it and mocks God’s call for us to be agents of reconciliation.”³ America is filled with homogeneous churches. This is not what God had in mind when you read the book of Acts where at Pentecost, many nationalities and races received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). Mr. Perkins has contributed considerably on this topic and those Christians who are actively working towards healing the church and their communities by building bridges between the races, most likely have heard of the work done by this remarkable man.⁴

If Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had lived longer, imagine how much more he would have written. Certainly he was a reconciling force, a strong and powerful activist on the front lines of change for desegregation. It was Dr. King who coined the phrase, “Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of Christian America.”⁵ His book, *Why We Can’t Wait*,

³ John M. Perkins, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 49.

⁴ John M. Perkins has been ministering for over 40 years, published Urban Family Magazine, written 11 books and many articles and is the recipient of numerous awards. See: <http://www.journeytowardforgiveness.com/stories/perkins/biography.asp>

⁵ Available from <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/10/06/why-sunday-morning-remains-america-most-segregated-hour>; internet; accessed 14 September 2011.

dives into the causes and effects of segregated churches. He thoroughly looks into the hearts of black men not allowed in white churches and the effect it had on the community.

Growing Up Black provides a plethora of historical scenarios in the life of African Americans trying to live side by side with whites in a volatile America. This book shows us the lives of black men and women who wanted nothing more than to live free and to be contributing members of society all the while trying to establish a world where skin color was irrelevant. Of course Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”⁶

Bigger Thomas, Richard Wright’s character in his novel *Native Son*, was more interested in just surviving than he was in becoming a contribution to his world around him. The novel reads more like nonfiction as it explains the mentality behind 200 plus years of oppression and slavery. The effects of it cannot be eradicated in just one or two generations. *Native Son* was published in 1940 and chosen by the ‘Book of the Month Club’ but Wright was told to delete a couple controversial scenes in the book to which he obliged. How tragic that they asked him to give up his freedom of speech. Those scenes have now been added back to his censored book. Again, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said in his book *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable . . . Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”⁷

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr.’s I Have A Dream Speech, August 28, 1966 on the Mall in Washington DC.

⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 197.

Many authors have written about the struggle between blacks and whites and how they need to heal the issues that keep them angry with each other. Karen Hunter's book, *Stop Being Niggardly: And Nine Other Things Black People Need to Stop Doing* packs a punch for both races. She challenges the black community to be thick skinned and not take everything so personally. She also encourages her race to "roll up their collective sleeves, channel their anger constructively and start fixing their own problems."⁸ She gives everyone the charge to "practice faith in everyday life."⁹

Many authors write about unity but more importantly, the unity that can best be described as biblical unity found in the Bible. Author Elbert Ransom in *Bridging the Divide: The Driving Quest for Bringing About an Amalgamation of Diverse American Cultures*, seeks to bring answers to Christians in America. He wants to narrow the gap between cultures and races and unite under the banner of Christianity. He was a civil rights advocate and an aide to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His insight into the problem of segregated Sunday and what causes this division could help bridge that gap.

Many historical books attempt to show causes and reasons for hatred and division among the races. The book *The Debt: What America Owes To Blacks* by Randall Robinson, focuses on wrongs done to African Americans in this country and how we can possibly right those wrongs. More importantly, he tells us what he believes blacks owe themselves. He considers himself a problem solver and wants reconciliation through restitution. Restitution is one of those controversial topics and he doesn't mince words in giving his opinion. The Bible gives examples of restitution and they will be compared with those Robinson writes in his book. He gives many fecund solutions that may or may not be substantiated by scripture.

⁸ Karen Hunter, *Stop Being Niggardly*, (New York: Gallery Books, 2010), inside cover flap.

⁹ Ibid., inside cover flap.

Bruce Mann is a well-known contemporary of John Perkins and has written books for the purpose of reconciliation. He attempts to inspire the church to resist resting on her laurels by crossing the road—literally and metaphorically. In his book, *Why Jesus Crossed the Road: Learning to Follow the Unconventional Travel Itinerary of a First Century Carpenter and His Ragtag Group of Friends as They Hop Fences, Cross Borders, and Generally Go Where Most People Don't*, Mann stresses the need for the church get out and get busy by way of intentionally working toward unity among the brethren and leaving their comfort zone behind. He says that Jesus crossed roads and barriers that other people detoured around so why wasn't the church following Christ's example? He tries to encourage the church to enter the lives of others and to avoid making our desire for comfort and security an idol.

Another source for solutions to the problem of segregated Sunday (we will explore whether it actually is a problem later on) is Norman Anthony Peart's book *Separate No More: Understanding and Developing Reconciliation in Your Church*. He has a vision for reconciliation of the races and attempts to provide solutions for a unified church. He says that it is not an option for Christians to work towards this goal because as Christians, we are to do it—to live in unity so the world will know about God (John 13).

A giant in the band of brothers for a reconciled church is A. Charles Ware. In his book, *Prejudice and the People of God: How Revelation and Redemption Lead to Reconciliation*, Ware seeks to answer many questions about the issues surrounding segregated Sunday and the results that continue to plague the church today. He describes in his book the biblical pattern for unity and resolution so that the church may live in harmony as one people seeking the same goal as followers of Jesus Christ.

Breaking Down Walls: A Model For Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife is a book—a story—of two men, one black and one white and how their relationship furthers the kingdom of God. These two men show that followers of Christ need to overcome racial strife in our witness to a lost and dying world. Author Raleigh Washington was treated unfairly in his life, without justice because of his skin color and he reminds us of the choices we have as Christians—we can become bitter or better. Author Glen Kehrein asks whites to remember the hurts caused upon our black brethren and the benefits we have more than likely received just because of our skin color. He says that it is important to acknowledge this instead of sweeping it under the rug and sticking our head in the sand.

He's My Brother is a must read for anyone contemplating whether or not peace among enemies can be achieved through Christ. The answer is yes and amen according to authors John Perkins, a black activist and Thomas A. Tarrants, III, a former Klansman. It is a disturbing read in the Klansman's 'life before Christ'—but a stand up and shout 'halleluiaah' for his life after Christ. Hatred festers the mind and causes gangrene of the soul. *He's My Brother* shows explicitly what darkness brings before Jesus sheds His glorious light.

Biblical Analysis

What does the Bible say about separate worship between the races, languages and cultures? Is it biblical to have an all-white or all-black church? During the civil rights movement, was it Christian to turn away blacks from worshiping in the church? Was it Christian to commit the sin of omission by not getting involved? Did Christians let evil spread like cancer by not speaking against the atrocities that took place against the black man in every century of America's history? Did Christians join Satan's side by doing nothing, as in the words of the 18th century philosopher Edmund Burke, "The only thing necessary for

the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing?” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would not make it possible for white men and women to do nothing. He made sure that they saw the evil and brought it out into the light. He proposed that, “if such credit is given to any single group, it might well go to the segregationists, who, with their callous and cynical code, helped to arouse and ignite the righteous wrath of the Negro.”¹⁰ He quotes then President John F. Kennedy saying that these evil men have done a good deal for civil-rights legislation this year! Joseph said to his brothers in Genesis 50:20, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.” How the human race has treated the black race or any other race for that matter is inexcusable but God will make a better way through the tenacity and commitment of His people. He will restore what the locusts have eaten (Joel 2:25). I heard a black pastor once say that “fighting for freedom made the white man better.” In *Growing Up Black*, a former slave said that some white people, after buying a slave for the first time, would go from being kind to cruel because she believed the reason was that no human could enslave another. She said that having that kind power over another human being leads to evil. In the Bible, God had harsh criticism of any one who treated slaves unkindly. God asked Abraham to circumcise his male slaves and by doing so, they were to enter into the covenant established by God for His people (Gen. 17:12). The Apostle Paul implores Philemon to treat his slave Onesimus as a fellow brother in the Lord (Philem. 1:16). Maybe it is more appropriate to say that as Christians, those who have ‘put on’ Christ (Rom. 13:14, Gal. 3:27) and have the Holy Spirit, are to treat everyone according to the Golden Rule—“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 7:12).”

¹⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1963), 163.

My Jewish tour guide in Israel once said, “thank God for the Holocaust for it was the first time in human history where people had compassion for the Jews and we got our country back.” Of course, no one but a Jew could say this because only a Jew can understand that kind of oppression and then choose to see the ‘silver lining.’ (Palestinians believe the land belongs to them. Both Jew and Gentile, whether living in the land of the Bible or elsewhere hopefully someday will learn that Jesus is the Temple and God’s children are ‘living stones’ (1 Pet. 2: 5) therefore the land becomes irrelevant.) Likewise, only a black man understands what it is like being black. The black man was oppressed and therefore is to exercise biblical forgiveness and it was predominately the white man who did the oppressing therefore he puts forth, continuously, an attitude of repentance. Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery but the brothers knew he had the right to kill them for what they did (Gen. 50:15). Joseph chose not to exercise this right under the law but to seek a higher law, God’s law of love. This doesn’t mean that Joseph wasn’t sad and hurt over his mistreatment by his brothers, on the contrary, Genesis 45:1 says that he wept bitterly when he saw his brothers remembering what they did to him. The pain is real today for many, if not most, of our African American brothers and sisters. It is essential to come along side of that pain instead of saying ‘just get over it.’

1 Kings 18:21 reads, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” The prophet Elijah was sick and tired of his brethren bending to the culture instead of changing the culture. They were not only calling themselves followers of the one true God but they also participated in pagan worship. There must have been some white men and women Christians (and non-Christians for that matter) who spoke out against the horrors of slavery and southern segregation. The black man could

not rely on most of the churches to help. Of all places white Christians should have been following God would have been in their churches while worshipping God with their black brethren. Clarence Shuler concluded, “Blacks in many cases, though, have not been able to depend on many of their white Christian brothers for help in areas of injustice. In most cases, black have had to depend on the government for help in the area of injustice. Sometimes, it was the white Christian brothers who were the source of the injustices.”¹¹ Why didn’t the church join Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in saying that you are either with us or against us? Dr. King said that this nation “will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”¹² The good people he is speaking of are his fellow Christians who let injustice roll down instead of damming it up. The status quo can be very comfortable and addictive. It is not too harsh to accuse the church of being comfort addicts and not wanting to rock the boat. Thank God for the Elijah’s of the world who think that the boat needs to be rocked off its status quo mooring. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. saw the need to remove the anchor of the white stronghold. He summed up the problem well saying, “The white power structure had frozen into position. Injustice was not an evil to be corrected even partially—it was an institution to be defended.”¹³ Addiction to the status quo and comfort zones was alive and well back then in Elijah’s day and certainly can be found in our churches today.

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” is God’s word to Amos in Amos 5:24. In Amos’ day, the poor were oppressed and treated harshly. In verse 11 of the same chapter Amos tells the people that God knows they are

¹¹ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 100.

¹² Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1963), 99.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 141.

putting heavy rents on the poor and accepting bribes. Therefore God reminds them about the need for justice and righteousness. Where were the bible-believing Christians during the time when blacks were being oppressed? Did they not read this verse? Were they convinced that this verse did not apply to this situation? God, according to His word, expects His children to be on the side of justice as much today as was then. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote from his Birmingham jail to fellow preachers in response to them telling him not to be ‘so extreme’ and to ‘wait for God.’ Dr. King’s response was biblical. He was asking for his God-given right—the right to exist and to live free. He was accused of being an extremist and his reply was that the black man was not sinning in his anger but demonstrating peacefully the wrongs and injustices being done to mankind. He reminded them that “Jesus Christ was an extremist for love, truth, and goodness and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.”¹⁴ Jesus came to preach to the poor, release the captives, and free those who are oppressed (Luke 4:16). It seems many of today’s Christians have been acting like those in Amos’ day.

In Genesis 2:18, God says that it is not good for man to be alone. We need each other and are to live interdependently. No man is an island as the saying goes and it is especially true for Christians who seek to obey the teaching of the Bible. The writer of Hebrews 10:25 commands his fellow believers to continue worshiping together. He says, “Stimulate one another to love and good deeds not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another.” How are we going to be ambassadors for Christ if we never leave our comfort zone? This was a problem then and it still is today for church goers. In *Bridging the Divide*, Elbert Ransom expands on Genesis 2:18 believing, “to be in

¹⁴ Ibid., 103.

communion with like minds and spirits is God's way of assuring peace and solidarity. In our celebrated human diversity, as we maximize our strength, we should not allow any self-imposed barriers to further divide us . . . we must covenant together to enter into a new sphere of living outside of our comfort zones."¹⁵ Let us not continue being alone with our own color. Let us expand our horizons and truly enjoy the people of God.

Solidarity is what the early church was all about. 'They went about in one accord,' the gospel writer Luke says in the book of Acts (Acts 5:12). It is biblical to worship God together in one accord and this has nothing to do with skin color, language or culture. The biblical picture of Heaven makes this very clear when the Apostle John sees Heaven and describes the people whom God has saved for Himself; "men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9)." Carl Ellis in his book, *Free At Last?* basically describes a non-racist Christian as one who believes and practices the teachings of the Bible: "Unlike evolution, however, the theory of creation derives from God's Word. God was there at the beginning, and humankind was not. An explanation of the origin of race consistent with creation will lead to human equality, because we are all in God's image. Thus if creationists are racist, they are being inconsistent with their framework."¹⁶ Heaven isn't segregated and Jesus in the Lord's Prayer says we should pray for Heaven on Earth (Matt. 6:9). We long for Heaven and are sojourners and pilgrims here on Earth (Heb. 11:13-16). In his book *Prejudice and the People of God*, A. Charles Ware explains it this way, "Truly we seek a better country, heaven. We should start preparing now for how life will be then. Heaven is

¹⁵ Elbert Ransom, Jr., *Bridging the Divide*, (LaVergne, TN: Xulon Press, 2010), 30.

¹⁶ Carl F. Ellis, Jr., *Free At Last?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 149.

not a segregated country. The church should not be a segregated assembly.”¹⁷ With God all things are possible (Matt. 19:26).

In *Bridging the Divide*, Elbert Ransom reminds Christians of what the Apostle Paul said in Acts 20:28, “be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” The Apostle Paul then goes on to warn them of wolves seeking to harm the flock. It is the lone sheep that is vulnerable. Many of our black brothers and sisters were vulnerable and probably felt abandoned because the church as a whole did not lift a voice or a hand to help and left them out in the cold to fend for themselves. Ransom wants this behavior in the church to cease; “Wolves continue to attack and penetrate, destroying unity. When we break rank, we become easy prey. America is vulnerable, because our ranks are fractured, and our leaders are misguided and have assisted in our ranks being broken.”¹⁸ A united church desegregated is stronger against evil than one that is segregated. Abram (his name before God changed it to Abraham) understood this kind of godly unity in his relationship with his nephew Lot. Their herdsmen were fighting and arguing because their flocks were grazing on the same fields. It was probably hard getting the sheep and goats all fed and this was causing the herdsman stress. Genesis 13 records his response, “So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers.’” Abram gave up his rights and allowed Lot to choose and of course Lot chose the better piece of land but as the saying goes, ‘would you rather be happy or right!’ Abram saw the wisdom in preserving unity and being a peacemaker even

¹⁷ A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 145.

¹⁸ Elbert Ransom, Jr., *Bridging the Divide*, (LaVergne, TN: Xulon Press, 2010), 37.

though the solution was separation. Abram prevented the herdsmen from blaspheming God by removing the contention. Why wasn't 'mending fences' instead of putting up fences a solution for Abram? John Gill in his Bible Exposition describes Abram's decision this way; "We are men, let us act like such, the rational and humane part; they were brethren being men, so by nature all are brethren; by natural relation, Lot being the son of his brother Haran; brethren in religion, of the same faith in the one true and living God, and worshippers of him; and therefore on all accounts, by the ties of nature, relation, and religion, they were obliged to seek and cultivate peace and love."¹⁹ A little elbow room for the herdsmen was Abram's solution for peace. Let us today go and do likewise being peacemakers for it is written, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9)."

The Apostle Paul asks his fellow brethren to exemplify Christ and tells us how to do this in Christ's hymn, Philippians 2:1-11 saying, ' . . . make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.' This scripture alone should cause any Christian to look after his brother; to go out into the world and be a blessing to others. Tom Tarrants left his life of hatred as a Klansman when he got saved by Jesus Christ and now as a pastor of a cross-cultural church, he serves the people he once tormented—African Americans. Quoting Sam Hines he says, "Humility is hard for powerful people. It is easier to humiliate than to be humble. The desire to be on top, to get ahead, to tower over, can corrupt aspiration and pollute ambition." "Sadly," he says, "this is

¹⁹ John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, (London: Matthews & Leigh, 1810), vol. 1: [100].

the case not only in the world, but too often in the Church and with her leaders.”²⁰ Love and unity intent on one purpose should be the cross-cultural church’s mantra.

People were dealt harshly by God when they worshiped other gods and disobeyed the covenant they swore allegiance to uphold. There was never an issue of race in either His punishments or blessings. The Jews got the same treatment as the gentiles. Joshua said to the Jews “choose for yourselves today whom you will serve (Josh. 24:15).” Choose wrong and there would be consequences. There is no room for racism as taught in the Bible, only love and compassion as we seek to obey Christ and serve one another in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. Norman Anthony Peart beautifully clarifies, “As ethnicity in the Bible is not allowed to hide the compassion and purpose God has for all humanity, so racism comes under the same prohibition in our modern society. Such an understanding mandates that the racial divisions within America must not be the standard that Christians use to determine those individuals with whom they should or should not have intimate relationships.”²¹ As Christians, we are defined by what God says about us, not the culture. Peart continues along this theme by saying, “It [the Bible] literally calls Christians to question the reality of the world around them and to then accept or reject that reality based on its conformity to the Word of God.”²² Nothing changes if nothing changes and change, even good change, can be scary. Doesn’t a tiger return to its cage in order to seek comfort rather than change? Change is unfamiliar but the Spirit beckons people to examine their beliefs and what they have been taught. Isn’t this what Paul praised the Bereans for? He says that they

²⁰ John Perkins, Thomas A Tarrants, III, *He’s My Brother*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books, 1994), 204.

²¹ Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 103.

²² *Ibid.*, 109.

searched the scriptures to see if what he was saying was true or not (Acts 17:11). Peart says that the American church has been unsuccessful in leaving the world's values out of the church. He believes the reason is the church's unbelief. The church doesn't seem to believe or they don't seem to care and act as if reconciliation is unattainable. But Jesus has broken down the barrier (Eph. 2:14). He has made one man from two, Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:15). The Apostle Paul declared that there was "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 (Gal. 3:28)." But Paul here is not asking us to give up who we are—our culture, our language or our gender. I am one in Christ Jesus with other Christians but I am still a female and not a male. We did not all become the same at salvation. The point is God doesn't show partiality and neither should we (Gal. 2:6). Even the prophet Samuel was guilty of looking at outside appearances for what he thought a king should look like. He thought a king should be mature, tall, and good-looking but God led him to the shepherd boy David. God told Samuel in 1 Samuel 6:7, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Dr. Ben Carson, the famous African American neurosurgeon, said when he opens a brain, "I can't tell whether it's a black brain, white brain, Asian brain or Hispanic brain. They are all the same. That's what makes you the person you are. Not the racial stuff." And when responding to the reality of poverty among blacks he said, "I would do that [help the poor] whether the inner city people were black, white, yellow or polka dot. It wouldn't matter because that is what we are supposed to do. That's what we [Christians]

have been called to do.”²³ Accepting our ‘outer’ differences shows maturity in our faith walk. When comfort becomes an idol, it will be sought at all costs. But if we are going to grow in the Lord we need to leave the nest of feathery down comfort and get busy doing God’s will even though His will could be challenging and possibly uncomfortable.

²³ Joel Freeman. “Dr. Ben Carson: an Inner View,” *Everyday Matters Magazine*, May 2010, vol.1, no.1, 2.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY FROM THE CHURCH'S PERSPECTIVE

The history of the American church has surely brought God a lot of pain in the area of racial reconciliation. Kirk Franklin sings, "It doesn't matter what color you are as long as your blood was red. We may be different but the God we serve's the same. Yet every Sunday we separate and bring the Father pain."¹ Why did most people from the 19th century (and even up to today), believe that blacks and whites could never live side by side as neighbors? It seems as though segregation was set in stone like gravity. Where was the church? Our founding fathers preached a good tune, quoting the Bible and giving us an amazing Declaration of Independence but still felt it was necessary, much less right, to own another human being. Even Thomas Jefferson said that freedom was a gift from God and everyone has a right to it so why did he keep his slaves? At the end of his life, after contemplating freeing the slaves, he wrote, "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate that these people are to be free. Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government."² What Bible were they reading? How could anyone watch the treatment of slaves, whether men, women or children and then say their prayers at night asking for the blessings of God? *Growing Up Black* describes the conditions for slave children in the 19th century,

They had a most unnatural childhood. More often than not they did not know where or when they were born, or who their parents were since they were frequently

¹ Kirk Franklin, *The Blood Song*, The Rebirth of Kirk Franklin, Daywind, May 2008, Compact disc.

² Jay David, Ed., *Growing Up Black*, (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 66.

separated from them at a very early age. It is interesting to reflect upon the fact that in many cases the father was the white plantation master. (It was, as a matter of fact, in his interest to have as many children as possible by his female slaves since the issue was regarded as additional property.) How did he feel to see his black child brutally whipped, perhaps by one of his legitimate white children? Did he feel any remorse? Or did he just regard the child as he would a piece of inanimate property?¹

Many slave children had white fathers but any amount of 'black' was considered a pollutant to the white race and therefore black and inferior. Where did the superiority of the white man come from? Why did so many Americans see blacks as 'not equal' and therefore not entitled to the same rights and privileges as all Americans? And what about the church?

Edward Gilbreath when working with Howard O. Jones on his autobiography asked him about the backlash of being the first African American associated with Billy Graham. He told him it was difficult; "Fellow evangelical clergymen shot him dirty looks. A London hotel refused to give him a room. Several of Graham's donors withdrew their support and sent Graham letters with ominous warnings like, 'Don't do it, Reverend Graham' and 'You're going to ruin your ministry by putting a Negro on your team.'"² And this took place in the late 1950's! It is no wonder many blacks do not trust whites even today.

It was in 1787 that a group of blacks were asked to leave a Methodist Episcopal church so they started their own church and it became A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal). Norman Anthony Peart provides the scenario, "Free negroes Richard Allen and Absalom Jones and other black worshipers were pulled from their knees while praying and were forced to leave the white-only section in the gallery of St. George Methodist Episcopal Church . . . Because of this incident the group left the white denomination and organized the

¹ Jay David, Ed., *Growing Up Black*, (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 63.

² Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 10.

Free African Society to offer mutual aid to Negro families in their time of need.”³ In many respects, white Christians have only themselves to blame for our Sundays being segregated. Was it because of years of slavery that so many white Christians did not see them as people and therefore no need to save black souls? In the 1800’s, William Wells Brown, a former slave believed many white slave owners began to focus on teaching their slaves about Christ because they saw how they could use the Bible to keep them from revolting. He said that masters would even hire preachers to instruct their slaves on Christianity.⁴ Peart elaborates on this sad truth within our church’s history, “some planters preferred a religious slave because the slave was taught that ‘God made him for a slave; and that, when whipped, he must not find fault—for the Bible says ‘He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes.’”⁵ It should come as no wonder that our churches continue to be mostly segregated after the horrible example set by the early churches in the south. Peart mentions that the southern clergy were in step with southern society and slavery. They did not feel it was a religious concern and tried to stay out of it. Could the civil war had been prevented if the southern churches would have stepped up and spoken up on the problem of slavery? Peart believes, “the fact that slavery had become embedded in the economy, culture, mentality and even the religion of the South made a division with the North inevitable. For this reason it took a conflict far more horrible than the Revolutionary

³ Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 30.

⁴ Ibid., 33; Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper from American Slavery*, (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Gunn, 1838), 51.

⁵ Ibid., 33.

War before the constitutional statement ‘all men are created equal’ would be applied to all men.”⁶ How very sad.

With the emancipation of the slaves, the Southern Church had a chance to do the right thing, grab the spotlight and shine the love of Christ by promoting a unified church but this was not the case. Unfortunately society chooses segregation and the church follows suit. In the Supreme Court case of Plessey vs. Ferguson in 1896, ‘separate but equal’ became law. Separation was observed religiously but the equal part was rarely enacted. Peart gives us a history lesson, “Racial segregation laws known as Jim Crow laws became an important means of preserving and legitimizing the established order of white supremacy and black subordination. Once segregation was made legal, any opposition to it was classified as illegal activity, thereby removing the legal rights of blacks.”⁷ Because of this, the actions of the Ku Klux Klan and lynching became common place and the right to live free, safe and with police protection became illusive for the black man in his so-called free life. Randall Robinson in his book, *The Debt* describes this disturbing time in our nation’s history. He is quoting from Yuval Taylor’s book, *I Was Born a Slave*.

Although they were not called *slavery*, the post-Reconstruction Southern practices of peonage, forced convict labor, and to a lesser degree sharecropping essentially continued the institution of slavery well into the twentieth century, and were in some ways even worse. Peonage, for example, was a complex system in which a black man would be arrested for ‘vagrancy’, another word for unemployment, ordered to pay a fine he could not afford, and incarcerated. A plantation owner would pay his fine and ‘hire’ him until he could afford to pay off the fine himself. The peon was then forced to work, locked up at night, and, if he ran away, chase by bloodhounds until recaptured. One important difference between peonage and slavery was that while slaves had considerable monetary value for the plantation owner, peons had almost

⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁷ Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 45.

none, and could therefore be mistreated—and even murdered—without monetary loss.⁸

Is it no wonder that blacks predominately still want to worship with other blacks? They are probably around white people all day in their jobs, stores and streets and so during a small time on Sunday, many of them don't want to have to deal with the white man.

During the Civil Rights movement, many churches did not see the importance of eradicating racism. Maybe they did not consider it important enough to be involved. This must have given Dr. King grounds for disappointment when so many his fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord did not consider his cause worthy of their support. One church even said that if blacks were truly Christians they would certainly not want to worship together knowing how uncomfortable their presence was to white people! This division can be seen in abundance in churches today. Elbert Ransom says that the church today has been derelict in her mission of moral leadership. He says, "The division of race and culture in America is the single most destructive impediment to realizing the true meaning of freedom. One would think that the 68,574 churches recorded across the landscape of America would have a profound persuasive bearing of the promotion of unity . . . Unfortunately, religion is a very guarded practice for many who are deeply reluctant to share or give up their zones of comfort."⁹ Once again it seems to come down to comfort zones and too many Christians are reluctant to give them up. God is a gentleman and will not force anyone to do what is right but asks His children to step out in faith. He desires us to get uncomfortable for the sake of unity, and walk the narrow path away from the society's norm. It can only be accomplished by His strength. Thank God there were a few Christians who did just that during the civil

⁸ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 226.

⁹ Elbert Ransom Jr., *Bridging the Divide*, (LaVergne, TN: Xulon Press, 2010), 24.

rights movement. Elbert Ransom, an aide to Dr. Martin Luther King, records this in his book *Bridging the Divide*; “White persons of good will left the comfort of their surroundings and joined the great liberating army of the poor and destitute to bring attention to their plight. Not only did many of our white brothers and sisters share ranks in the lines of civil rights marches, they also gave their lives as the ultimate for change.”¹⁰ God always does have a remnant who has not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

It is hard to imagine that any black person hasn’t been affected by racism today. There is an underlying reality that blacks understand and most whites do not. All our lives are shaped by the past but even more so when that past is centuries of oppression, degradation, stereotypes and heartbreak. John Perkins said that not once when he was a child did he ever hear of any white churches in Mississippi speak out against racism and the lack of equality. He said it was just the opposite, “The white churches of Mississippi were for the most part defenders of the status quo preaching segregation from the pulpit as God’s perfect plan for the races.”¹¹ In his book, *Let Justice Roll Down*, Perkins gives a brief but poignant history lesson;

Two hundred years of slavery, followed by two or three generations of economic exploitation, political oppression, racial discrimination and educational deprivation had created in black people feelings of inferiority, instability and total dependency. The implanting of such negative values in a people deprive them of any true sense of self-worth, or any real sense of self-identity. And the end result of negative values is negative behavior that is self-destructive in its effect. Dehumanizing values only and always produce destructive behavior.¹²

Richard Wright’s central character Bigger Thomas in the novel *Native Son* is a brilliant exposition of such a man living with this self-identity.

¹⁰ Ibid., 54.

¹¹ John Perkins, Thomas A Tarrants, III, *He’s My Brother*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books, 1994), 35.

¹² John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down*, (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1976), 105.

This is our sad history of God's beloved church; all battered and tattered from fighting each other. Will she ever unite? If so, the world would see how she loves one another and no doubt, a revival the world has never seen would most likely take place. The Church can learn from her past and not be content to stay stagnant because stagnant water stinks. Living in denial is another unity killer. Those whites in America whose families owned slaves or those living as racists today but want to stop being racist, ought to first acknowledge historical offenses and take initiative by asking for forgiveness. Whites (and of course other races too) need to realize that for most blacks, slavery has shaped their lives and this can lead to a deep demoralization of spirit. It gets passed down from generation to generation.

Earlier it was said that the A.M.E. (black) church was conceived because of discrimination. But even today, a homogenous church is promoted as to what is best for church growth. Some Christians believe blacks witness to blacks better than whites do and that the reverse is also true. The numbers might be there but God isn't about numbers, at least in this context. King David's pride and disobedience, caused him take a godless census of all the people in his kingdom even though he was advised otherwise by a wise prophet (He included the Levites in the census against God's law). Just look at the Fatherly discipline King David received when he chose to count his subjects. God made David choose his own punishment (1 Chron. 21)! God wasn't interested in numbers. He wanted to be trusted.

In Numbers 14, the children of Israel, after a census was taken, grumbled when they saw the giants in the land and thought they weren't big enough or just plain—enough. All but Caleb and Joshua protested entering the land and this displeased God. Just because a smaller cross-cultural church might have more problems than a bigger homogenous church

doesn't mean it isn't vibrant and a better church for God. A church that practices biblical racial reconciliation in Christ is not stagnant spiritually nor does it have to be numerically challenged. It's just that it is so extremely hard to do because of our past. Take a look at some obvious and not so obvious problems.

CHAPTER 3

ISSUES PREVENTING A UNIFIED CHURCH

There are enough reasons for blacks to hate whites; that is awfully clear. The perspicuity of the biblical mandate to love one another so evident in scripture is not readily seen in the church today. Can love truly overcome hate? Is the white man's guilt and pride so great that he is not willing to ask for forgiveness and repent of his sins (Ezek. 18:20) and the sins of his fathers (Dan. 9:15)? Sin is in every heart so how is the black man accountable if he is purposely perpetuating a segregated church? One problem is that we are all comfort addicts. We don't like to do anything that causes us to be uncomfortable. Being intentional will create this from time to time and so will the charge to love one another; commanded by Christ Himself. How did the American Church at large miss this charge?

The Pain Remains The Same

The book, *Why Jesus Crossed the Road* appropriately opens with a Presbyterian Prayer of Confession, "Loving God, we admit to attitudes that exclude rather than embrace. We prefer to associate with others who think and act as we do . . . Awaken us to the limits of our understanding and the narrowness of our dealings."¹ By considering ourselves better than others and dawdling about with an air of superiority, our churches, consisting of fallen humans, logically reflects this too. Instead of affecting the culture, the sins of the culture are readily found in the church. Black and white Christians are just as culpable of succumbing to

¹ Bruce Main, *Why Jesus Crossed the Road*, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010), xi.

the shiny things of this world Satan dangles in front of us to lure us away. Charles Van Engen gives a balanced approach: “An understanding of the twin truths of universality and particularity in God’s mission will influence our missiological orientation to the issues facing us today . . . Too strong an emphasis on universality will drive us towards uniformity and blind us to cultural distinctives. Too strong an emphasis on particularity will push us toward either exclusive homogeneity or fragmented ethnocentrism, creating serious questions about our oneness in Jesus Christ.”¹ All ethnicities are to preach the gospel to each other, not just their own race. Israel was to let the foreigner know about the Lord just as much as their own children. God’s house is a house of prayer for all people (Isa. 56:7).

When blacks try to integrate with whites whether in business or church, they are accused by other blacks of ‘trying to be white.’ A. Charles Ware knows this first hand. He shares a couple examples in his book, *Prejudice and the People of God*, “Blacks with good jobs and who live in middle-to upper-middle-class neighborhoods are considered by some to be ‘sellouts.’ They are said to have forgotten who they are and that they are trying to be white . . . high school children who were performing very well academically were told by other black students that academic excellence was a ‘white thing!’”² He continues by saying that Christian blacks need to reject the myth and embrace the truth and grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). It is not a good thing to be rejected by your own race because you want an education or a better life for your children. Karen Hunter says that black men aren’t taking care of their children and the embarrassment that blacks experience

¹ Charles Van Engen. “The Complementarity of Universality and Particularity in God’s Mission: Reflections on Planting Multiethnic Congregations in North America,” (This paper was meant to stimulate discussion and reflection during the “Ted W. Ward Consultation on the Development and Nurture of Multiethnic Congregations,” at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Chicago, IL, November 1997), 1.

² Charles A. Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2001), 64.

by their own race for wanting a higher education is ridiculous. She cries, “What’s up with that! I can’t imagine that a people who risked life and limb to learn to read during a time when they could be killed for knowledge are raising a generation of children who refuse to read for fear of looking like a nerd. Are we serious? And Bill Cosby can’t talk about it?”³ Learning proper history of the contributions blacks have made throughout history is one way to reject the myth.

Jesus Christ saves our soul but we still have to live here on planet Earth. “The Emancipation Proclamation freed some of physically,” Karen Hunter reflects, “but the chains that really bind black America are still ever present because they exist in our minds. We must confront some of those things and slay the dragon. Free ourselves”⁴ Some whites think everything is rosy because the generations that owned slaves have died off but nothing could be further from the truth. In *Growing Up Black* there is a story of a little girl who started middle school with her best friend who happened to be white. She was not only rejected by the other white girls but the black girls told her that if she didn’t stop hanging out with her white friend then they would beat her up. Talk about being between a rock and a hard place.

Raleigh Washington says that his defenses go up when a white person says, “I never owned any slaves but I agree it was a terrible thing” but what he says he really hears is, “I had nothing to do with it.” The reason he says his defenses go up is this: “That person is separating himself from any responsibility and even though he may not say it, what he means is, ‘Don’t put the blame in my lap.’ That kind of statement colors my perception of

³ Karen Hunter, *Stop Being Niggardly and Nine Other Things Black People Need to Stop Doing*, (New York: Karen Hunter Publishing, 2010), 68.

⁴ Ibid., 31.

everything else he may say . . . and my trust level is going to be guarded.”⁵ I personally never gave it a second thought how I might have benefited from being white or the flip side, how often blacks were not on the good side of the receiving end. I do recall one time where being white did not benefit me. The white policeman, who pulled us over, told us that he would have let us go but that his black partner kept lecturing him about equality and justice so they ended up taking us downtown to the police station. (We were sixteen and caught with marijuana. Trust me, justice prevailed—I was grounded for a month!) I never really understood what that policeman meant but I always remembered it and now I know why; for such a time as this (Esther 4:14). I certainly can’t blame that black policeman for wanting to practice equality.

They say that pretty girls go through life with things handed to them on a silver platter. In this context, whites, without even realizing it, have more than likely experienced the same thing. There have been times when a white person has gotten their feathers ruffled when they hear of a black magazine or a black television station. Well what do they expect! Whites kept blacks out of their groups and clubs so they started their own. They too needed and wanted a place ‘where everyone knows your name’—it is called community (more on this later). They too want to go where they can feel safe and heard and understood.

Get To Know The Brethren

The white race cannot possibly know what it means to live as a black person. This is demonstrated by a deplorable lack of empathy and compassion towards the black issue by so many whites. As I mentioned previously, I am guilty as charged but with God’s help and the forgiveness and understanding from the black people in my life, I am sure to succeed as part

⁵ Raleigh Washington, Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 203.

of the solution rather than part of the problem. All this comes down to the fact that we don't know each other. We must not stop at first impressions or a few casual encounters but really work at gaining trust. Intimacy means 'in to me see.' Do most white people take the time to get to know the heart of black people? Ask any black person the question, 'can you pinpoint the exact time you became conscious of being black by something cruel being said because of it?' and you can bet you will learn something about that person. You might also get to know them by asking if any white person ever stood up for their race in front of them. This too could generate good conversation. But once again, this takes leaving the status quo and entering the unknown territory known as the 'uncomfortable zone.' If you are willing to be part of the solution, then take the journey. Bruce Mann challenges Christians to enter the lives of others by being like Jesus, "by crossing those roads Jesus demonstrated that a God-following life is a life of inclusion and expansion—not an exclusive and limited life that avoids certain kinds of people and certain places . . . it was a life that challenged barriers."⁶ He challenges the human race but predominately the white man, to be brave and become fishers of ALL men. Raleigh Washington shares a story of a white woman wanting to get to know a black woman in her church but kept getting the cold shoulder. He reminded her that many times blacks will test whites to see if they are truly committed to getting to know their heart or if they are some sort of 'pet project.' Encouraging her not to give up he told her, "She's uncomfortable being with you, so she shuts you out."⁷ The woman said that she was determined to not let that happen even if it meant being shunned. He then reminded her that

⁶ Bruce Main, *Why Jesus Crossed the Road*, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010), 6.

⁷ Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 136.

the Bible teaches us to pick up our cross and follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24) even if it means rejection but on the other side is reconciliation and resurrection glory.

The worldwide Christian Church has a goal to work for the common good. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Why do some Christians act as if it isn't? Sin, pride, the devil, all contributes to a church divided. Do black and white Christians believe the Bible is true? If so, then what better way to get to know each other than by stepping out in faith and bridging that divide in Jesus' name by following the advice of the Apostle John when he says, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." And in this case it is the idol of comfort created by a paralyzing fear of the unknown.

We Are Not All The Same—That's A Good Thing

"Good theology promotes freedom and unity" states Dr. John Frame in *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, "while rival views make 'dichotomies' or 'dualisms.'"⁸ In the words of Rodney King, "can't we all just get along?"⁹ If there was ever a need to get along, the church has this need. If we keep the main thing the main thing, (Jesus and Him crucified for the sins of the world and is coming back to usher in His Kingdom with those in Him) then all other pettiness should fall away . . . right? Worship styles differ, lengths of services differ, dress codes differ and countless other cultural and ethnical preferences differ. The importance of allowing individuals to be unique and diverse cannot be emphasized enough because this is how God made us. Unlike the Borg in the Star Trek series where 'resistance is futile; you must assimilate,' the church of Jesus Christ is diverse, colorful, and composed

⁸ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1987), 289.

⁹ His response to the Los Angeles riots in 1992. The riots began after the acquittal of the police who beat him.

of many unique individuals. The paradox is that in Jesus Christ we are one but that doesn't mean we are to all look the same, talk the same, sing and worship the same, etc. Segregated Sunday is 'groupthink' in its worse sense.¹⁰ It is human nature to join groups or in this case, churches where we feel comfortable. Imagine how difficult it must have been as a black person NOT to vote for Barack Obama! In the same vein, being a woman doesn't dictate that I should vote for a woman just because I am a woman. There are wonderful black bible-believing churches and wonderful white bible-believing churches. Many are joining forces for the purpose of intentionally uniting as one in Christ.¹¹

It's Still Broke

The movie *Crash* got it right; race relations in America is still broken. There is still a lot to do towards righting the wrongs committed by sinful people. Ultimately change can only come through the healing touch of Jesus Christ. I once worked at a Middle Eastern TV Station called *Alhurra* and was friends with a Palestinian who was constantly complaining to me about the mistreatment his people receive from the Jews. He said they were fighting over the land and its rightful owners. I told him that in Christ, he and his Jewish neighbors could be friends and the importance of the land wouldn't matter as much because he would be storing up treasures in Heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy (Matt. 6:19). In other words, I told him that he *and* the Jews need Christ! So why do Christians still bicker over seemingly unbiblical issues? Or more importantly, why have these issues become more important than worshiping together and living a changed life in Christ? Bruce Mann says the

¹⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1987), 285.

¹¹ Redemption Fellowship and Christ Liberation Fellowship of Philadelphia, PA merged in 2011. Their new name is Christ Redemption Fellowship.

problem is this, “we can faithfully read the Bible, pray, fast . . . and never really change. We can go to church all our lives and still hold bigoted views of others, live in fear, and never develop the capacity to see beyond our own kind of people.”¹² He explains fuller with a brief history lesson pinpointing the sins of the church; “Christians sat in church Sunday after Sunday for years, well aware of the atrocities happening to their African American brothers and sisters, and still resisted granting them their basic civil rights. Some high-profile Christian leaders, who have spent a lifetime studying the Scriptures, still make comments that reveal a complete ignorance of other cultures and values.”¹³ We need the perspective of others; it makes our own lives more full and colorful. We also need to stand up when injustices are spoken or enacted. The laws of the land, and it’s about time, have given more peace, justice and equality for African Americans (and others including women given the right to vote) but there is still more work to do, especially in the Church of Jesus Christ. Edward Gilbreath says it is more than just broke, “it [racism] is now a more subtle and elusive thing. To paraphrase Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s famous quote about pornography, ‘I can’t define it, but I know it when I see it.’”¹⁴ He believes that most racism is because of ignorance on the white folk. Karen Hunter agrees, “Understanding the nuances of race and knowing that profiling and racism or prejudice can so often be talked away and called something else. But those of us, who have experienced it, know it when we see it.”¹⁵ Gilbreath has seen this when working with whites on church boards where integration really

¹² Bruce Main, *Why Jesus Crossed the Road*, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010), 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁴ Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 11.

¹⁵ Karen Hunter, *Stop Being Niggardly and Nine Other Things Black People Need to Stop Doing*, (New York: Karen Hunter Publishing, 2010), 2.

meant assimilation. He says that the stereotype is perpetuated when whites say to him that they really like him but they just wouldn't want him to marry their daughters. He tells the story of a gentleman; in response to telling a white youth director that sports was not his thing, the youth director said that he thought all *his* people did sports. These were bible-believing Christians! Those people, he believed, were not ill-intended just ignorant. I resemble that. And as I have stated previously, my prayer and hope is that other, well-meaning but seriously ignorant white Christians like me might learn too.

Clarence Shuler asks some heavy questions in his book, *Winning the Race to Unity: Is Racial Reconciliation Really Working?* He asks, "Are you serious about improving race relations among Christians in America?" He says that it will cost you. He asks, "Are you willing to pay the price? Has your relationship with God reached the point where you can live without the praise of men? Are you willing to have the new friends God will give you who will be of a different culture or race?"¹⁶ 1 John 4:20 puts the Christian's charge to love his brother in the light of whether or not he is a true believer by saying, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." Love can be messy and heartbreaking but no guts no glory! Plus Christians have the Holy Spirit who gives them strength to step out of their nice, warm, comfortable boat and into the chilly waters that can be racial reconciliation.

White people are accused of acting superior by many African Americans and certainly this would be sinful behavior. If this is still true today, why do whites see themselves differently—better than the other races? Whites are not indigenous to America; they came over by boat like everybody else, except Native Americans. Many races have

¹⁶ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 63.

reasons to gripe. What about the Japanese Americans who were interned during WWII? With the focus being on the struggles between the black and white segregated churches, I won't enter into other race problems. Needless-to-say, all races need to take a stand and reach out in the name of Christ to all cultures and races. Chris Rice has something to say about the lack of races worshiping together; "The Holy Spirit's interruption of this world at Pentecost . . . is not realized in the church in the U.S. Ninety percent of African-American Christians worship in all-black churches. Ninety percent of white American Christians worship in all-white churches. Thirty years since the incredible victories of the civil rights movement, we continue to live in the trajectory of racial fragmentation."¹⁷ He believes that the biggest problem is that we don't see it as a problem. If the majority of white people walk around thinking that there isn't a problem then that is even a bigger problem. Just as an alcoholic or addict has to identify the problem before help can be accepted, so too must God's church.

Is the problem with the church the lack of commitment to Christ? Thomas Tarrants seems to think it is definitely a part of the problem. In the book, *He's My Brother*, he quotes Pastor Dick Halverson, "Christianity began as a relationship with Jesus Christ. The Greeks made it into a philosophy, the Romans made it into a religion, the Europeans made it into a civilization and now the Americans have made it into an enterprise."¹⁸ Would the white church lose money and attendance if they began to intentionally reach out to blacks or join up with a black church? How about vice versa? Pastor Paul Shepherd, a black pastor said that

¹⁷ Jason Byassee, "A Passion for Reconciliation: An Interview with Chris Rice", *The Christian Century*, pp. 34-39, March 2008; available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3155>; internet; accessed 1 December 2012.

¹⁸ John Perkins, Thomas A Tarrants, III, *He's My Brother*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books, 1994), 166.

his predominately black church was growing concerned because many whites began attending. He finished by saying, “integrated churches are difficult to create and even harder to sustain.”¹⁹ God did not call the church or the individual Christian to be successful but to be faithful. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would agree with this. Chris Rice said that Dr. King spoke of blacks, the oppressed, being the ones who might have to initiate reconciliation and that no matter how difficult, Christians—black Christians are called to be faithful even when it doesn’t work out. Chris Rice and Spencer Perkins, white and black respectively, lived out this principle of reconciliation in the name of Jesus. Their families moved in together along with some other families into an old farmhouse. Here are his words reminiscing about it; “We shared a common life for the next 12 years. We had one refrigerator and one telephone line. We had a common checkbook and all of our salaries went into a common purse. We ate dinner together every night. We had a ministry of hospitality to neighbors and to men just out of prison. A single mother lived with us during her pregnancy and when she gave birth. We had a saying that there was always room for one more at the table. Those were rich years.”²⁰ White Christians need to take into account decades of discrimination and do something special. Just like Isaiah cried, “send me” (Isa. 6:8) shouldn’t white Christians, with the same heart cry, go out and do likewise? All Christians can go in faith knowing that God will never ask us to do something he will not enable us to do.

¹⁹ John Blake, “Why Many Americans Prefer Their Sundays Segregated,” *CNN Living*, August 2008; available from http://articles.cnn.com/2008-08-04/living/segregated.sundays_1_black-church_small_church_pastor?_s=PM:LIVING; internet; accessed 29 September 2011.

²⁰ Jason Byassee, “A Passion for Reconciliation: An Interview with Chris Rice,” *The Christian Century*, 34-39. March 2008; available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3155>; internet; accessed 1 December 2011.

The importance of predominately white churches and white parachurch organizations to comprehend racial struggle cannot be emphasized enough. When blacks are given authority in white churches, they experience the same thing as in the world—the white man looking over their shoulder. Many churches want to hire blacks for the purpose of helping minister to the black community but they have a hard time allowing them to lead and to do what is necessary for ministry. Clarence Shuler says that many blacks would rather fellowship with a nonbeliever who understands the racial issue than with a Christian who doesn't. Concerned with this problem he says, "Until this problem is resolved, or at least until there is a major improvement, I fear what might happen. That is why I am convinced that the time is now for Christ's church to respond to the Gospel message of unity, love, and justice."²¹ Once again it all comes down to comfort. Are whites going to let the black man lead or are they going to swoop in as 'the great white hope' and take over? The message of the Gospel is that Christ died for all and He is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He has gifted each one of us differently (1 Cor. 12:4). The image of people groups being melted down into one pot doesn't describe cross-culturalism. No one wants to melt—to assimilate or be pulverized in a blender so that we all come out looking the same. God's plan is that each individual strive to be everything God intended them to be without comparing themselves to others. All Christians are a work of art, His workmanship, a masterpiece created by the Father (Ephesians 2:10). The Church of Jesus Christ ought to stand on this truth and let God reign and rule over His saints.

There is a great need for black leaders in the Evangelical Church. Responding to this problem, Clarence Shuler doesn't mince words; "When white Christian churches or

²¹ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 21.

organizations continue to exclude minorities from their decision-making bodies, and the white Christian says that he or she must seek the ‘will of God’ as to how to respond to racial injustice, we blacks wonder what Bible is being read.”²² He also said, “Whites tend to recruit with the idea of assimilation in the back of their minds, which means whites don’t have to change, just the recruited blacks. This kind of thinking violates the biblical principle of diversity found in the study of spiritual gifts.”²³ The white man should stop playing Holy Ghost Jr. and let his brother rise.

The Reality Of Racism

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, you reap what you sow (Gal. 6:7) and slavery was a terrible harvest and America is still reaping the consequences. Most white Christians won’t even acknowledge there is a problem. Raleigh Washington comments on this perspective, “it is a common contention by whites that, yes, racism is a historical fact, but has little current impact . . . discrimination is no longer the norm. But that perspective occurs because whites have experienced racism only intellectually and not empirically.”²⁴ I have been a member of a cross-cultural church for so long now that I am uncomfortable when participating in something where there are only white people. But as Glen Kehrein says, and he has been reminded of this a million times by his black friends, that he might be less ignorant and not as racist as others but he will never know the black experience. He says that whites have a difficulty realizing racism exists and that whites to some extent participate overtly or with passive acceptance. Pastor Kehrein said that as a white man he had to come

²² Ibid., 105.

²³ Ibid., 152.

²⁴ Raleigh Washington, Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 133.

to accept either, “the theory that black people were inferior and that is why they couldn’t rise above their bad conditions,” or “that widespread systematic injustice kept them from realizing their full potential.”²⁵ Clarence Shuler tells the story of a white tennis buddy friend who said that he had no use for Christianity. He told Shuler that some blacks were asked to leave his church when he was very young and ever since that day, he considered Christians hypocritical. The days of persecution (during segregation) for praying together are over but why doesn’t the church come together for prayer and worship? What example is the church setting? Billy Graham was once asked on national television, “What is your greatest fear?” He said that as an ambassador for Christ, he never wanted to bring shame to His name. Christians have brought shame to His name in the area of segregating on Sunday. There is a reason God asks Christians to lead a life of repentance and forgiveness.

Blacks are not off the hook either. Most blacks interested in racial reconciliation will admit that racism exists in the lives of African Americans too. In December 2011, I attended an African American History seminar held at a black church in S. E. Washington DC. They opened it up to questions and comments—nothing was too racy (no pun intended)! The comments and questions were many and passionate. Blacks and whites together were speaking plainly and sincerely. The dialogue, instead of dividing, seemed to bring us closer. Something I had never witnessed before came at the end of the discussion. A black gentleman said that he had a confession to make. He pointed to a white gentleman on the row in front of him and said (I am paraphrasing), “We were at the bus stop together and I thought to myself, this man is probably a snobby government worker. So imagine my surprise when we started walking towards the same place and here he sits!” He went on to say that his thoughts were racist and he wanted to publically confess it. Turns out the white

²⁵ Ibid., 38.

man was a pastor with a heart for racial reconciliation! I know a Hispanic man who attended a Hispanic church and when he brought his African American sweetheart into his church to introduce her, they kicked him out! They are now married and attending my cross-cultural church, New City Fellowship. It is not a contest to determine 'who has sinned more'; there is plenty of God's grace to go around. The question remains, is God's power strong enough to save His church from killing each other and damaging her witness to the world.

CHAPTER 4

EVERYDAY KINGDOM MATTERS

DC TALK has one of the most beautiful song lyrics ever written, “If confession is the road to healing, forgiveness is the Promised Land.”¹ There is so much to be forgiven in the lives of African Americans; so much that without Jesus Christ, how does one cope. Such a daunting task lay ahead for black children growing up in a land still so full of sadness and bitterness. But who can blame them? If my great-grandfather had to watch his wife raped and murdered and then his children taken from him, I would have a hard time getting that image out of my mind too. Even in the worst of days, Christians are to live a life of faith. This includes repentance and forgiveness.

Forgiveness Is A Must

Jesus forgave much (Luke 23:34)—blacks are in good company and can certainly say they share in his sufferings (Phil. 3:10) as have all races. No one gets off this planet unscathed. Life is a battlefield but our Commander’s name is Jehovah Nissi whose banner goes before us (Exod. 17:15). According to Jesus in Matthew 5:11, Christians are blessed and great is their reward in Heaven when insulted and persecuted. I have no idea how an unbeliever can forgive so much and live a productive full life. Even believers struggle to

¹ DC Talk, *Just Between You and Me, Jesus Freak*, Virgin America Records, November 1995, Compact disc.

repent for unforgiveness. Maybe this is why there is so much death and destruction all around us. Kidnapping, slavery, torture, rape, who can endure much less forgive? Randall Robinson elucidates this sad truth, “The crime—246 years of an enterprise murderous both of a people and their culture—is so unprecedentedly massive that it would require some form of collective insanity not to see it and its living victims.”¹ Turning to Christ and the teachings of Scripture are the only solutions that will work in the short term and the long term. Norman Anthony Peart agrees, “For blacks the wall can never be forgiven and they dare not attempt to diminish its significance in daily interactions with white people. For whites the wall has been denounced and forgotten. They believe it is time to move on and they have. There is a standoff, and the gospel’s message of forgiveness and reconciliation is the only answer to it.”² But what does that look like in the everyday life of the Christian Church in America made up of hurting people? There must be an ever ready stance of extending forgiveness, between Christians, whether it is deserved or not. This is Christianity. This is what sets God apart from all other gods. Ravi Zacharias tells the story of a conversation between Brother Andrew and a Muslim cleric after the Muslim had ordered an execution: “Brother Andrew looked at him and he asked him two questions. He said, ‘who made you the executioner to execute people at your whim and your order?’ The cleric said, ‘I’m not an executioner but part of my responsibility in life is to make sure God’s justice is implemented.’ So Brother Andrew said, ‘what then becomes of forgiveness?’ The cleric responded, ‘that’s only to those who deserve it.’”³ The Bible says forgiveness is never

¹ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 221.

² Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 86.

³ Ravi Zacharias, “Bridging the Heart and Mind,” *Just Thinking Magazine*, no. 20.1, 2011, 4.

merited, it is given. No human being on planet earth owes a debt greater than the one owed Christ for it was sin—everyone’s sins that nailed Him to the cross. “God has canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Col. 2:14).” In his chapter ‘All For One,’ Peart hammers home the idea of forgiveness; “For African Americans to be in a position to not allow our emotions to guide our responses, we must get rid of our anger. This can only be done by covering the wrongs of the past through biblical forgiveness. The term forgiveness is not very popular when applied to the wrongs of slavery and discrimination, but it is a necessity.”⁴ Like in a marriage, daily forgiveness is necessary for moving closer together. Forgiveness is an intentional sacrifice given to God ultimately out of love and gratefulness to Him for His forgiveness and salvation. No relationship is without difficulty and there is none which doesn’t require repentance, forgiveness and sacrifice.

It is said that if you want to drive your enemies crazy—love them. It drives them nuts! By loving them you are forgiving them. Television preacher Joyce Meyer once said that a company she had hired to do all their printing, and it was a large contract, had been slandering her and her ministry. Of course, the natural man in her wanted to cancel the contract, in-other-words, get even. But God spoke to her heart and told her to send them a gift. So she said that she sent them a large basket of goodies with a note thanking them for their service. She said that afterwards she was SO GLAD she did it God’s way and showed restraint of tongue and pen. God’s ways are not our ways. Thank God this is true, otherwise there would not be a man left standing. Every now and then, someone says that man is going to destroy the world but the Bible teaches that God will make sure this doesn’t happen. He

⁴ Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 171.

always has a remnant and He will always preserve us (Mic. 4:7, Rom. 11:5). God will guide us through the difficult terrain of forgiving and loving our enemies.

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting. It is important to remember the past and to study history, good and bad and teach it to our children—black and white. God had the Israelites remember their bondage to Egypt and God's deliverance by celebrating Passover (Exod. 12:27). There is a similarity in the black experience; that by remembering slavery and God's deliverance, African Americans can form a deep commitment to God and might eventually end up loving a race that once oppressed them. Fast forward to today's oppressors; violent white supremacy groups as an example. God's principles of forgiveness still go forth for healing and reconciliation. In the newspaper a few days ago, there was a story of a white guy who was a member of the National Alliance and was considered a pillar in the white-power movement. He was considered one of the most notorious, racist, aggressive skinheads of the group but joined the church and left the past lifestyle behind. He publically repented and received many death threats and harassment from his old group of 'buddies.' A movie was made about it and after the screening, a black woman embraced him in tears and said, "I forgive you."⁵ "This is where the healing begins, this is where the healing starts, this is where light meets the dark," song lyrics so apropos and so beautifully sung by Mike Donehey in the Tenth Avenue North song, *Healing Begins*.⁶

The darkness loves division and would like nothing more than to see God's children fighting and being hostile to one another instead of living in peace (Luke 1:79). Whether we are aggressively aggressive or passively aggressive in our dealings with each other, Satan has

⁵ Helen O'Neill, "Ex-Skinhead's Journey," Fredericksburg (Virginia) *The Free Lance Star*, 31 October 2011, sec. A, p. 8.

⁶ Tenth Avenue North, *Healing Begins, The Light Meets the Dark*, Provident 2010, Compact disc.

a hay day when we neglect God's truth of practicing forgiveness seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22). John Perkins experienced this. Beaten almost to death in Mississippi for being black in 1970, God asked him to do this very thing. He said that he kept going back to what God said about forgiveness; he couldn't shake it. He said that God gave him the love he needed to love his enemies. He understood man's depravity, "The Spirit of God helped me to really believe what I had so often professed, that only in the love of Christ is there any hope for me . . . Oh, I know man is bad—depraved. There's something built into him that makes him want to be superior. If the black man had the advantage, he'd be just as bad, just as bad. So I can't hate the white man. The problem is spiritual: black or white, we all need to be born again."⁷ What a giant in the faith!

Forgiveness is necessary not only because God commands it but it is good for our soul. Resentment is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die; you only hurt yourself when forgiveness isn't an option. Karen Hunter knows this first hand as a black woman. She doesn't use the word forgiveness but the result is the same. She asserts, "Don't get me wrong. Black people *are* owed that forty acres and a mule, but that won't change the condition, because we first have to change our own minds . . . It will start with what *we* must stop doing to ourselves . . . I have learned that change doesn't come in comfort."⁸ We expect others to quickly forgive us when we have done wrong but when the shoe is on the other foot, it is very hard to extend forgiveness.

Some say that Christianity is a crutch for a weak man but nothing could be further from the truth. Forgiving others is not for the faint of heart. It takes a brave heart indeed. It

⁷ John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down*, (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1976), 206.

⁸ Karen Hunter, *Stop Being Niggardly and Nine Other Things Black People Need to Stop Doing*, (New York: Karen Hunter Publishing, 2010), 31.

is all part of being a real Christian, one who has been transformed by the love of Christ. This transformation isn't about power, wealth and beauty. More often than not, it's about suffering, disappointment and waiting. In the children's book, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the sage old horse explains to the tattered stuffed bunny, "It doesn't happen all at once . . . You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."⁹ It was said of Jesus that he was nothing to look at and of no reputation (Isa. 53:2, 3). When we become Christian, we chose to serve Him, to become a bond servant (Rom. 1:1). Is the servant greater than his master (Matt. 10:24)? Do most blacks wish that whites would change? It would certainly make love and forgiveness a little easier. But even if change comes slowly, we can only take responsibility for ourselves. Clarence Schuler reminds fellow black Christians, "As much as we want to force many white Christians to change, we must understand that this is God's job. Only God can change people's hearts. When we attempt to do His job, we only frustrate ourselves. We must be careful not to allow this frustration to lead us to sinful action . . . Thus we must forgive and continue to wait for God to move . . . We must also set an example of Christlikeness in the midst of injustice."¹⁰ Please don't hear what he is NOT saying. He is not saying what the pastors told Martin Luther King when they told him to wait on the Lord

⁹ Margery Williams, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, (New York: Random House, 1985)[5]; see Stephen Arterburn. *New Life Every Day!* (Laguna Beach, CA: New Life Ministries, 2006), 1.

¹⁰ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 174.

which caused Dr. King to write his book, *Why We Can't Wait*.¹¹ That was different. The laws of God trumped the laws of man in that case. Mr. Shuler is just saying that if the black man turns to hate and violence then he hurts only himself. The moral high road is forgiveness; resentment is bondage and will keep the chains forever bound, spiritually and emotionally.

Repentance Is A Must

It must be very difficult for African Americans to forgive white Americans when they act as if nothing is wrong. Obviously, this can be a major hindrance for reconciliation and a stumbling block in relationship making. Pastor Tarrants, ex Ku Klux Klan member, reminds Christians of what they should see in their minds and hearts when seeking relationships with blacks, "Life for most blacks in America today is shaped by the fact that their history in this country began with slavery to white masters. Any people held in slavery suffers not only the degradation of being treated as property but also a profound demoralization of spirit. This historical fact is part of the cultural story passed from generation to generation; it shapes personal identity and expectations."¹² With this in mind, come with a spirit of repentance, compassion and empathy rather than an attitude of 'get over it' given in pride and arrogance. Denial is a heart issue and it seems as if white America as a whole doesn't want to acknowledge that wrongs still take place. There hasn't been an official apology given to

¹¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, New York: Penguin Group, 1963. Read *Letter From Birmingham Jail* for the full story.

¹² John Perkins, Thomas A Tarrants, III, *He's My Brother*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books, 1994), 199.

African Americans from the United States Government—ever.¹³ The Church is slow in repenting though some have done just that. There was a small blurb buried in the newspaper about Charlottesville, Virginia apologizing for the loss and demolition of a black neighborhood that took place in the 1960's. Many more apologies need to take place and God willing, maybe it would actually make the front page of the newspaper. Tarrants elaborates, "While both blacks and whites have need of such repentance, historically there has been far more racial pride and sin on the part of whites. Whites have held the reins of power in this country since her founding, yet have done little until recently to address the plight of those in the black community. Progress in many instances has been little more than grudging acquiescence to federal court orders and legislation."¹⁴ What would happen in this country if whites would, as an act of the will, decrease and let the black man increase? Repentance is a great start. Sin is not a popular word these days but it was sin that caused the white race to treat another race in unimaginable ways. It needs to be dealt with; the black man, woman and child are waiting to hear, 'I'm sorry.' In the Bible, Nehemiah repented for the sins of his fathers (Neh. 9:2) and so did Daniel (Dan. 9:16). Those white Christians, who haven't already, need to repent of their sin by asking God to remove the veil from their eyes and show them their sin. Human beings are experts at pulling the wool over their own eyes. Be aware that there might be some denial. Yes, that is an oxymoron—how can there be awareness if living in denial? Prayer is needed for God to enable His people to accomplish what they have been incapable of doing on their own.

¹³ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 213.

¹⁴ John Perkins, Thomas A Tarrants III, *He's My Brother*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books, 1994), 196.

Jesus came to deliver us from our sin. The Spirit of God is with us to convict us of our sin and cleanse us from unrighteousness (John 16:8). Some churches preach that repentance is unnecessary but scripture is clear; the Christian life is one of repentance and faith (Mark 1:15, Acts 20:21). God's Word applied brings about a changed life. There is not a soul around who has already arrived (Phil. 3:12) and doesn't still need a good dose of Holy Ghost cleansing in the areas of attitude, opinions, morals and behavior. How the African American race was treated was wrong and sinful. Repentance is turning from sin and turning to Christ. It also can come in the area of restitution. Restitution is taught in God's law. Numbers 5:6, 7 gives the principle to be applied: "When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the Lord, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged." Randall Robinson feels that there has been no attempt on the American Government in the area of restitution for the human-rights wrongs done to blacks. Lamentably he describes the restitution owed, "In this case, the psyche and economic injury is enormous, multidimensional and long-running. Thus must be America's restitution to blacks for the damage done. As Germany and other interests that profited owed reparations to Jews following the holocaust of Nazi persecution, America and other interests that profited owe reparations to blacks"¹⁵ God knows how blacks have suffered and when whites offer a simple 'get over it,' how sad is that. Randall Robinson believes that racial reconciliation cannot ever come without monetary restitution from the government. He says that if it is true, that African Americans will never be compensated, then there is no chance that America can solve its racial problems. He may be

¹⁵ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 9.

right but only God knows. He clarifies, “Solving these problems means, as I believe it must, closing the yawning economic gap between blacks and whites in this country. The gap was opened by the 246-year practice of slavery. It has been resolutely nurtured since in law and public behavior. It has now ossified. It is structural. Its framing beams are disguised only by the counterfeit manners of hypocritical governing class.”¹⁶ Zaccheus knew the law of restitution first given in Exodus and was willing to pay back fourfold to those he might have robbed (Luke 19:8). He was willing because God changed his heart. It is about time for blacks and whites to come together and show the world what God can do. It starts with prayer, repentance and forgiveness and ends with intentionality.

Stop Demonizing The Black Man

One thing whites must stop doing is demonizing the black man. So many white brothers and sisters speak with an air of sophistication believing that the black race is responsible for the problems bemoaning them. The white man began his education in the country long before the black man so a little patience and understanding please. Hundreds of years of neglecting teaching black slaves to read and write, is it no wonder that when freedom was finally granted most people still considered them inferior? On top of this, decades of denying an equal education until the Civil Rights Act and even today, some would swear that the education gap is still as prevalent. The same thing would have happened to whites if the tables were turned. It isn't fair to say that “blacks should be this or blacks should be that because America offers so much to everyone.” One way to bridge that gap and show restitution is helping all children suffering in our school system with their school work and helping them with their education. A good education is still kept from so many and

¹⁶ Ibid., 204.

as the slogan for the United Negro College Fund declares, ‘A mind is a terrible thing to waste.’ Blacks are not inferior—get rid of this mentality.

Many white Christians kept blacks out of their churches thinking blacks were ignorant and inferior but all along it was they who wore the title. It seemed the Church believed Jim Crow laws instead of believing the clear teaching of the Bible. All they had to was read Acts 8:27 when Phillip joined a Negro (an Ethiopian). He didn’t say, “I can’t sit at the lunch counter with you because you are black (and in this case—a chariot).” No, he jumped right up into that chariot and off they went. There probably aren’t any churches today that turn blacks away but many of them sure don’t seem to go out of their way to be welcoming. Recently I had an email conversation with a white person from my church. I had sent out a church wide email asking if anyone was going to the Martin Luther King Prayer breakfast sponsored by the NAACP. It was being held at a black church we frequently join in prayer and study. His response was, “no way!!!” I emailed him saying, “Yea I know, there are plenty of democrats but I don't mind being the minority.” Then I said, “Democrats are still Americans and NOT the enemy. But, I'm entitled to my opinion.” To which he responded,

Nothing wrong about being a democrat. Deplorable to be a parasite off of other folks labor. So! I am implying that many in the black community have subscribed to the entitlement mentality that our president pushes for. This man and those that support him, like most if not all chapters of the NAACP have done NOTHING to bring healing races together. These people . . . I will stop here as I will not be able to say anything nice about them. Not speaking about blacks in general but the ones who walk in lockstep with the Sharptons, Jacksons, Obamas and NAACP. Speaking to them as individuals might be good, but to fellowship with them? Might as well invite Satan.

I replied,

I am of the opinion that, what you described, still doesn't make them the enemy much less fellowshipping with Satan. The people you mentioned are passionate about what they believe—just as passionate as what you believe but this doesn't make them evil.

We are to be a shining light on a hill. And also as part of a cross-cultural church, I have been taught the importance of whites putting themselves in places where *they* are the minority. The MLK breakfast, I am assuming since I've been before, is a place I can go and put shoe leather to my commitment of working towards racial reconciliation. I once heard about a woman who was pro-choice. Listening to her and her passionate plea to help women and girls with their 'problem,' you would have thought she was a pro-lifer. The point of that 'sermon' was to remind conservatives that each side is equally passionate AND that they are fellow human beings so please don't demonize each other. Another time, and this is SO important, I heard about a woman, a pro-lifer, who got so involved that she had a nervous breakdown! I don't want to be like her—acting like Holy Ghost Jr. I would rather be like the Pro-lifer who saw a picket line of pro-choicers in the bitter cold and brought donuts and hot coffee! Also, when I was a baby Christian, I was a member of a union AND pro-choice. I changed because I studied the Bible and was around other more mature Christians who taught me truth in love. If they thought of me as evil or that being with me was fellowshiping with Satan, I never would have grown in my faith.

This was his reply,

I like talking to them as individuals. That takes away the mob mentality that is dominant with them. 'The heart of man is wicked.' We're all evil. Some more than others.

A little prejudice and gasconade wouldn't you say? And this person goes to my church, a cross-cultural church seeking to reach across racial and economic borders. I sent the conversation to my pastor (without mentioning names) and this was his comment, "There is too much division in this country. We do not need more. However I do think it shows you why New City Fellowship [our church] has struggled fulfilling its vision and why we focus on black and white reconciliation. There is still racism, anger and bitterness on both sides."

Whites need to realize that blacks do not 'play the race card' as much as they would like to think. Scholar John McWhorter wrote a book called, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* where he delves into the self-defeatist attitude that he believes runs through the black community. He coined the phrase, 'the cult of victimology' to describe blacks blaming all their problems on racism. But Mr. Gilbreath says in his book *Reconciliation Blues* that this isn't true. As a black man he said that he has learned that even though racism

is alive and well, most blacks believe the stupid things whites say and do are out of ignorance not hatred. If whites are interested in reconciliation and getting to know their black brother, every time a black person has a gripe, white people need to stop thinking it is always the race thing. All people get their feelings hurt. Is an apology necessary even if the hurt wasn't intentional? Of course; that is called friendship, much less Christianity.

Whites who believe everything they hear and read need to get their facts straight. In the book, *Don't Believe the Hype: Fighting Cultural Misinformation About African-Americans*,¹⁷ Farai Chideya sets the record straight. She clarifies one misunderstanding by saying that there are more blacks in college than in prison. In another instance, in a *Study of the Status of Virginia's Families*¹⁸ it was learned that more white teenagers had babies out of wedlock than black teenagers. Researcher Nicolas Eberstadt elaborates, "Unmarried mothers are increasing likely to be white, chronologically mature, and well-educated. The stereotype of the unwed mother as a black teenager is completely outdated."¹⁹ Clarence Shuler provides some light in this area and where misinformation can hurt the most, "When poor research is done, it tears the body down, not builds it up. It also provides more ammunition for Minister Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam to criticize Christianity."²⁰ Get rid of blanket generalizations and stereotypes—it doesn't do the Body good.

¹⁷ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 166. Farai Chideya, *Don't Believe the Hype: Fighting Cultural Misinformation About African-Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1995).

¹⁸ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 166. Kay Coles James, "Study of the Status of Virginia's Families," *Report to the Governor and the General Assembly, Commonwealth of Virginia, House of Document No. 57* (1995).

¹⁹ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 166. Nicolas Eberstadt, "A Revolution in 'Family' That Is Eating Its Children," *The Washington Times*, 24 September 1993.

²⁰ Ibid., 166.

White churches and those that are predominately white would benefit from diversity training. Businesses have discovered the importance of this and those in the evangelical community who haven't already should get on board. Businesses have learned that bringing in people from all races, cultures and ethnicities brings value to the company, and the result has been that people from all walks of life get to know each other better. This makes for a more pleasant and productive work environment. You can bet that this intentionality helps blacks and white gain a deeper appreciation of each other as fellow human beings. If whites will only worship with other whites, the Church is the worse off for it. Think of the effect it must have on a lost and dying world that sees the impotence of Christianity in bringing the races together. Shuler suggests that all cross-cultural churches, from the top down, get involved in diversity training and that it should be mandatory. He says that the church needs to learn to listen and trust the blacks that they hire. He reflectively explains, "Just think of the incredible things the Christian community could do for Christ if we were one! Think how we could impact our society if we were united in Christ! . . . Think about evangelism, discipleship, marriage and families. The world would be a different place!"²¹ As Christians, ending this race problem is eternally important.

The contributions of Blacks in math, science and technology before slavery ought to be studied by every white person. Before slavery, the idea of black inferiority did not exist. The idea of inferiority was used to justify slavery. Randall Robinson's *The Debt* gives a thorough history lesson of the glorious contributions of blacks to the world.²² He cites an example; "William Shakespeare wrote *Othello* between 1602 and 1604. Had Shakespeare

²¹ Ibid., 168.

²² *Return to Glory: The Powerful Stirring of the Black Race* also gives a detailed history lesson of the contributions of blacks to the world.

lived and written in the eighteenth century, *Othello* would never have had a Moor [a black man] as the protagonist. The sea change in global racial perceptions, principally occasioned by the Atlantic slave trade and its justifiers, was that pervasive.”²³ Far too many whites (and even African Americans) believe their history began with slavery. Nothing could be further than the truth. If all whites would read, study, seek out this history, their false perceptions and stereotypes would fall away like yesterday’s news. Then the future could be lived in the light of God’s truth—that He has created us and gifted us all. One story Robinson tells brings tears to my eyes. He tells of the Haitian people after the last slave was brought to the shores in 1791. He says that they have retained more of their African history than American Africans. He laments, “Almost two hundred years after the last African slave was brought to that country; Haitian paintings (of which there is a glorious abundance) are filled with tigers, lions, giraffes, and other images from a place long ago and far away—except in the Haitian heart.”²⁴ White man, see your black brother for who he really is—lovingly created by the Father. Robinson ends with this, “Shameless perhaps, but here we blacks are, in the hundreds of millions the world over, caged by post-slavers in stunted half-told, unfavorable pictures of what we were and are and can be. Too many of us too broken, scarred, soul-weary to engage in the full truth and glories of ourselves in the Africa way-back as well as in our American experience.”²⁵ Those white folk who don’t see it need to get on board and see that black is beautiful and as are all the colors God made.

²³ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

It is each person's responsibility to attempt to understand the hurt in the lives of many black Christians. One way is to stop generalizations, especially those seen in the media and in the movies. You know the stereotypes; but not all black men are violent and prone to violent outburst, not all blacks are leaches trying to get something for nothing. The stereotypes must be identified and eliminated. There is no place for this in the lives of Kingdom workers. There are stories of some white churches who wouldn't allow black churches to use their baptismal facilities. Why would a white Christian demonize his black brother this way? A number of white churches left neighborhoods when the neighborhood became more ethnic. Instead of following the command of our Lord—to make disciples—they left and took their Christian witness with them. No wonder we need a bridge to cross the divide.

Stop Demonizing The White Man

Pastor Jeremiah Wright seemed to do a great job of this (demonizing the white man) and practically single handed turned many white Americans against Barack Obama when he slandered white people from the church pulpit saying things like, "God damn white America" and "US of KKKA." No one is denying inequality nor the heap of despair piled upon blacks in this country but if you are interested in racial reconciliation and being a follower of Christ, this does nothing for the cause. God knows there are plenty of white preachers, so-called Christian preachers preaching hate and stirring the pot of racial discord in this county but if you wish to turn this country around and join the Holy Spirit's party instead of the Republican or Democratic Party, then don't be a party to this kind of diversionist mayhem.

Is it too much to ask black Christians to see that slavery was Satan's plan all along; to destroy people, black and white? Please have pity on the white man. As John Perkins

previously stated, sin is in the heart and it could have easily been the other way around. In *Growing Up Black*, Walter White (1893-1955) tells the story of when he was a young boy. Whites were rounding up blacks in his neighborhood, pulling them out of their homes and shooting them. His dad put him at a window with a gun and told him to shoot if they tried to come in. At the last minute the mob went away leaving the young boy quaking with fear. But he said deep down in his heart he was glad that he wasn't one of those men. Having God's sense of pity for the lost in his heart he described it this way, "I was glad I was not one of those who hated; I was glad I was not one of those made sick and murderous by pride. I was glad I was not one of those whose story is in the history of the world, a record of bloodshed, raping, and pillage."²⁶ Most whites are ashamed of the past and those that aren't probably aren't the ones looking to befriend you and worship God with you. Actually, both black and white Christians could get together and storm the throne room of God and pray for those who still harbor that kind of hate in their hearts. Like unforgiveness, hate keeps a person in chains and spiritual bondage.

Another story I hope will cause you to desire reconciliation with whites is Frederick Douglass' story. As you recall, he was first a slave boy to a family in Baltimore and then Abraham Lincoln's adviser during the Civil War. The introduction to his story reads, "It [Douglass' story] gives a penetrating insight into the effects of slave-holding upon the owner, as we witness the rapid degradation of a decent family when confronted with the arbitrary power of human bondage."²⁷ Kind of makes you sick doesn't it. Here are Frederick Douglass' words;

²⁶ Jay David, Ed., *Growing Up Black*, (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 9.

²⁷ Ibid., 82.

My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tenderhearted woman; and in the simplicity of her soul she commenced, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another . . . but slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tenderhearted woman. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tigerlike fierceness . . . She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself.²⁸

Kind of makes you feel sorry for the white man doesn't it?

Karen Hunter features Nannie Helen Burroughs book, *Twelve Things the Negro Must Do* in her book, *Stop Being Niggardly and Nine Other Things Black People Need to Stop Doing*. Ms. Burroughs wrote her book in 1890! It is a must read not only for her insight but her foresight. Ms. Burroughs did not want hatred to grow in the heart of her race towards the white man. She must have known what scripture says about hate—it is not from God but from our adversary the devil. Ms. Burroughs tried to speak to the hearts and minds of black people of all generations. Hoping to make good communities instead of enemies she said, “The American Negro has had and still has friends—in the North and in the South. These friends not only pray, speak, write, influence others, but make unbelievable, unpublished sacrifices and contributions for the advancement of the race—for their brothers in bonds. The noblest thing that the Negro can do is to so live and labor that these benefactors will not have given in vain.” You are probably thinking, “Yeah right, our Great White Hope.” But remember, as Christians we want to follow Jesus and His teachings on unity, living together as one with one purpose—furthering God’s Kingdom made up of people from every nation. Ms. Burroughs continues, “The Negro must make his heart warm with gratitude, his lips sweet with thanks and his heart and mind resolute with purpose to justify the sacrifices and

²⁸ Ibid., 92.

stand on his feet and go forward—‘God is no respecter of persons. In every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is sure to win out.’ In spite of race prejudice, American is brim full of opportunities. Go after them!”²⁹ Obviously she knew nothing of the future atrocities committed against her race but God knows she must have seen her share living as a black woman in the 1800’s. It seems she must have known that God would have wanted her to live life in Him with an attitude of gratitude.

This is our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We live and breathe for an audience of One in Him who knoweth all things (Jer. 12:3, Ps. 44:21, Luke 16:15). When things are all said and done, we stand alone at the judgment seat of Christ. We won’t be able to say, “Well look what he did to me” because Jesus, who has been tempted in every way (Matt. 4:1-10), will look at how we responded to our circumstances (Rev. 2:2).

Fast forward another century and you can hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. echo this great lady’s sentiment; “We Americans have long aspired to the glories of freedom . . . Today the Negro is fighting for a finer America, and he will inevitably win the majority of the nation to his side because our hard-won heritage of freedom is ultimately more powerful than our tradition of cruelty and injustice.”³⁰ Dr. King mentions many white men and women who came alongside him, albeit a minority, fighting for a better America. Dr. King said that the beauty of the March on Washington was that it was televised nationally and white people, most for the first time, had an opportunity to see well informed and serious black men and they were surprised at the dignity, friendliness and organization of the men. In the aftermath he said, “The stereotype of the Negro suffered a heavy blow . . . As

²⁹ Karen Hunter, *Stop Being Niggardly and Nine Other Things Black People Need to Stop Doing*, (New York: Karen Hunter Publishing, 2010), 209.

³⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can’t Wait*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1963), 148.

television beamed the image of this extraordinary gathering across the border oceans, everyone who believed in man's capacity to better himself had a moment of inspiration and confidence in the future of the human race."³¹ Even though progress seems slow, we can join with him in confidence knowing our God reigns.

Not every white person believes the old American myth that blacks are the inferior race. There are many white people who are genuinely trying to make things better for their black brother, for America and for the Church. They have their hand extended so don't bite it off when they say or do something stupid. A. Charles Ware has some advice for his fellow black brethren, "Christians from the African American community seem slow to forgive and accept reconciliation attempts. Their lack of presence at reconciliation events is a source of frustration to many whites who desire to promote better relationships."³² I believe what he is saying is that many whites want to do the right thing by God and his fellow man; so don't purposely make it more difficult for them.

God is not a respecter of persons and neither is sin. We all come from one man, Adam (Gen. 5). Therefore we are all guilty and need the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ to wash away our sins. Blacks too have a few blots on their history. Does Rwanda ring a bell? In order to be part of the solution instead of part of the problem, blacks need to see whites as fellow sufferers trudging the pilgrim's path stumbling and falling along the way. Be the Good Samaritan. Stop and pick one up from time to time. You might just make a friend.

³¹ Ibid., 153.

³² A. Charles Ware, *Prejudice and the People of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2001), 37.

CHAPTER 5

INTENTIONALITY IS THE FRUIT OF A CROSS-CULTURAL CHURCH

Unity among the brethren shows the world that we are Christ's disciples. Jesus said in John 13:34, 35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Unity also shows the world that God has sent His Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 17). The Messiah, the Savior has come. He sends us out as His hands and His feet (Matt. 28:19). Instead of kicking and clawing each other, we ought to be showing the world that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son (John 3:16). But obviously, good relationships—loving one another—do not come by osmosis. Daunting and difficult is the task. It takes intentionality for black and white Christians to be one in Christ. Let us not rest on our laurels about this. My pastor has been preaching this ever since I joined our cross-cultural church. "Reach out to one another," "Invite someone out to lunch," "Have someone over to dinner," "Get a prayer partner," and of course he means someone of a different race. To some this seems so insincere, so forced and deliberate but this is what intentionality is all about. The Church ought to make this effort. But you ask, "Aren't we supposed to be color blind?" There is no such thing. We are not blind, we see color and there is nothing wrong with that. More importantly is to see each other the way God sees us, fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14).

Everyone has twenty-four hours in a day and a choice of what to spend their money on. Does it show a commitment to promote intentionality? Would God be pleased of our good works in the area of cross-cultural ministry? How many white people spend their time in the library reading books about African history and written by African Americans? How many times a month or a year do you invite a white person or family over for a meal? If you as a white person are intentional in your commitment, put yourself under the authority of a black leader. Attend a black church and get to know what programs they promote and see if you can help but remember to follow *their* lead. My pastor taught me the importance of being the minority as a white person. Being white, we are used to being the majority. Go to places where you are the minority. Get out of your comfort zone and get comfortable being a white surrounded by blacks; God knows many blacks in America have had to sustain (dare I say—endure) this dynamic for way too long.

Norman Anthony Peart said that racial reconciliation doesn't just magically happen. He gives us a lesson plan, "those who wish to pursue it must do so intentionally. They must not step out without becoming informed about the history of the other group. They must be ready to extend and receive forgiveness. They must drop all the old stereotypes and they must be prepared to stand alone in their convictions and against the criticism of others."¹ Sound simple enough? God expects this and He will be there strengthening us the entire time, we can be assured of that. Bruce Mann, in his book *Why Jesus Crossed the Road*, tells the story of a man named Jim who ventured out of his neighborhood and into a predominately black one to intentionally get to know the people, the ones with whom he had never been neighborly. He stepped out of his comfort zone and into a place he would have rather avoided and became a changed man, a better one. Mann recaps, "Real change wasn't

¹ Norman Anthony Peart, *Separate No More*, Grand Rapids, (Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 164.

because of intensified personal prayer, a voracious consumption of Scripture, or even a warm, fuzzy experience with other believers. Jim's willingness, albeit reluctant, to venture into a place he had excluded from his life dramatically changed his perception and attitude."² He spent his time well with everlasting benefits.

Did the early Christians or for that matter saints of old, ignore God and remain in the safety of their cocoons? Think of Abraham. He left everything he knew and went into a strange land (Gen. 12:1). Some of the apostles reached across boundaries to Roman guards while sitting in jail (Acts 16:31). If Christians want to follow the examples left for us in scripture, God might ask you to go to another country or He might just ask you to cross the street. Either way, He asks that you refrain from being a comfort addict. "Perfect love casts out fear . . . the one who fears is not perfected in love," the Apostle John reminds us in 1 John 4:18. Bruce Mann gives another lesson plan for intentionality; "The way to start dealing with issues of race is by slowly cultivating friendships that move across lines of race and ethnicity. Friendships create trust. Trust creates an environment of honesty in which difficult issues can be discussed without labeling people as racists and bigots."³ I am reminded of a visitor I brought to my cross-cultural church a few years ago. She was a white woman. I introduced her to a friend, an African American gentleman sitting behind us. After sharing pleasantries we turned back around and she said, "He is so well-spoken." Well what did she expect? Did she mean, "So well spoken for a black man?" I couldn't imagine her saying this if he were a white man she had just met. Had she ever taken the time to

² Bruce Main, *Why Jesus Crossed the Road*, Carol Stream, Illinois: (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010), xiii.

³ Ibid., 58.

intentionally invite any black people into her circle of friends? Who knows? Maybe her statement wasn't racist. I don't know but it gave me pause.

Intentionality is proactive the way love is. There is a tendency to gravitate towards those we are similar to but the reverse is also true; we run away from those who are different from us. Bruce Mann gives valuable instruction for combatting this dilemma, "It's simple in theory but extremely difficult in application. However, if we are going to be active road crossers we must confront this roadblock called fear. We must acknowledge its presence, request God's help to address it head-on, and then grow through it. And if we don't? There are consequences . . . and our potential for growth will be significantly stunted and God's movement in the world will be diminished."⁴ How can some churches believe cross-cultural ministry isn't that important? Vigilance is required in the battle against evil trying to separate God's children. We are not to give up the fight or decide it is irrelevant for the Christian life.

The Church sings, "They will know we are Christians by our love," but instead of love, we have shown the world plenty of failure in the area of racial reconciliation. There are many examples of Christian love throughout the ages but still far too many examples of segregation exist in the church. We need to get to know each other's cultures and individual's tastes. An unbelieving world must laugh as we talk and sing about love yet live separate lives. It is time to say, 'no more, we *will* love each other.' Ruth showed faithful love by following her mother-in-law to Bethlehem. She was not a Jew but was intentional in her efforts to learn the customs and culture of Israel out of her love for their God. She said to Naomi, her mother-in law, "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God (Ruth

⁴ Ibid., 111.

1:16).” Raleigh Washington says this is the kind of commitment we need. He agrees relationships are tough but ‘love never fails (1 Cor. 13:8).’ He furthermore says, “This is the kind of commitment needed for all serious relationships: husband/wife, business partners, deacons in the church, and cross-cultural friendships . . . conflicts are inevitable. But when you keep your hand on the plow, the end result is a deeply enriched relationship. This is the first step you must take . . . be committed to any relationship you begin to develop.”⁵ In a marriage, a couple must reconcile after an argument lest bitter feelings build up day after day year after year. The same is true in cross-cultural relationships. If differences aren’t settled and they are allowed to simmer, distance is created and the relationship falls apart. Isn’t it about time for some more love between blacks and whites? “Let it begin with me” is my prayer and I hope it is yours too.

In their book *Breaking Down Walls*, Glen and Raleigh tell a story of a white woman who was involved in a predominately black bible study. Things were not going as smoothly as she had hoped. One day she got up the courage to ask the group why she was having such a hard time being close friends with them. She said one of the women spoke up and said, “Do you want me to be honest with you? The fact is . . . we hate you because you’re white and you hate us because we hate you.” After the shock past, she said that she understood the reality of that statement but more than that, she knew the power of God’s love over hate. She reasoned, “In our society, that’s the bottom line for blacks and whites. But now that I’ve been told the truth, I can deal with it, because I know that God’s love can break down the barriers of hate.” Commenting on this story, the authors said, “That’s blunt talk. But alienation between blacks and whites has been fomented by hundreds of years of racial agony

⁵ Raleigh Washington, Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 114.

in our society. If we expect it to break down by itself without our being doggedly intentional about it, we're naïve . . . We must be intentional, pursuing a relationship even when it is uncomfortable.”⁶ What does it mean to love God? Who did God love? Did He love some of the people some of the time? We must go deeper. We are first children of God, second, black or white. We must identify with the pain suffered by the oppressed and the poor. Christ did when he came down from His throne and took the form of man. We read about it in Christ's Hymn, “but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:7, 8).” We must be intentional. It will keep us spiritually fit as we challenge ourselves by stepping across racial lines.

Can the church intentionally affect the culture? It seems as if the church's modus operandi is to let someone else do it. Many orphanages, hospitals, clinics, even the YMCA were founded by Christians. Copious American Christians don't look much different than the rest of America. Do you think if the black and white churches would unite that the Kingdom would go forth in strength and power and actually affect the culture? It is a theory worthy to be tried and tested. It has been said that if every Christian adopts a child, there would be no need for orphanages. If every Christian helped a woman financially and emotionally with an unwanted pregnancy, there would be no abortions. If every Christian ‘adopted’ a poor child and tutored them, all children would have a shot at a good education. It has also been said that this is the Christian's job, not the governments’. I don't know if this is true but it seems true enough that American Christianity is awfully flabby and in need

⁶ Ibid., 126.

of some exercise. Even though trials may come—and they always do—the church is in desperate need of “Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:9).”

God loves diversity all week long so why don’t Christians come together on Sunday morning? Are differences dividing the Christian church? A black woman once told me that while watching John F. Kennedy’s funeral on TV, she and her black friends were dumbfounded how Mrs. Kennedy could sit there so emotionless. She proceeded to say if Mrs. Kennedy was a black woman, she would have been wailing at the funeral. She said that they thought her behavior was so odd. In *Breaking Down Walls*, the authors illustrates this, “blacks tend to be more emotional and ‘tell it like it is.’ If it’s bad, you’ll know it. For instance, a black mother may have one child in jail, one on the streets and one in college—but she’ll tell you about them all. If a white mother has one kid in Yale and one on drugs, you’ll hear about the first and never know the second one exists.”⁷ We should relate to each other as individuals who have different strengths and weaknesses. This just proves we are different but these differences do not need to divide us. Dr. John Frame says, “Love for our brethren requires careful thought . . . We jump to conclusions on those matters because we are passionate about them. The passion may be appropriate, but it ought to be channeled in a healthier direction. Our passion ought to give us a greater zeal for truth.”⁸ People react differently to different circumstances, but these differences can unite the Body of Christ as something to be appreciated.

Some worship quietly others do not. Some raise their hands while praising God, other close their eyes and bow their heads. Some wear suits and others wear shorts. Some

⁷ Raleigh Washington, Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 162.

⁸ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1987), 293.

shout ‘amen’ and ‘preach it brother’ and others say nothing at all. Diversity in the congregation makes for wonderful church services. God has made a kaleidoscope of people. During a *Jews For Jesus* street ministry, one of the volunteers received a bear hug of a welcome instead of the usual insulting remark. He fondly recalls, “I can still see his face—Gino from Brooklyn. He put his strong arm around my shoulder, hugged me and shook me just as hard as he could, ‘You must be a believer,’ I smiled wanly, stating the obvious. Gino replied, ‘hey, I’m just a brother from another mother.’ We laughed, but it was true”⁹

This is what unity looks like when the church is being intentional. We share a deep, common bond as Christian brothers and sisters. If Satan can get us separated then we are easier to defeat. This reason alone should be enough to press on. Dr. Willie Richardson has experienced a few failed race relation programs but said, “However, I have not given up on obeying the Lord by trying to be ‘one body in Christ’ with white Christians because it is God’s will.”¹⁰ Do you want to be a trail-blazer or be a member of the status quo? God is waiting for your answer. “Saddle up your horses; we have a trail to blaze. In the wild blue yonder of God’s amazing grace. Let’s follow our Leader into the glorious unknown; for this is a life like no other—this is the great adventure.”¹¹

⁹ David Brickner, “A Brother From Another Mother,” *Jews For Jesus*, vol. 11:5771, July 2011, 1.

¹⁰ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 9.

¹¹ Steven Curtis Chapman, *The Great Adventure, The Great Adventure Album*, Sparrow Records, June 1992, Compact disc.

CHAPTER 6

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR A UNITED CHURCH

Scripture tells us that God's house is a house of prayer for all people. Jesus said to the money changers in Luke 19:46, "It is written, 'and My house shall be a house of prayer.'" Jesus quotes an Old Testament scripture found in Isaiah 56:7, "Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer . . . For My house will be called a house of prayer *for all the peoples* (Italics added)." We have already seen it is hard to start a cross-cultural church and even harder to sustain it. No lack of issues and problems surround the cross-cultural church but does this mean God wants His children to give up in the quest for unity? Joining with the Apostle Paul, his words—God's words—can be our anthem, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:14)." What is that call? No less than Jesus Christ and Heaven on Earth among the saints of God as we await His glorious coming.

Solution 1: Start Doing Something

John Perkins said God spoke to him about just waiting in the wings, "When a person starts to criticize the people doing a certain job, when he is forever trying to persuade someone else to do it, more than likely God is calling him to do that job himself. That was certainly true for me."¹ There is a great book called, *Just Do Something or How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random*

¹ John Perkins, *With Justice for All*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1982), 44.

Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, Etc. A few Christians reject the book based on its title alone. They perceive that it doesn't leave room for 'praying God's will' before moving forward. The truth is not everyone gets a 'burning bush' and many Christians use this as an excuse to not do anything. "Put something in and you will get something out" as the old adage goes. This is the opposite of entitlement. We are owed nothing but Hell because of our sins. God's will is for each of us to use our God-given gifts and talents. The question we ought to ask ourselves is, given the gifts we have from God, our abilities, desires and aptitudes, how can I offer my services to God to accomplish the greatest potential in my community and church? Gordon Parks, a young black fourteen year old in 1926, got some good advice from his terminally ill crippled brother, "for the life of me I don't know why you're so mad at the world. You can't whip it the way you're going. It's too big. If you're going to fight it, use your brain. It's got a lot more power than your fists." He said that his brother's words changed his attitude and he "awoke early the next day . . . eager for a look at the new surroundings . . . suddenly thankful to be in this bright new land."¹ Just do something with an attitude of gratitude knowing that whatever it is, God will use your unique personality and interests to make it your own special project to be used for the common good.

Charles Van Engen in his paper on planting multi-ethnic congregations in North America offers these suggestions on how to grow a cross-cultural church: by word of mouth as enthusiastic members share their story and their pilgrimage in God's community, by congregations growing when leadership is shared and is representative, by growing when the community of faith is nurtured through worship, education and fellowship in content and relationships, by growing as they serve and as they extend a warm and genuine welcome to

¹ Jay David, Ed., *Growing Up Black*, (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 31.

visitors from another culture.² The church can demonstrate oneness in Christ by worshipping as one in a colorful array of many shades of melanoma displaying God's artistic attribute. Each and every one of God's people is to work towards this goal.

Solution 2: Study, Study, Study African American History

Frederick Douglass said, "The world should not pass judgment upon the Negro and especially the Negro youth, too quickly or too harshly. The Negro boy has obstacles, discouragements, and temptations to battle with that are little known to those not situated as he is." He says that the lack of knowledge of the whereabouts of relatives in the black community creates a difficult environment for success. He explains, "The influence of ancestry, however, is important in helping forward any individual or race . . . I have no idea who my grandmother . . . The fact that the individual has behind and surrounding him proud family history and connection serves as a stimulus to help him to overcome obstacles when striving for success."³ Learning black history will help because by changing your own presumptions and false perceptions and by gaining a good dose of compassion and understanding you can change yourself and how you relate. There is a universal principle—you can change your behavior if you change your self-perception. Randall Robinson says that understanding American's history will help solve racial problems. In his book, *The Debt*, he spends an enormous amount of time on past and present history. He tells of many cultures in distant pasts who relive ancestral traditions as a way of appreciating their roots

² Charles Van Engen. "The Complementarity of Universality and Particularity in God's Mission: Reflections on Planting Multiethnic Congregations in North America," (This paper was meant to stimulate discussion and reflection during the "Ted W. Ward Consultation on the Development and Nurture of Multiethnic Congregations" at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Chicago, IL, November 1997), 13.

³ Jay David, Ed., *Growing Up Black*, (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 104.

but for the African American, this is impossible; “For the armaments of culture and history that have protected the tender interiors of peoples from the dawn of time have been premeditatedly stripped from the black victims of American slavery.”⁴ I want to believe that white Christians want to see their black brethren succeed but the lack of compassion and understanding among whites today towards blacks is deplorable. Malcolm X, in his autobiography said, “I have no mercy or compassion in me for a society that will crush people and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight.”⁵ To be a part of the solution, study, study, study. This will create a stronger, more vibrant and compassionate church body.

Blacks too gain tremendous hope from studying their history. Nathan McCall writes for the Washington Post (as of 1992) but his writing career began in prison. His experience with his own history began here; “A job in the prison library exposed me to a world of black literature that helped me understand who I was and why prison had become—literally—a rite of passage for so many of us. I sobbed when I read *Native Son* because it captured all those conflicting feelings—Bigger’s restless anger, hopelessness, his tough façade among blacks and his morbid fear of whites—that I had often sensed in myself but was unable to express.”⁶ He also said that if Malcolm X could pull himself out of the toilet so could he. (This came after reading his autobiography in jail.) How many whites only see Malcolm X as an angry black man? If they did a little reading about him, they would discover that he gave his anger

⁴ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 7.

⁵ Jay David, Ed., *Growing Up Black*, (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 275.

⁶ Ibid., 274.

to God and God changed him while in prison and was giving up the lifestyle that got him in so much trouble when he was shot and killed.

Recently on Good Morning America, Robin Roberts interviewed Cuba Gooding, Jr. for his upcoming movie, “Red Tails” about the Tuskegee Airmen. She asked him, “Were you ever taught in school anything about the Tuskegee Airmen?” He replied, “I was so frustrated and angry when I read the script [a previous (1995) script for an HBO movie also about Tuskegee Airmen] because I didn’t know there were black fighter pilots and I was 22 or 23 just finishing my education. So you’d think I’d be like, ‘of course, Tuskegee Airmen’ but I didn’t know.”⁷ The WWII Tuskegee Fighter Pilots is a great *American* story. That is why it is so important for *all* American history to be studied by all Americans . . . black and white.

Thomas Paine, best known for his role as a leader in the American Revolution had this to say about slavery. He had visited Africa and saw the country as a fertile land with quiet, peace loving people. On March 8, 1775, he published “African Slavery in America” in the *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*:

That some desperate wretches should be willing to steal and enslave men by violence and murder for gain is rather lamentable than strange . . . The managers of that trade themselves, and others, testify that many of these African nations inhabit fertile countries, are industrious farmers, enjoy plenty and lived quietly, averse to war, before the Europeans debauched them with liquors, and bribed them against one another, and that these inoffensive people are brought in to slavery, by stealing them, tempting kings to sell subjects, which they have no right to do, and hiring one tribe to war against another to catch prisoners. By such wicked and inhuman ways the English are said to enslave one hundred thousand yearly; of which thirty thousand are supposed to die by barbarous treatment in the first year; beside all that are slain in the unnatural wars excited to take them. So much innocent blood have the managers and supporters of this inhuman trade to answer for to the common Lord of all.⁸

⁷ ABC, *Good Morning America*, 13 January 2012.

⁸ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 24.

Learning black history before and after slavery is a solution for changing the hearts of blacks and whites alike to form a more unified body of Christ.

White Christians ought to be part of the solution actively and intentionally. With knowledge and the Spirit of God as our weapon, we can put to death any and every slanderous word said against our black brothers in arms. If America isn't what we think it should be, let's get busy studying history lest we repeat it. It is about time to start taking some responsibility. Why not start with a few history lessons and arm yourself with the truth?

Solution 3: Get Talking And Connect

Dialogue among the races is critical to a better America but to create a more unified church, it is imperatively important and not an option. Talking can be messy and feathers might get ruffled but no pain no gain. Sometimes, when sharing a hurt or offense with a person, it causes that person's defenses go up. They might say something like this, "You shouldn't feel that way or don't be so sensitive." Or how about this one, "now you're hurting *my* feelings" or "why the big deal?—just let it go." But the Matthew 18 principle (if your brother sins go and show him his fault) not only works but works because it is truth from God's word. There is an aphorism, "if anyone gets a resentment I would rather it be you than me." At first read, this sounds so insensitive but really it is the Matthew 18 principle in action. Remember Paul says afterwards, *if* you win your brother . . . because many times now *they* have a problem after being called out. I once (in private) said to a sister in the Lord that I didn't like her condescending voice when speaking to me. Her defenses immediately went up and she began to tell me everything that she didn't like about me. I proceeded to say, "Yes, I have many character defects to work on and we can discuss them after we

discuss this.” She was a little peeved and I thought “oh great, now *she’s* mad and has a resentment” but do you know what happened when I practiced this godly principle? She called a week later saying how she really hates it when she talks like this and proceeded to apologize. It was a turning point in our relationship and I ‘won my brother.’

Talking is always good! No such thing as too much communication, quite the opposite. Many problems result for a lack of communication. At Rock Church, Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein said that they have become very intentional about this. At their cross-cultural church they started having meetings together to dialogue and called it, “Fudge Ripple Sunday.” They say that the purposes of these meetings are to intentionally discuss topics and issues of the day that affect relationships between black and whites. They demonstrate how it works; “All blacks get together during a Sunday school hour [quarterly] in a ‘chocolate’ meeting and express whatever concerns them . . . whites do the same—the ‘vanilla’ meeting. After lunch we all get together in a combined ‘fudge ripple’ meeting where we serve fudge ripple ice cream and Oreo cookies . . . and we talk about all the issues that came up in the earlier meetings.”⁹ They said that they never outgrow these meetings because like a marriage, problem solving and good communication are ongoing dynamics. Evil and resentments do not like the light. An atmosphere intentionally created to dispel things hidden and things kept in the dark will keep the church living in the light. The Apostle John teaches this in 1 John 1:7, “but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” It takes a thick skin and a desire to have a unified church to practice this daily.

Through dialogue we will realize we have more in common than we think. A problem

⁹ Raleigh Washington, Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 132.

shared is cut in half. Our communities will be strengthened and our churches more unified if we celebrate diversity as God's will for His people by talking, sharing and confronting.

Solution 4: Seek Unity, Build Friendships, Create Community

Don't be part of the problem by getting people all riled up and stirring the pot of discontentment. Get used to hearing yourself say, "Well, I could be wrong." Seek unity and seek peace. If you never get into any relationships, you will have a very peaceful life—all alone being a unified party of one. We are built and designed for community. "In the Divine Order of the universe, humanity was created to be in harmonious relationships with one another so we might have strength and capacity to further enhance God's kingdom on earth," Elbert Ransom purports. He reminds us, "God spoke in Genesis 2:18 saying, 'It is not good that man should be alone' and so he placed man in the company of another being which eventually multiplied into a community of humanity. To be in communion with like minds and spirits is God's way of assuring peace and solidarity."¹⁰ My pastor Bob Becker is fond of saying, "relax, you're worse than you think you are but relax, God's grace is greater than you can imagine."¹¹ It is another way of saying that God doesn't love you more than He loves someone else. You did not get un-lost or saved by any greatness inside of yourself. Jesus said "no one is good except God alone (Luke 18:19)." That's pretty darn clear.

The good works we do are out of our love for God because He saved us. We do these good works in His strength; we can take none of the credit ourselves. Look at the effect Alcoholics Anonymous has made in communities around the world. They never take any

¹⁰ Elbert Ransom, *Bridging the Divide: The Driving Quest for Bringing About an Amalgamation of Diverse American Cultures*, (LaVergne, TN: Xulon Press, 2010), 83.

¹¹ Pastor Robert Becker of New City Fellowship PCA, Fredericksburg, VA 22401, www.newcityfellowship.org.

credit for getting sober but give all the credit to God. They have figured out that the playing field is level and that no one, regardless of money, power or prestige (or skin color) is better (or worse) than anyone else. But more importantly, they have realized that they need each other and without each other, failure is inevitable. In the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the chapter, *There is a Solution* says:

We are average Americans. All sections of this country and many of its occupations are represented, as well as many political, economic, social, and religious backgrounds. We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness, and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful. We are like the passengers of a great liner the moment after rescue from shipwreck when camaraderie, joyousness and democracy pervade the vessel from steerage to Captain's table. Unlike the feelings of the ship's passengers, however, our joy in escape from disaster does not subside as we go our individual ways. The feeling of having shared in a common peril is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined. The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution. We have a way out on which we can absolutely agree, and upon which we can join in brotherly and harmonious action.¹²

Amazing what God can do. Our common problem is Satan and his evil cohorts; our common solution is to band together as brothers and sisters and remember that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against spiritual principalities that wage war against the saints (Eph. 6:12, Rev. 19:19). The world should look at the church and see a city of brotherly love. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . . let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another (Gal. 5:22, 23, 26).

Community was lost when churches started leaving the city and moving to the suburbs. Tim Keller wrote about this in his article "*What is God's Global Urban*

¹² *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed., (New York: AA World Services, 2001), 17.

Mission?”¹³ He writes about the changes in the landscape of our communities. Where it was once a ‘mixed use’ (cities where homes and businesses were compactly together), it has become a suburban ‘single use’ zone whose purpose is to avoid the mixed use settlement pattern. He says that this is killing relationships between the races. By using Christ as our example, he shows us how the early church was urban and how we can attempt to heal the two groups. He gives two reasons why this is important: “The technology/communication revolution means that the culture and values of global cities are now being transmitted around the globe to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. Kids in Iowa or even Mexico are becoming more like young adults in Los Angeles and New York City than they are like adults in their own locales.” And his second reason, “. . . churches offer supportive community, a new spiritual family, and a liberating gospel message.”¹⁴ The church should be a place to grow the ‘whole’ man. Hosting the Boys and Girls club, having community block parties, teaching and helping children with their homework are all good ways to build community while sharing the love of Jesus.¹⁵ Carl Ellis gives an expanded list of possible church duties: “These would be biblically based workshops to teach such skills as reading, math, critical thinking and computer literacy, and to engage students in such studies as African-American history, jazz theology, economics, Bible, community development and contemporary cultural issues.”¹⁶ Today’s church is homogenous and so comfortable in its

¹³ Tim Keller, “*What is God’s Global Urban Mission?*” The Lausanne Movement, Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper, (July 2010).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “The House” is a safe haven and loving environment for teenagers from Anacostia High School in S.E. Washington DC where they can learn, grow and meet Jesus Christ. www.thehousedc.org.

¹⁶ Carl F. Ellis, *Free At Last?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 198.

all-black cocoon or its all-white cocoon clearly catering to a single use purpose. Mr. Keller colorfully describes America's church today:

Most evangelical churches are middle-class in their corporate culture. People value privacy, safety, homogeneity, sentimentality, space, order, and control. In contrast, the city is filled with ironic, edgy, diversity-loving people who have a much higher tolerance for ambiguity and disorder. If a church's ministers cannot function in an urban culture, but instead create a kind of non-urban "missionary compound" within it, they will discover they cannot reach out, convert, or incorporate many people in their neighborhoods.¹⁷

Understanding and appreciating diversity is key if the church in America is going to make a difference in the community. Our churches will remain stagnant, impotent and spiritually poor if they do not. Raafat Girgis, in his article, "House of Prayer for All People: A Biblical Foundation for Multicultural Ministry" says that for a church to survive, integrate and grow, it must become diverse. He says that the gospel is bound by race and culture in our monoculture churches.¹⁸ So to set the gospel free in the individual, the church and the community, cross-cultural churches need to thrive in America. But setting the gospel free among the cultures is not the only goal. Besides learning from each other and enjoying each other, Dr. Sam Larsen shares another benefit as the result of intentionally building bridges with all cultures. He encourages the church, ". . . to enrich the polychromatic variegation of the people of God. In doing so, we bring God from His disparate and finite creatures, the fuller praise that is His due."¹⁹ Not only is the church to preach Christ crucified but in doing so, seek unity, build friendships and create community. God is glorified when His church brings Him praise. When the brethren are living together in unity, we are showing the world

¹⁷ Keller, Tim, "*What is God's Global Urban Mission?*" The Lausanne Movement, Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper, (July 2010).

¹⁸ Girgis, Raafat, "House of Prayer for All People: A Biblical Foundation for Multicultural Ministry," *International Review of Mission*, vol. 108, issue 2, (June 2006).

¹⁹ Sam Larsen, "The Church: Blender or Symphony?" *Reformed Quarterly*, (Fall 2007), 13.

that He sent His Son (John 17:21). There are wolves masquerading as sheep seeking to create division and segregation in our friends, family and children. Get out off of the couch, get out of the house and be a blessing to someone.

“Third Place” is a term to describe community explored by urban sociologist, Ray Oldenburg. First place is home and second place is work. Third place used to be the church but no longer. The new third places are the coffee shops, bars, pubs, etc. but even these are becoming irrelevant because where people could once walk to these places, they now have to drive. Suburban life, with its rules, codes and regulations do not permit ‘third places’ to be within walking distance. Always in a hurry from work to home, no one stops to hang out anywhere. He asserts, “Most needed are those ‘third places’ which lend a public balance to the increased privatization of home life. Third places are nothing more than informal public gathering places.”²⁰ Where do you go when you leave your private home? The church not only should be this third place for human connection but it is vital and necessary for the gospel to become unbound. He says of our present home lives, “A habitat that discourages association, one in which people withdraw to privacy as turtles into their shells, denies community and leaves people lonely in the midst of many.”²¹ Dr. Oldenburg says that we are social animals and need third places to thrive. He stresses the importance of the community; “Most individuals, particularly those cut off from community life, suffer what some psychologists call cognitive bias. The fundamental idea is that individuals, in their ignorance, think they know all their needs and how to satisfy them. This is not true. Life lived amid a variety of other people in a casual habitat supplies much of what people need

²⁰ Ray Oldenburg, *Project for Public Spaces*, available from <http://www.pps.org/articles/roldenburg/internet>; accessed 18 October 2011.

²¹ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place*, (New York: Avalon Publishing Group, Inc., 1999), 203.

without their ever being aware of it. ”²² To be around other people from all walks of life in a social setting adds to a person’s well-being. God made us to be social creatures, not hermits prisoned in our homes.

I once visited Tegucigalpa, Honduras and was struck how many people were out and about in their neighborhoods. Their homes, compared to most American homes, were dilapidated but they seemed so joyous conversing and being good neighbors out in front of their homes and on the streets. We have made our homes in America so comfortable that no one wants to leave them! Becoming comfort addicts prevents us from getting to know our neighbors down the street much less next door. If the church is going to make a difference in the community, it first needs to recognize the value of community. The church’s effectiveness in the community can provide an oasis of fellowship in a dry and barren desert for the suburban and urban home and workplace.

²² Ibid., 289.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

It all boils down to this; homogenous churches are not Biblical and therefore not good for the individual, the community, Christ's Church and America. Speaking the truth, Clarence Shuler says, "The homogeneous church theory seems to be inconsistent with the Great Commission as well as being responsible for promoting racism. The theory teaches very subtly that the races should worship God separately. This makes genuine integration in the body of Christ much more difficult. It also makes it harder for the races to see each other as equals and, more important, as brothers and sisters in Christ."¹ More than likely it will cost you something if desegregating Sunday worship is your goal. King David said he did not want to give to God that which cost him nothing (1 Chron. 21:24). You will be stretched but your faith and your church will be strengthened. Are you willing to lose some of your racial identity for the sake of Christ? In Ephesians 2:15, the Apostle Paul says that in Christ, He makes two men into one and thus establishing peace. As the dominant and privileged race, white Christians ought to be bothered when aspects of their lives are lived homogeneously. Look around, if all you see is white expand your circle and get out of your comfort zone. Black brothers and sisters—know that there are white brothers and sisters who want reconciliation and are willing to leave their namby-pamby pampered lives to be obedient to the will of God. Don't shun them and by that join Satan's party of derision and

¹ Clarence Shuler, *Winning the Race to Unity*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 102.

division. Elbert Ransom gives Christians a charge, “Until there is mutual respect between the races, reconciliation is impossible. The mutual respect begins in the social and economic arenas where African American people are recognized on equal par with their White counterparts . . . White people, for the most part, live secured lives of privilege, and make no apologies for their existence. Some of the feelings of perceived inadequacy by African American people must be overcome by their own sense of empowerment and self-worth.”¹ I tell my kids, “Do you know how you know you have worth? You’re breathing!” God is love and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).

So much has been written on this subject that I thought, ‘what more could I possibly add?’ I agree whole heartedly with the sentiments of Karen Hunter who felt the same way. She said beautifully, “But I know that drops of water on any hard surface will over time wear through that hard surface. I am hoping to be yet another drop of water—just as Nannie Helen Burroughs was a drop of water in her time, as were so many others, from Marcus Garvey to Marva Collins, from Martin to Malcolm (which were more like monsoons), to the preachers and teachers who attempt to inspire and motivate people to live full lives.”² Many drops of water can be dangerous to the kingdom of darkness. Shall we gather at the river, you and I, as a united front and send some demons running? Sink or swim I’m diving in!

¹ Elbert Ransom, Jr., *Bridging the Divide: The Driving Quest for Bringing About an Amalgamation of Diverse American Cultures*, (LaVergne, TN: Xulon Press, 2010), 39.

² Karen Hunter, *Stop Being Niggardly and Nine Other Things Black People Need to Stop Doing*, (New York: Karen Hunter Publishing, 2010), 29.

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