

When Forth From Egypt's Trembling Strand (Psalm 114)

George Burgess (1809–1866)

When forth from Egypt's trembling strand
The tribes of Israel sped,
And Jacob in the stranger's land
Departing banners spread;

The One, amid their thick array
His kingly dwelling made,
And all along the desert way
Their guiding sceptre sway'd.

The sea beheld, and struck with dread,
Roll'd all its billows back;
And Jordan, through his deepest bed,
Reveal'd their destined track.

What ail'd thee, O thou mighty sea?
Why roll'd thy waves in dread?
What bade thy tide, O Jordan, flee
And bare its deepest bed?

O earth, before the Lord, the God
Of Jacob, tremble still:
Who makes the waste a water'd sod,
The flint a gushing rill.

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ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Am I My Brother's Keeper? A Dialogue about Race and the Church

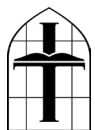
Jon Pratt

In the most recent *Nick of Time* essay, Kevin Bauder introduced the subject of race relations based upon a recent conversation he had with his African-American friend, Simon. Kevin ended his article by posing two questions: 1) What should we do with the perceptions that Black Americans have? and 2) What does the Lord expect from White Americans in the church in light of these perceptions?

I have asked African-American pastor Emmanuel Malone, one of our board members and an adjunct professor at Central Seminary, to join me for a dialogue about these and other questions related to this significant issue. Our format is somewhat limited, and we regret that we will not be able to spend as much time discussing each point in greater detail.

Before jumping into the pool, some introductions are needed. Emmanuel began his professional career as an electrical engineer with General Electric. After receiving his MBA, he was hired by Control Data Corporation as plant manager in Minneapolis. Later he was rehired as an executive manager in GE's Space Systems Division. He appeared to be at the pinnacle of his engineering career when the Lord called him to pastoral ministry. He left GE, earned an MDiv degree at Calvary Baptist Seminary, and proceeded to start a church in Philadelphia where he served for seven years. Following this pastorate, he moved to the Chicago area where he planted Antioch Baptist which later merged with Calvary Baptist Church, Tinley Park, IL, and then pastored Maranatha Baptist Church for seven years. Finally, he came to the Twin Cities and pastored All Nations Baptist Church until his retirement in 2016.

I serve as the Academic Dean and Professor of NT at Central Seminary. Emmanuel and I have had several private discussions about race through the years, and in light of recent events in our city, we are bringing these out into the open in the *Nick of Time*. We plan to take the next few weeks for this dialogue, beginning with a Question & Answer layout. Then in the remaining weeks we will discuss several questions related to race relations, offering our unique perspectives. We know that neither of us is a perfect spokesman



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for White and Black Americans as a whole, but we do agree that the gospel and the Bible's worldview hold the key to both a proper understanding of race relations as well as a correct solution to what is sometimes misguided in regard to these relationships in the church.

I have four questions for Emmanuel. Here's his answer to the first, and we will see his responses to three others in next week's issue.

Q: When a situation like the George Floyd killing arises, what are some ways White Christians intentionally or unintentionally minimize the pain and frustration that the African-American community is feeling?

A: This question does not have a simple "this is what you do" answer. First, they need some appreciation for what it is like to be a minority in America, especially where color is the distinguishing factor.

Perhaps a good beginning is for White Christians to understand some of the perceptions people of color have. When events occur like the George Floyd killing by a Minneapolis police officer, it reinforces the belief that there is no "justice for all" and the injustice is against people of African descent. Also saying you are color blind is perceived to be just as bad, for it denies the reality of the person and it is a false perception that color does not truly play a part in everyday life. Just as the Jews had a perception of what it meant to be Gentile or Samaritan and they treated the Gentiles and Samaritans according to that view (cf. John 4:9; Eph 2:1-2, 11-12), there is a perception of what it means to be a person of color.

Therefore, White Christians must realize that people of color are very conscious of color in life settings among Whites. In fact people of color are four times more conscious of race or color on a daily basis than Whites. The issue is a question of acceptance: Will I be accepted in this group? Will I be treated fairly in this transaction? When Whites say things like, "all lives matter" in response to "black lives matter" signs/slogans, they minimize the very point that people of color are consciously aware that their lives can be easily and unjustly snuffed out. Now there is point of hypocrisy to the slogan. If Black lives do matter, then should it not apply to Black on Black crime? I believe it should, but there is no national advocacy or little protest here.

Another failure in perception occurs when people say, "Why can't you just get over it?" Besides being extremely callous and un-Christian, this statement fails to understand Black oral tradition: slavery and segregation. Framed within the two are brutality, lynching, and second-class citizenry. While today's rhetoric continually reminds us of the 400 years in bondage and disenfranchisement, it is in fact part of Black history. History must not be denied. What would be helpful is promoting a better history—one that remembers, but one that does not define life today. That redefining for Black

America once took hold in the 60's and 70's. There were slogans like "I'm Black and I'm proud" and "I don't want nobody to give me nothing, just open up the door, I'll get it myself." Yet the period was marred with violence in the Civil Rights Movement. Then came the public welfare system and political liberalism destroyed those notions and made people of color dependent on government, giving them a sense of entitlement. The senseless police shootings and the way that the media amplifies those events confirm in the minds of the people of color that they are an oppressed and entitled people.

Second, White Christians minimize identification with Black America's problem by giving responses of self-justification. For example, they might say, "My forefathers came here from Sweden and they never owned slaves." Or they might say, "I am not a racist and I've never said any racial slurs or treated a Black person differently from a White person." These types of responses are not helpful. The community of color doesn't necessarily look at life at the individual level. The view is corporate identity, and every White person is part of that corporation. There is no justification in saying what one's family did not do. The better claim is an expression of regret for what your race of people did to my race of people. Just as the people of color are ashamed when a Black person does something publicly wrong or are elated when a person of color does something great, either way there is association.

I believe White Christians should do the same. Don't try to escape the bad. If there are any words of comfort, they should be words of regret for what has happened and, given the place or opportunity within one's respective sphere of influence today, you will not tolerate or support any avenue of racial discrimination or degradation of any image-bearer of God. Solomon observed oppression (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3), and he noticed that the oppressed lacked advocacy. There can be no greater action than prayer. Pray for opportunity to connect with a person of color and that a good relationship can be formed. Use that time to listen and understand, then speak the truth into the lives of the people He allows you to influence. Philip helped the Ethiopian eunuch to understand hard questions of a spiritual nature. Philip spent time with the man. He willingly went out of his own way, but in the final analysis the gospel was given and the Ethiopian was saved (cf. Acts 8:26-8). Ultimately, the problem of race is a spiritual one.



This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
