

Ye Sons of Men, a Feeble Race

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Ye sons of men, a feeble race,
Exposed to every snare,
Come, make the Lord your dwelling place,
And try, and trust His care.

He'll give His angels charge to keep
Your feet in all their ways;
To watch your pillow while you sleep,
And guard your happy days.

“Because on Me they set their love,
I'll save them,” saith the Lord;
“I'll bear their joyful souls above
Destruction and the sword.

“My grace shall answer when they call,
In trouble I'll be nigh;
My power shall help them when they fall,
And raise them when they die.

“They that on earth My name have known
I'll honor them in Heav'n;
There My salvation shall be shown,
And endless life be giv'n.”



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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: Part 2

Jon Pratt and Emmanuel Malone

We welcome back Emmanuel Malone as he answers three more race-related questions with the goal of seeking understanding in regard to race relations and the church.

Q: As a part of the majority culture, how do White Christians display racist attitudes toward minorities, particularly Black Americans?

A: A resounding argument continues that the Christian church is a segregated institution and unable to model racial diversity and unity. Cities and some suburbs have racial boundaries that were established in the past due to segregation, real estate steering, and White flight. Churches and denominations have formed consequently around ethnicity. The diversity in our suburbs today has changed little in our churches. People want to go to the church of their own ethnicity. Unfortunately, worship style, congregational make up, even politics, supersedes a hunger for truth.

Similar segregated structures exist within conservative Bible colleges and seminaries. Some years ago, I surveyed several colleges and seminaries. I wanted to see what schools employed minorities as faculty and what kind of courses they taught. Most had minority representation, but I discovered only three professors of color taught courses other than preaching and pastoral courses. I interviewed the NT chair at one seminary, and he painted a discouraging picture. He said he struggled with being accepted among his peers. Maybe he had a performance problem (which is doubtful); it may have been resentment for appointing him as department chair thinking his appointment was merely part of the school's diversity goal.

Q: Why do Black folks distrust law enforcement so much? Is “driving while Black” actually true? Do you have any personal stories that can help to shed light on this?

A: In 2015 the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) conducted a Religion and Politics Tracking Survey. They posed the statement: *Police officers generally treat Blacks and other minorities the same as Whites.* 62% of White Evangelicals agreed with the statement. 75% of minority Protestants disagreed. In view of the stats I do not sense Black people opposing police protection in their community. What raises the ire among the people of color is

the excessive use of force to subdue a criminal suspect.

Traffic violations are where most every American has encountered law enforcement. "Driving while Black" is a catch phrase for a Black male's personal encounter. There are three situations from which the phrase "driving while Black" happens: 1) Police receive a call to investigate a crime at a location and the perpetrator is identified as a "Black male." While I have not heard this statement lately, it used to be said "all Blacks look alike," ergo the profile to stop the driver. 2) The driver is driving in an all-White neighborhood. "Why are you in the neighborhood?" 3) The driver is driving a luxury car. "Let me see your license and registration." "What's in your trunk?" I have been stopped for being in an all-White neighborhood. I also was jailed for one night until I was able to prove my identity. The stop was for making a U-turn in Detroit. The circumstance occurred around 2:00 am. I did not have my wallet. I got lost. I'm thinking to myself, "I'm going in the wrong direction," so I made a U-turn. There were no cars on the street but apparently the police were nearby.

There is another reason which may account for a distrust in law enforcement. When raising a young Black male, there is a time when a father and/or mother sits him down and has what is called "The Talk." The Talk is a discussion about police encounters – what to do when stopped. I imagine every household instructs their children what to do if stopped by the police. The Talk is about taking extreme care that your child comes home alive. The Talk may be a contributor to a negative perception of police. My wife and I gave our two boys The Talk and we instructed them when stopped about how to act and respond to an officer. I also included counsel about their appearance behind the wheel, e.g. "Do not wear a baseball cap turned backwards" and "Drive with the driver's seat at an appropriate inclined position."

Q: In your MacDonald lectures given at Central Seminary on February 1, 2017, you provided a biblical "acceptance model" for how majority Christians should relate to those who are "other." Could you give a bullet-point description of this "acceptance model" for our readers?

A. The model presented was designed for the local church. It addressed the church's role in bridging the racial divide. The six-part model has its origin in the Triune God. God Himself has a relational divide with humanity. Sin is an offense against the Lord. Sin is a barrier that prevents a personal and harmonious relationship with Him. My development began with a question: "How did God act in a way that leads to reconciliation and to harmony between humanity and Himself?" The foundation for the model was derived from Ephesians 1–3. Briefly the six parts are these:

- INTENTIONALITY AND PERSONAL INITIATIVE – Our God in His predetermined will devised a plan for expressing His concern and love for all men. He personally took the initiative to rebuild a relationship with fallen humanity. The local church, specifically individuals within the church, can do the same. We can counsel together. We can employ my

51% rule for creating relationships. It states: "*I will take the majority responsibility to initiate relationships.*"

- INCLUSION – God has made us accepted in Christ. Every born-again kindred and tongue become an equal part in the family of God. Inclusion must be one of the products in the church.
- THE CROSS – The cross is the crux, the center-point of the Father's plan. The effects of the cross are momentous. But for the church, the relational plan of God cannot take place without repentance and forgiveness. For example, for African American Christians to move forward there also must be repentance for allowing what oppression has done to their souls (taken from Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*). The oppressed must repent of any desire to excuse reactionary behavior, either by claiming that they are not responsible for protests gone wrong or that such reactions are a necessary result of liberation. Forgiveness must be rendered for what has happened in the past so that the power of remembrance is broken. For the White Christian, confession must be given before God and man for the failings of forefathers, biological or national, and even spiritual leaders, for the history they have made, and the product of their complicity and any suspicious theology that have brought us to where we are today.
- REVELATION – God not only disclosed His will; His word is deposited under the stewardship of the church to promote His will.
- FORMATION OF A NEW COMMUNITY – The church is a new man constructed of diverse peoples empowered by the Holy Spirit. Studies of developed nations reveal six observable traits: a common language, cross-cultural interchange, a common identity, a variety of plenteous resources, a common philosophical base, and military strength. The Lord has designed the church as a spiritual entity of people with similar traits but which are spiritually empowered.
- CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONAL MINISTRY – God's desire is for all people groups to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love for the saints. The American church must willingly cross cultures in America. We have White Christians going to Africa but very few reaching out to Americans of African descent. African American Christians are not exempt. They too must go unto all the world, here and afar, to preach the good news to all people groups.



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.
