

Our Heavenly Father! Hear

James Montgomery (1771–1854)

Our Heavenly Father! hear
 The prayer we offer now;
 Thy name be hallow'd far and near,
 To Thee all nations bow:
 Thy kingdom come; Thy will
 On earth be done in love,
 As saints and seraphim fulfil
 Thy perfect law above.

Our daily bread supply,
 While by Thy word We live;
 The guilt of our iniquity,
 Forgive as we forgive;
 From dark temptation's power,
 From Satan's wiles defend,
 Deliver in the evil hour,
 And guide us to the end.

Thine then ever be
 Glory and power divine;
 The sceptre, throne, and majesty
 Of heaven and earth are thine;
 Thus humbly taught to pray
 By thy beloved Son,
 Through Him we come to Thee, and say
 All for His sake be done!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Am I My Brother's Keeper? A Dialogue about Race and the Church: Part 3

Jon Pratt and Emmanuel Malone

For the past two weeks, we have heard from Pastor Emmanuel Malone as he has answered several questions related to the issue of race in our American culture generally and then in our evangelical church culture particularly. We learned about the danger of minimizing another's pain, about latent racist attitudes among Whites, about the Black experience with law enforcement, and about the biblical acceptance model proposed by Pastor Malone.

Now we would like to have a dialogue related to several questions. Our intent in this discourse is not necessarily to show our disagreements over these issues (using a point/counter-point method) but rather to learn each other's perspectives. In taking this approach, we hope to shed light on these matters and to welcome our readers into the conversation for the benefit of Christ's church and the glory of Christ's name.

In the last issue of *Nick of Time* Emmanuel used the words "repent" and "confess" when referring to the necessary response of White Christians to past sins like slavery, segregation, and discrimination. What do these words mean and how should White Christians respond to language like this?

JP: Before discussing repentance and confession of other people's sins, I think we need to evaluate our own. Have I ever told or laughed at a racially biased joke? Have I ever used the "N" word, even in a ditty or as a term for a Brazil nut? Have I ever used poor hermeneutics like the Hamitic curse or the Mosaic Law's proscription of interracial marriage to justify treating Blacks as inferior? Have I used racial stereotypes in my thinking, speaking, writing, social media posts, etc.? For the older readers, did you agree with segregation practices in your church, whether through active participation or silence? If I have sinned in these or any other unloving ways toward those of a different ethnicity, I need to repent of my sin. And I would even go a step further in light of John the Baptist's words when he called for sinners to bring fruits worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8). We would do well to ask, "What are some ways I can show my minority brothers and sisters that



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I have turned from my sinful actions and now desire to demonstrate love and compassion for those I have treated as ‘other’?”

So what about White guilt? Am I guilty, i.e., liable for punishment, because of something my White forebears did? Do I need to seek forgiveness and repent for sinful actions they committed, especially in light of passages like Ezek 18:4 (“the soul that sins, it shall die”)? On the one hand, we have verses that express sorrow and confession in terms of the corporate solidarity of the people of Israel under the terms of the Mosaic covenant (Neh 9:2, 33; Ps 106:6; Dan 9:5–6; Lam 3:42). This is why Daniel, Jeremiah, and the psalmist could speak about Israel’s sin as their own. In this sense, I find it hard to use repentance language while speaking of the sins of my ancestors since America is not a theocracy like Israel, nor is it under a covenantal agreement like Israel was.

But on the other hand, texts like Neh 9:2, 33 that speak of confessing the sins of forefathers are given for our instruction (1 Cor 10:6–11). Beyond the covenantal overtones of this ancestral confession lies an example of public admission, acknowledgement, and recognition that these sins should not have been committed and that these sins had led to the current state of disarray and confusion Israel was then experiencing. Hence, what is keeping us White Christians from confessing and acknowledging the sins of our White ancestors? We ought to be shedding light on these sins in our writing (both scholarly and popular), church and institutional Bible conferences, conversations on podcasts and radio/TV shows, and blogposts and other social media platforms. Rather than shrug off the failures of our White ancestors in regard to the institution of slavery, segregation, and discriminatory practices, we should seize every opportunity to publicly recognize that these behaviors happened and that the residual effects of these sins are still with us today.

EM: Repentance and confession are transformative responses. Both are reflective of a person’s change in thinking. For White Christians repentance is necessary if one’s heart harbors/harbored prejudice and ill-will toward a person of color or any people group. (This applies to Black Christians too.) Repentance is necessary when in the past a person was complicit and failed to stand for truth when knowingly faced with racist attitudes, policies, or practices. I often ponder, how could White Christians support segregation in a church or in Christian colleges or seminaries, whether the legal kind in the South, or the implied kind in the North? *Did many agree or were they afraid to speak out?* There are two kinds of repentance: 1) repentance for sin that results in salvation, and 2) repentance for sins committed in one’s Christian life. Regarding this second type of repentance, there are White Christians who need to repent if they have a sinful way of thinking and conduct regarding people of color. For me when I heard the truth preached on WCTS radio, not knowing what to expect, I said in my heart, “My racialized

life is no more.” I gathered my family and headed to Fourth Baptist Church because the truth was proclaimed there, and I wanted us to abide in it.

Confession is acknowledgement. Though you did not personally contribute to racial problems, you as a citizen of the United States, as part of a family who spoke ill of Black people, and as part of the majority race that had enacted and enforced slavery and then segregation, you should express regret for what has happened in this country. Daniel, after reading Jeremiah, understood the time of exile was ending and made a confession. He associated himself with the sins of his nation and leaders, his family, and people (Dan 9:1–6). He himself may have been guilty of the same sins. I have taught math for over 10 years at the junior college and university level. In every class there came an occasion when I would confess to the students my regret for my generation’s (the 60s) impact on theirs. We, as a collective, created a rebellious spirit in American culture. While I personally did not teach my generation to act or think as they did, I identified with the spirit of the times that set the tone for the way of life they were living and the godless values they held.



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.
