

Psalm 64

Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)

Hear, O Lord, our supplication;
Let our souls on Thee repose!
Be our refuge, our salvation,
'Mid ten thousand threatening foes.

Lord, Thy saints have many troubles,
In their path lies many a snare:
But before Thy breath like bubbles,
Melt they soon in idle air.

Cunning are the foe's devices,
Bitter are his words of gall;
Sin on every side entices;
Lord, conduct us safe through all.

Be our foes by Thee confounded,
Let the world Thy goodness see,
While, by might and love surrounded,
We rejoice, and trust in Thee.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Am I My Brother's Keeper? A Dialogue about Race and the Church: Part 6

Jon Pratt and Emmanuel Malone

This discussion about race and the church has been invigorating and thought-provoking. Yet both of us realize that we have only scratched the surface. We must proceed to the last two questions we want to consider. These questions help us to circle back to one of our main reasons for beginning this series in the first place: we want to understand each other's perspectives. While neither of us claims to represent fully the White (Jon) or Black (Emmanuel) evangelical viewpoint, we desire to help our readers recognize that as much as we all desire perfect unity in the church, this will not be possible until Christ comes again. So just as Jews and Gentiles struggled to accept and to understand one another in the first century church, we White and Black Christians also must work to accept and to understand one another in the American church. May God help efforts like this to maintain (and increase!) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in Christ's church (Eph 4:3).

How can we be supportive of the ruling authorities in our land (such as police, military, and justice departments) while also showing support for those "others" who feel frustrated with the lack of justice these authorities are called to enact?

JP: First, the Bible calls us to submit to civil authorities and to support their efforts to fulfill their God-given responsibility to punish evildoers and to approve those who do good (Rom 13:1–5). This is why Christians should resist any efforts to abolish or defund police departments, and if a city's population grows or if the incidence of crime rises, funding to the police should increase. Second, we should encourage wise policing which includes comprehensive and humanitarian training. Third, we should look for opportunities to thank (both privately and publicly) those who enforce justice and protect us at home and abroad.

How can I lend support to people of color who claim that civil authorities are often unjust in the way they treat minorities? First, I need to listen, to be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19). Second, I need to acknowledge poor policing when it occurs and avoid minimizing or denying that it has



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happened. Third, I need to have a well-established relationship with my Black friends so that we can have an honest conversation about two things in particular: 1) Actual statistics regarding police behavior show that there is no racial bias when it comes to police shootings; however, there is evidence of racial disparity when it comes to non-lethal use of force with people of color being 50% more likely to experience some form of force in police interactions than White people (<https://www.dennyburk.com/can-we-weep-with-those-who-weep/>). 2) Injustices in the past never justify sinful behavior (such as rioting) or unjust decisions in the courtroom in the present (I recall the awful feeling in the pit of my stomach when O.J. Simpson's acquittal announcement in 1995 was met with cheers from several of my workmates).

EM: One simple way we can show support for police officers and military personnel is with a word of thanks. We regularly encounter police and military personnel in passing. If we would take a moment and thank them for their service, this would be a big encouragement. We support all authorities with our prayers. Pray for their well-being, for their safety, for their families. Pray that our authorities will exercise a righteous rule and legislate laws that produce peace and are consistent with God's way of godliness. Also, we should pray for their salvation. Pray that the Lord will use them for our good and not for our chastisement (1 Tim 2:1-4; Rom 13:1-7).

For the frustrated Christians I would remind them that justice is in the hands of the Lord. He will take vengeance against every injustice. It is a confidence every Christian should embrace. It is our assurance from the mouth of our Lord Himself (Rom 12:19). We can be angry over injustices or political decisions, but we can never engage in illegal actions or join hands with subversive groups.

Satisfying the spirit of the general populace is not realistic. What God calls His people to do makes no sense to the unsaved. We can express regret. We can listen to the complaints. We can work within our community for better policing. But we can also give them this reminder: Years ago, LA's Chief of Police, Willie Williams, was asked why he couldn't do a better job recruiting police officers. He responded, "Our source of recruits is from the community." The police are us. They will never be perfect. We are not perfect. We need to work together for the betterment of our community. We need to be better people ourselves. We need a Savior and a transformed life.

How should we respond to the desire of some to destroy symbols related to slavery (like statues and flags), to rename historical/geographical places, and to denigrate historical figures who owned slaves or who fought for the South in the Civil War?

JP: All people are sinners and, therefore, no one leaves a sinless legacy (Jesus excepted, of course). Statues are commissioned and places named

in people's honor because of some noteworthy accomplishment on their resume. But how should we respond when we learn negative truths about these heroes (e.g. they owned slaves)? Or in the case of famous generals or statesmen, should we completely ignore their contribution to America's history because they fought for the South? Allow me to answer these queries with two questions: "What was the person best known for?" and "Is the awareness of this person's faults bringing undue pain to people today?" One thing that is difficult to quantify in this discussion is what it means for someone to be "offended" by one of these symbols. I want to be considerate of my brothers' and sisters' feelings, but there is sometimes a fine line between "offending" sensibilities and causing an offense that leads someone to sin (1 Cor 8:7-13). I pray for God's wisdom to know the difference and to land on the side that looks to the needs of others above my own (Phil 2:4).

EM: The words of the apostle Paul (Rom 13:7) come immediately to mind. Every Christian is commanded to render to all authority taxes due, respect and honor due. Statues, murals, and pavilions have been ways civic leaders, the nation, and communities honored historical figures for their contributions. Some of those honored owned slaves and some are said to have had a reputation for White supremacy. No one is without fault, and history should not be revised for special interest groups. Perhaps a productive approach would be to incorporate a more inclusive methodology while honoring figures in American history. For instance, when I was in high school, I recall our history books had one paragraph on slavery and another paragraph that mentioned Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. I was an adult before I learned of the many African-American contributors to our nation's success.

There is a saying, "Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter." I do not know the exact source of the proverb. Some claim an African origin. One interpretation states, "As long as the lion can't write, the hunter keeps telling his side of the story. His heroic acts in the jungle, his expeditions, medals, and bravery are glorified in all his stories." The success of our nation was a contribution of many, both the hunter and the lion.



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.
