



CALVARY MONUMENT BIBLE CHURCH
LOVING, LIVING, LEADING FOR GOD'S GLORY

REFLECTIONS ON THE WHITE AMERICAN CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO RACISM PART TWO: THE NEW COMMAND AND THE A.R.C. OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Pastor Chris Lenhart | July 21, 2020

JOHN 13:34-35 (ESV) ³⁴A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE TO YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER: JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. ³⁵BY THIS ALL PEOPLE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER."

A new command. As it turns out, the systemic and institutionalized oppression of other people are not just realities alive and well in America today. These were realities that were very much alive and well in the near eastern religion of Judaism. The Pharisees in the New Testament Gospels are mirrors. These men reflect towards us our most pervasive desires to rule, control, manipulate, and overpower. Theirs was a system of oppression. Jesus at many times and in many ways said this himself. Ruling over men and women by "LAW & ORDER" does not reflect the heart of Jesus. The Pharisees failed in their leadership of the Jews; Jesus showed a better way, a simpler way. It was a way that was so simple that it was both wildly controversial and disruptive among the religiously responsible elites of his day.

"Love one another." Jesus was talking about our neighbors, measurable and intentional actions towards our neighbors. And yet, he was also talking about our relationship to God, measurable and intentional actions for God's glory. The gospel is wholistic. This means that when the gospel takes root in a person's life, the Spirit uses it to produce fruit that manifests itself in the way we treat one another. Still, the question remains: "Who exactly is our neighbor?" And this is not a new question.

As Jesus was teaching his disciples about how he was systematically dismantling the old laws of Judaism by perfectly fulfilling their requirements for them and abolishing their requirements for us (the Gentiles), a lawyer came strolling by. He has two questions for Jesus. Question one: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Knowing this man's intentions, Jesus first gives him the law. The law is what any lawyer worth his weight would want to live by. The lawyer answers Jesus' question perfectly (Luke 10:27). So Jesus responds: "Do this, and you will live."

Now, we must be careful not to miss the second question. The second question reveals the true nature of the lawyer.

You see, Jesus has just told this man that he knows what to do, so "just do it." The lawyer's first question was so simple and so simply answered that he now feels compelled to justify his first question with a second: "Who is my neighbor?" Notice that in the answer to the first question, Jesus gives the man what he wants. He gives him the law. But now, in the answer to the second question, Jesus is going to take responsibility (the law) away and replace it by giving an example of the new command: love.

In answering the second question, Jesus gives an illustration regarding a man who falls into the hands of robbers who strip him, beat him, and leave him for dead. The religiously-responsible, law-abiding elites, those committed to "LAW & ORDER," look at the man and essentially say: "Not my problem." In their minds, I suspect they thought that he must have had it coming to him. Or perhaps they believed that his poor and/or irresponsible behavior merited the whipping that he received. We are unsure what they were thinking by the text, but what we do come to see is that his humanity was of no concern to them. There was no commitment from them towards a man who lay beaten nearly to the point of death directly in their pathway.

Then, a Samaritan appears. Hold up, wait a minute, Jesus. A Samaritan!?! Jews and Samaritans did not like one another. Samaritans were considered second-class citizens by the Jews. There were systems and institutionalized realities in place to keep the Jews apart from the Samaritans. Yet this Samaritan would truly demonstrate how to fulfill the new command. We know the narrative well. He goes above and beyond, loving and caring for this man whom God had directed into his pathway. This illustration not only gives us a clear illustration of how we might fulfill the new command of love, but it also gives us a pathway towards how we might be used of God in attitudes and actions that may promote racial healing, unity, and reconciliation.

Author Jemar Tisby, in his book “The Color of Compromise” talks about the “A.R.C. of Racial Reconciliation.” This A.R.C. is clearly seen in the scenario involving the good Samaritan. The ‘A’ stands for awareness. Our black and brown brothers and sisters are lamenting and grieving, they are advocating and peacefully protesting, largely due to the reality that their white brothers and sisters have acted unaware that there is any problem at all, sometimes even to the point of saying that systemic racism does not exist. How hurtful would it be for another person to ignore or dismiss a painful reality that you were facing? Almost as if we somehow think that we no longer struggle with the problems that have plagued generations of humanity all the way back to the beginning of time. Becoming aware of the hurt that exists right in front of us is an important piece of reconciliation. This requires seeing, listening, and learning from those who are hurting right in front of us. The example of the good Samaritan is clear: he was a man aware.

The ‘R’ of A.R.C. stands for relationships – our neighbors, the people that God places directly in our pathways. There can be no reconciliation without relationships. Relationships are complex, multi-layered, sometimes difficult, and require intentionality and vulnerability from both parties. The Levite and priest weren’t looking for relationship. Their posture was actually very “anti-relationship.” We cannot fulfill the new command without relationship and if all of our relationships look just like us, we may have a problem with how we are relating. If Jesus hasn’t placed anyone in your pathway that looks differently than you, pray with intentionality that he might. Our world is growing more and more diverse. The latest U.S. census data shows that white children under the age of 15 in our country are the first generation of white children to be in the minority in U.S. history¹. The opportunities to diversify our relationships are all around us, but we don’t often walk towards those opportunities. The good Samaritan walked towards a new and diverse relationship.

Commitment is the ‘C’ of A.R.C. Talk about commitment – the good Samaritan’s narrative is a model of what real commitment looks like. Commitment in relationships might look like creating, providing, and funding opportunities for the healing of those who have been hurt. The good Samaritan pays reparations, not for the hurt that he had caused, but for the hurt that others had caused! We use the phrase “going the extra mile.” The illustration of the good Samaritan models this behavior and example. This means that when relationships are complex, difficult, or uncomfortable, we press on. It’s not easy to hoist a man near death onto your horse, to take him into the nearest town and drop him at the nearest inn, paying for both his stay and recovery. Yet that is the example of love that Jesus sets before us.

We have a lot of space to grow in each of these letters: Awareness, relationships, and commitment. Perhaps for the white evangelical American church, starting with educating ourselves towards a greater awareness would be a

significant way to improve the diversity of our relationships, ultimately giving us the staying power for commitment when things feel new, start to change, or get a bit uncomfortable.

Now we must jump back into the narrative of the good Samaritan. Remember the first question? It was a question that related to eternal life. Jesus is giving flesh to the first question in the way that he answers the lawyer’s second question. In my life, I have grown up in circles that love the lawyer’s answer to the first question. We love the law. Jesus takes the law away. He abolishes the law for the Gentiles. We are Gentiles. For the Jews, Jesus was the fulfillment of the law (Matt. 5:17). For the Gentiles who were not under the law, that which kept us apart from God was abolished by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:14-15). Love must lead. Love is the great, first, and only commandment for the church. Love that expresses itself in the attitudes, behaviors, and actions of the good Samaritan.

We are quick to judge, slow to listen. We are quick to criticize and slow to serve. We love postures of power, control, and manipulation when the love and example of Jesus should compel us towards humility, freedom, and vulnerability. Opening our hands and relinquishing our self-perceived power is hard. Giving up control isn’t easy either. These attitudes require constant care and shepherding. This is the work of discipleship. Until we get to these places in our lives, I fear we will be largely unwilling to listen, love, and learn from those who do not look or act like we do. It will be hard for us to embrace new beliefs, patterns, styles, methods, and modes for ministry.

Next week will be our final week together in this article series. We will unpack and explore how the gospel gives us hope to press towards racial unity, healing, and reconciliation in our congregations and communities. Then we will conclude by giving you some tangible opportunities to participate in the A.R.C. of racial reconciliation.

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/less-than-half-of-us-children-under-15-are-white-census-shows/>