



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

BIBLICAL RACIAL EQUALITY

Bruce Ligon

Evaluating history can be painful. People, including Christians, sometimes have reached wrong conclusions. They have misused Scripture to support their mistaken beliefs. These beliefs have been passed on to succeeding generations by word and example. Tragically, this has been true regarding racism.

An entry in the Encyclopedia Britannica makes the following poignant statements:

“Racism reflects an acceptance of the deepest forms and degrees of divisiveness and carries the implication that differences between groups are so great that they cannot be transcended. Racism elicits hatred and distrust and precludes any attempt to understand its victims.”

We may state with conviction that God loves all people, that all people are equal in His sight, and He wants all people to be saved. But it is possible, though we state the preceding principles, to harbor racism in our hearts.

The apostle Paul taught Christians, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). How am I treating, both my fellow Christians and all people, if I permit racism to be a part of my mindset?

Attitudes of the past

Brother Wayne Jackson stated, “Many have been racist out of ignorance or weakness. Others, with a more ingrained disposition, have sought to defend it.”¹ In speaking of her childhood and background,

a dear friend recently told me, “Just because we were not practicing the most extreme forms of racism does not mean we we’re not engaged in racist attitudes or have racist perspectives.” In years past, associating with people of another race, by and large, did not happen. One demonstration of this attitude was in congregations being characterized by their racial make-up. Each racial group would have their own congregation. I recall hearing of the following incident, which took place in a large congregation in Nashville, Tennessee; probably in the 1950’s or early 60’s. A Christian, who was an African American,

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1 www.christiancourier.com/articles/146-tragedy-of-racism-the



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THE SOVEREIGN OF LIFE

That life is precious seems like a fairly obvious truth, and for many it is. Childbirth, the death of a loved one, frightening medical diagnosis, and other things provoke reflection on the fragile and wonderful nature of human life, regularly. But for too many, the precious nature of life is of little or no concern. Typically, figures like serial killers and malevolent genocidal rulers come to mind when considering those who think little of life, and for good reason. Illustrations of their wickedness are plentiful. But we deceive ourselves if we think that only the hardest of criminals have a low view of life. We are treated daily to a barrage of people proving, that to them, life is cheap. The Internet is filled with videos of individuals being beaten (in some cases, to death) because of the color of their skin or their political views. Terrible instances of verbal harassment, disrespect, and inhumanity abound, and the problem is perfectly exemplified in the person who decries injustice, physically harms another person to protest their point, then defends abortion while someone else records it all and posts the video which then goes viral. In many ways, we are no different than the Romans.

What all people must recognize is that God is the Creator and Sovereign of life. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." The Psalmist declared,

Know that the Lord, He is God;
it is He who has made us, and not
we ourselves; we are His people and
the sheep of His pasture (Ps. 100:3).

The fact that God created us in His image means that every human being has value. Jesus said one soul is worth more than the entire world (Matt. 16:26). It also means that God loves and cares for every

person. He provides for us physically (Matt. 5:45) and desires salvation for everyone (2 Pet. 3:9), and offered His only begotten Son to make it possible (John 3:16). As God's people, it is imperative that we learn to view and respect life in the way God does.

Respecting life means opposing every kind of murder, including abortion. The intentional taking of human life is condemned in every dispensation of man (cf. Ex. 20:13; Gal. 5:13). Murder is a direct result of rejecting God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign of life (Rom. 1:29). The very thought of one maliciously snuffing out the innocent life of another should anger and disgust us, especially when that life is in its most vulnerable location—the womb. Millions of people in this world passionately protest the death penalty for a convicted murderer, or deforestation, or some imagined abuse of animal life, while viciously defending the "right" of a person to gruesomely dismember and destroy a baby in his mother's womb. Such is hypocrisy of the highest degree and a warped understanding of how valuable human life truly is. God's people simply cannot stand for it.

Additionally, recognizing God as the Sovereign of life means supporting the government in its God ordained role to punish those who take innocent life. God said "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man" (Gen. 9:6). Government is "God's minister" and He has given it the responsibility to "execute wrath on him who practices evil" (Rom. 13:4). This includes capital punishment in some cases (Rom. 13:4), and we must recognize the difference between a murderer unjustly taking the life of an innocent person, and the government exercising its God approved role in completing punishment on one whose crime meets the standard of execution. We must support the government and pray for our leaders, that they may carry out their office in the way God expects (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

As God's people we must recognize the importance of treating all people with respect and dignity. We must "honor all people..." (1 Pet. 2:17) which means understanding that every soul is precious, and treating them accordingly. There is no excuse for racial prejudice, abusive language, or mistreatment of any kind, to any person, for any reason. Instead, we must practice the Christian ethic of love. Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). We are to love our enemies, and bless and pray for them (Matt. 5:43-

48). We must not harbor hatred in our hearts for our fellow man (Matt. 5:21-26) or seek retaliation against the (Matt. 5:38-42). Every human being is made in the image of God and has a soul that will live somewhere for eternity. If we recognize God as the Sovereign of life and seek to view life as He does, as we should, then we will desire the best for every person, whether friend or foe. We will recognize the precious nature of life and treat it with the careful esteem it deserves.

CW



BIBLICAL GENDER EQUALITY

Bryan Hodge

Let me begin by clarifying what is meant by “gender.” Cambridge Dictionary’s first listing says, “the male or female sex, or the state of being male or female” (dictionary.cambridge.org). One certainly can find other definitions. However, this is how I am using the term. I mean male and female. I do not mean the one hundred or more genders, which some now imagine to exist (consider: BBC teaches kids there are ‘over 100’ gender identities by Jessica Chasmar – The Washington Times – Friday, September 13, 2019, washingtontimes.com). “Male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27).

In the Home

God created the home (Gen. 2:18, 24) and He assigned different roles to the man and the woman.

Man is to be the leader in the home (Gen. 3:16; Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:3-5). Woman is to be the helper of man (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:8-9). God spoke to Eve about childbirth (Gen. 3:16), and to Adam about farming (Gen. 3:17-19). This seems to indicate a different focus. While a woman may help bring in income (cf. Pro. 31:16, 24), and a man can help with domestic work (cf. Gen. 18:1-8), there are differences in focus or emphasis (cf. Tit. 2:5).

The role of the man and the woman is to be respected. Children are to honor their fathers and mothers (Eph. 6:1-2). They are not to be despised, even in old age (Pro. 23:22). A virtuous wife should be greatly valued (Pro. 31:10, 28).

There is equality in spiritual value. “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them... as being heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). The Christian man should regard his Christian wife’s spiritual value. They are heirs together of the grace of life. They have different roles. However, there is equality in spiritual value.

In the Church

God created the church (Matt. 16:18 cf. Acts 20:28), and He assigned different roles to men and women. Men are to be leaders in the church (1 Tim. 2:8, 11, 12). They are to lead the worship (1 Tim. 2:8, 11, 12). It is qualified men who are to be appointed as elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9). God gave to woman a role that only a woman can fulfill (i.e. childbearing); even so, God gave to man a role that only a man should fulfill in a mixed assembly consisting of male and female Christians. However, there are many things that a woman may, and even should do. A woman may teach children and women (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14-15; Tit. 2:3-4). She may help explain the Bible to a man in a very private setting (Acts 18:24-27). She may teach by way of example (1 Pet. 3:1-6). She may do good deeds for others (Acts 9:36, 39). We should respect God’s sovereignty to make distinctions in the role of men and women in His church. These distinctions are not merely culturally based (1 Tim. 2:12-14).

The role of both men and women should be respected. Where would we be without the great things done by godly women? I suspect that many church building doors would have been shut long ago, if it were not for these godly women. Remember that women supported the ministry of our Lord (Luke 8:1-3).

Both genders should be treated with respect. Paul

told Timothy to treat older members as fathers and mothers, and to treat younger members as brothers and sisters (1 Tim. 5:1-2). May we strive to do so.

There is equality in spiritual value (Gal. 3:26-29). Both men and women are eligible to become sons of God through faith (lit. the faith) in Christ Jesus. Thereby, one becomes an heir of the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12:3b cf. Acts 3:25-26). Both men and women may be baptized (cf. Acts 8:12). There is equality in salvation's availability.

In Society

Both genders should be treated with respect. Jesus taught, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12). The word "men" is generic. The NASB reads "people." The ESV reads "others." Jesus had compassion on a widow at Nain (Luke 7:13). He spoke to a woman at Samaria (John 4:27). He healed a woman who had a spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:12). He allowed Mary to sit and learn at His feet (Luke 10:38-42). The resurrected Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and then to other women (John 20:16 cf. Mark 16:9; Matt. 28:9). We are taught to "Honor all people" (1 Pet. 2:17). It literally reads, "Honor all."

We should understand that there are differences between men and women. Peter describes the woman as the "weaker vessel" (1 Pet. 3:7). The term "vessel" refers to the body (cf. 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 Thess. 4:3-4). Generally speaking this is true. Woman, not man, bears children (Gen. 4:1-2; Job 14:1; Matt. 11:11; 1 Cor. 11:11-12; Gal. 4:4).

There is confusion when differences are not recognized. One example is that females are now having their sports taken over by "transgender" men. Selina Soule, a Connecticut high school student said this after losing a track event to a "transgender" male, "We all know the outcome of the race before it even starts; it's demoralizing" (High School Athletes File Complaint over Transgender policy by AP, June 19, 2019, nbc.com).

In sum, God created both men and women. Men and women are different, and have been given different roles. These differences should not be denied, they are good. Both men and women have important roles. Both are to be respected. Both can be heirs of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7).

CW

THE CHRISTIAN AND IMMIGRATION

Kevin Cauley

This past weekend, I heard a news story: a religious body placed effigies of Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus into chain-linked cages to protest the detaining of illegal immigrants to the United States. It is true that Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus took refuge from King Herod in Egypt, but they were travelling lawfully within the Roman Empire and were **not** illegal immigrants. In fact, Joseph had led his family to Bethlehem because Caesar Augustus had ordered all to participate in a census (Luke 2:1-2). Joseph was **obeying** the law. The suggestion that they were doing otherwise is offensive.

There's no more controversial topic in the nation today than illegal immigration. Does the Bible have anything to say about it? Many will cite the Old Testament's immigration laws to justify their contemporary politics. One oft cited verse is Exodus 22:21, "You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." The word for "stranger" is the Hebrew word *ger*. Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldea Lexicon defines this word as "a sojourner, stranger, foreigner, a person living outside of his own country." Moses' Law implicitly permitted foreigners to immigrate to the nation of Israel. Moreover, they were to be treated with respect, and not mistreated or oppressed.

The Law of Moses also expected the foreigner to obey the law. For example the foreigner was obligated to: 1) observe the Sabbath day (Ex. 23:12), 2) offer sacrifices (Lev. 17:8), 3) not eat blood (Lev. 17:12), 4) not commit abominations (Lev. 18:26), 5) not practice idolatry (Lev. 20:12), 6) not blaspheme (Lev. 24:16). There were penalties associated for violating the law up to and including death. Those who were accused of violating the law could be detained until such a time as a trial could take place (Num. 35, and specifically verse 15).

The Mosaic Law had a unique purpose, and that was to bring Christ into the world (Gal. 3:24). Once this purpose was accomplished, the law was no longer needed (Gal. 3:25), and it was abolished (Eph. 2:15). No other law today exists to bring Christ into the world. This means that the Law of Moses cannot be used to divinely justify contemporary politics. Are there other scriptures that might comment on contemporary legislation and immigration? Romans 13:1-7 and

1 Peter 2:13-17 address the purpose of government in general, and part of that purpose is to punish those who do evil. These verses also command obedience to the governing authorities. They state that the government may impose penalties (including death) on those who don't comply. The only exception the word of God gives us to obeying the law is if the government's law directly contradicts God's law in which case we are to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Is it a direct contradiction to the word of God to prohibit unregulated immigration? It is not. This means that governments may regulate immigration and decide who may and may not enter a country. Nothing about the mere regulation or prohibition of immigration per se is inherently unjust. There may be times when a government wants to open the gates to immigration. There may be times when a government wants to halt immigration. None of these actions taken by the government should create a crisis of conscience in the mind of the Christian since God's word does not explicitly prohibit such laws and since God explicitly commands obedience to governmental authorities. This means that Christians are obliged to honor laws of immigration. Christians who want to immigrate are also required to honor these laws. Even those who are not Christians have a divine obligation to obey the law; everyone is amenable to the law of Christ and all will be judged by His word (John 12:48). There are no scriptural grounds on which one may object to a country's immigration policy, per se.

Having said that, individuals employed by the government have a moral obligation to treat every person they encounter with dignity and respect. The Bible says, "Honor all men" (1 Pet. 2:17). This means that while an individual is detained, he must be given access to the necessities of life: food, water, clothing, shelter, necessary medical aid, and anything else that honors basic human dignity. Children who have been forced to participate in illegal activities must especially be respected since their parents acted custodially on their behalf, and children are not legally responsible for their behavior. Upholding the law and honoring the dignity of each individual is a great challenge. With love, compassion, and respect, such a challenge may be met. May God help us to love Him, our neighbors, ourselves, and our enemies (Matt. 5:44; 22:37-40).

CW



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CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Trent Kennedy

In the face of 21st century moral and ethical issues, the Lord's church must still lean upon the inspired Word of God and look to Divine wisdom to answer these questions, find God's perspective on these issues, and see how we should treat those with whom we disagree. One of the topics of political, cultural, and spiritual significance is capital punishment. Does the government have the right to administer the death penalty? Can a Christian support ending the life of another human being? Must the Christian support it in every circumstance? Can a Christian be opposed to it? These are not questions merely for our feelings nor for our own subjective truth nor for the political party leaders that we support; they are questions which must first and foremost be considered from the Bible; and then readily, humbly, consistently, thoughtfully, and carefully be applied to our lives.

Our family has lived in the Asian city/nation of Singapore for just a few months, and one thing that everyone knows about Singapore is that they are serious about law and order. In fact, up until a few years ago you could be prosecuted for chewing gum or spitting on the sidewalk. You do not want to paint graffiti (or at least not get caught) without permission. Even certain drug crimes carry a significant penalty, up to death. In Singapore, public execution is still something that citizens can see today. This large city (about 6 million people) has one of the lowest crime rates in the world. Their stiff punishments may not be the only reason crime is so low, but consider the wisdom of the wise:

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil (Ecc. 8:11).

Solomon is observing that many people continue to violate the law because they are not punished immediately. While living on earth, civil governments would find Biblical wisdom to punish quickly in accord with the crime. Many people live their lives without considering the fact that all will be held accountable for their (our) actions upon this earth. When God chose to punish sin immediately, on the spot, it had quite a lasting affect on those who stood near by (cf. Lev. 10, Acts 5). Now, God will wait to punish or reward our lives on earth until our time on earth has ceased. But, God has reserved the role for punishing evildoers to the civil authorities, and this is where we must consider the topic of capital punishment.

The observation that Solomon made in Ecclesiastes 8:11 is true in Singapore and other places even today. People are deterred by punishment that is rendered quickly. If others see the quick and efficient punishment of horrendous offenses of law, they will be much less likely to commit the same crimes. Academic research by Dezhbakhsh, Rubin, and Shepherd states as follows, "Our results suggest that capital punishment has a strong deterrent effect; each execution results, on average, in 18 fewer murders..."¹ While this research may be a little old now, so is the book of Ecclesiastes. Both are still relevant.

How exactly does God view capital punishment? In the era of the patriarchs, God said, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man," (Gen. 9:6). Under the Mosaic Covenant God said, "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death..." (Deut. 21:22). So many people today wring their hands at God's wisdom, which is actually in accord with the 8th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In Exodus 21:24ff (cf. Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21), God gives the rule that the punishment should fit the crime and not be in extravagance. If you are wronged an eye or a tooth, you are not allowed to take a life. But, if you are wronged a life, then that is punishable by the loss of life (cf. Deut. 19 and the role of the avenger of blood).

What about under the New Covenant, the one we live under today? Has God changed? Here

¹ (http://www.cjlf.org/death_penalty/DezRubShepDeterFinal.pdf).

are some thoughts for consideration: 1) Jesus did not deny Pilate's authority to execute him (John 19:10); 2) Paul encouraged his own execution under worthy offenses, (Acts 25:1-12); 3) God gave civil government the authority to use the death penalty (Rom. 13:1-7, 1 Tim. 2:9, 1 Pet. 2:14). When commenting on the authority of government to wage (just) war and carry out (just) capital punishment, a dear brother used to say "you don't use a sword to butter bread!" The resounding answer from scripture is that capital punishment is given to civil governments by the very hand of God and should be supported as the right of the government (when justly used) by all Christians.

In this support though Christians must pause to check their consistency. Would (should) Christians support the use of the death penalty in every case? Would we support the death penalty of 1 million people in Europe who were found guilty of being Jewish? Would we support a foreign government administering the death penalty for the crime of journalism? You see, it is actually unchristian to support the death penalty in every circumstance. The punishment must fit the crime. In order for life to be taken, something given by God and owned exclusively by Him, the crime must be such that life is taken, ruined, or discarded. Because this is a serious matter, the offense must be serious, of grave consequence from a civil perspective.

Another point of consistency that Christians in the U.S. must consider: must we support a death penalty that is much more likely to be given to people who have darker skin than those who have lighter skin? What about a death penalty that is more readily administered to those who have less money and power? Unfortunately, Lady Justice's blindness generally treats some more harshly than others within the U.S. Justice system (if you would like to examine the evidence, it is easily accessible through a simple Google search). But, this is not a problem with the God-ordained way of doing things. In fact, man's inability to do what God has commanded has never shown a weakness in the prescription of God! So, if God ordained the civil authorities to bear the sword, we must accept that and use the power we have as citizens to help the government punish the evildoers (despite their race, class, or wealth). Also, we would do well to acknowledge that some who have not done evil have been mistreated within the justice system. This is not a knock on God's perfect design but another comment

on man's inferiority and inability to be divinely perfect.

One final objection: is it hypocritical to support the death penalty and condemn abortion and euthanasia? Is it inconsistent to support the punishment of criminals and condemn the murder of elderly and unborn babies? Absolutely not. God breathed the breath of life into man (Gen. 2:7). Therefore, Christians must hold to a sanctity of life view. That is to say that life as given by God to the pinnacle of His creation is something distinct and glorious, perfect, and precious.

Support of the death penalty for Christians is not about torture or revenge. Support of the death penalty is not about declaring the government to be perfect. Support of the death penalty is about recognizing the God given role of government. Support of the death penalty is not about Christians blindly accepting it in every circumstance nor remaining silent when we believe injustice is done. Support of the death penalty recognizes that life is precious and ruining a life is best met with swift punishment. And, supporting the death penalty is about protecting the sanctity of life as viewed by God by punishing those who do not regard innocent human life.

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began to enter the meetinghouse of the congregation. But he was forthrightly told he was not welcomed. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident.

I have read several statements by well-known preachers of previous generations regarding how they viewed and treated African Americans. Their attitudes were shameful, repulsive, and sinful. Sometimes when quotations from these men are cited today, it will be emphasized they were living in a different time. While that is true, it

does not excuse their sinful attitude of racism.

The Bible and Racism

From the principles emphasized in the following passages it is very clear that Christianity and racism are not compatible.

Acts 10:34-35 – “Opening his mouth, Peter said, ‘I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears him and does what is right is welcome to him.’” This was a drastic change from the teaching of the Law of Moses. God’s chosen people were no longer a certain group of people.

Acts 17:26 – “And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth.” All mankind has descended from Adam, the first man. In our Father’s sight, all people are equal. We need to rid of our minds of racial prejudice. This is where overcoming racism begins. All mankind is a part of the human race.

Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither is there slave or free man there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Accepting that all people were equal in the sight of God was a difficult principle for the early Christians. This verse emphasizes that all distinctions are meaningless in Christianity. Salvation is now equally available to all people.

James 2:1 – “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” (Jas. 2:1, 4). While this passage is not dealing with racial distinctions, the principle of treating all people equally is set forth.

Conclusion

Dr. Albert Mohler has correctly expressed regarding racism, “To put the matter plainly, one cannot simultaneously hold to an ideology of racial superiority and rightly present the gospel of Jesus Christ. One cannot hold to racial superiority and simultaneously defend the faith once for all delivered to the saints.”²

Racism is not merely a weakness. It is the most extreme version of hatred. These kinds of distinctions are an affront to the impartiality of God. May He help us to examine our hearts and rise above racism.

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² albertmohler.com/2015/06/23/the-heresy-of-racial-superiority-confronting-the-past-and-confronting-the-truth/



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