

FAQ on Racial Reconciliation, *Jamaal Williams*

As a black pastor, in a predominantly white context, I get questions that revolve around race quite often. I thought it would be beneficial for my white brothers and sisters if I answered some of these questions that I receive most, from a Christian, black male perspective, to help them continue to learn and grow in their understanding of these issues.

I write this in the spirit of Paul's exhortation to the church in Ephesus, desiring to say "only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." In order for a post like this to be helpful two things need to occur. First, my speech and language must be done in a way that builds up not that tears down. Second, as a reader it is important, if you have a different perspective, for you to be an empathetic listener. Keeping in mind that your cultural upbringing, political party, past hurts and experiences may have shaped your perspective in a different way.

We want to remember that issues of division, whether they are between races, genders, ages, or classes, actually stand in opposition of what God has done for us in Christ. Because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are made into one new man, the Church! God has reconciled us to himself through Jesus, and because of that work, we are reconciled to each other! Therefore, we are not working for unity, but working to keep unity. As we follow Christ's example of humility in Philippians 2:3-10 we will experience Christ love and peace at a greater level and show the world what we have in Him.

The following questions deal with issues of racial reconciliation, specifically between whites and blacks. We recognize that reconciliation is much larger than race, and that there is more to racial reconciliation than simply black and white. However, I see the black-white divide as one of the deepest divides in America, historically and today. Further than that, this is an issue that cannot be overlooked by Sojourn Midtown, a majority white church in a majority black neighborhood.

For most of the questions below, I have included links/suggestions for further study. While I may not agree with everything that others say (in the links/suggestions), I do think they offer a helpful perspective for all of us to learn from.

Is it wrong for me to be color-blind?

The simple answer is yes. Why? Because God Himself is not colorblind. Inside the human race, God has created many ethnicities, all of which bear his image equally. To claim to be "color-blind" is to ignore the differences of another, which in turn ignores the aspect of the imago Dei which they bear in their personhood. From a human perspective, telling somebody, "I don't see color," goes much deeper than the color of their skin. It can communicate a lack of care for their culture, their heritage, and even their experience as a person of color in America.

As Christians, we embrace unity in diversity. In Ephesians 2:15, we read, "Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody." God made us into a new people group, but that doesn't mean that our diversity is done away with. Because we are made into a new group, we are able to embrace each other's diversity, recognizing that in the Body of Christ everybody is valuable and has a vital role.

If you'd like to read further on the matter, read D.A. Horton's article, ["God is Not Colorblind, So Why Are We?"](#)

Black Lives Matter is largely a secular movement, how should a Christian interact with the movement?

As Christians, we must be discerning when we consider our participation in secular groups and movements. I can confidently say that I believe we should support the sentiment, but supporting everything about the movement should be left up to the individual conscience. As it has been said, when people use the phrase "Black Lives Matter," it does not mean that other lives don't matter, but rather that Black Lives Matter too. It does not mean that other ethnicities are not suffering injustices, but that American blacks are experiencing great injustices now (and historically).

Each individual's stance towards the movement may look different, but the least we can do is pray for our cities and people marching or protesting. We also should seek ways, as the body of Christ to be present and serve in our communities, drawing near to those who are hurting. Black and brown communities need to know that the church acknowledges their full humanity, and will not stand for injustice. When we stand together, we model what God has called us to in Isaiah 1:17, "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed."

In an article on The Gospel Coalition, Mika Edmondson deals at length with this issue. To learn more, read his article, ["Is Black Lives Matter the New Civil Rights Movement?"](#)

Is Systemic Racism real?

Systemic Racism has become a very politicized term; but just because politicians and activists talk about it doesn't make the reality any less true. Nonetheless, I find it more helpful to talk about Systemic Racism in the biblical terms of power and oppression. The Israelites cried out to God in Psalm 123:4, "Our soul has had more than enough of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud." Our forefathers in the faith, the Israelites, suffered great oppression throughout the Bible. They were enslaved in Egypt and Babylon, and were treated like second-class citizens by the Romans.

If we truly believe what the Bible says about the fallen world that we live in—a world stained with sin—we should have no problem accepting that the systems (or powers) of this world are corrupt and broken. Why? Because, apart from Christ, everybody in the system is opposed to God and His will. That same oppression that was seen in the Bible can be seen today in the experience of Black Americans (and really all minorities).

The institution of African slavery started in the New World in 1619, America was not even a country yet. If you add the years of slavery and Jim Crow (which lasted from 1877-1957) approximately 87% of the African-American experience in this country has been under unjust laws. Those laws have had consequences and lingering effects that still impact African Americans to this day. There is a great [disparity in wages](#), [availability of income](#), and much more. Just recently BancorpSouth was [accused](#) of mortgage redlining (the practice of denying or limiting financial services in minority neighborhoods) in Memphis. There are many other examples of institutions and corporations behaving this way.

The important thing to remember is that our answer is different than the politicians and the activists. Our answer to oppression and the conquering of powers that perpetuate injustice is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Colossians 2:15 tells us, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." There was only one King that could fix the problem of oppression. Jesus Christ conquered the powers by becoming powerless, he conquered oppression by becoming oppressed. As the Church, we are now given the responsibility to carry on the work of Jesus, and stand up against the oppression that we see in the world. If we fail to recognize that systems are broken, we fail to recognize the power of our Savior who was broken.

For a more in-depth analysis of the realities of, read [American Apartheid](#) by Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton. If you'd like to see an example of systemic racism in our own city of Louisville, watch ["The Ninth Street Divide"](#) by Broken Sidewalk.

What's the deal with Colin Kaepernick and how should I react?

If you're not familiar with the situation, NFL quarterback, Collin Kaepernick has recently begun to kneel (it started out as sitting) for the national anthem as it is played before each game. He describes why: "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color." There has been great outrage from scores of people, all across the spectrum. But how should we as Christians react?

Just as Colin Kaepernick has the right to protest in a harmless, non-violent manner. You have the right to oppose him. But I would encourage you to consider why you oppose him, and also consider why he is protesting.

Over the last several decades, the concept of nationalism has become extremely entangled with American Christianity, I believe, in a detrimental way. For many American Christians, Kaepernick's protest is exponentially more preposterous than an unarmed, black man getting shot near his car. As Lecrae eloquently stated, "Take a

knee...people riot. Take a bullet...people quiet.” As Christians, when we look upon a protest, we are certainly allowed to disagree, but we should always ask, “Why are they protesting? Is there validity to the what they are saying? Is there truth to what they’re claiming?” James 1:19 says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” Our posture as Christians should be to listen to what others are saying, first. But we must also remember that our truest citizenship is not American; our truest citizenship is in Heaven.

Both Peter and the author of Hebrews refer to Christians as “sojourners”. Paul calls us “ambassadors” and tells us that our “citizenship is in heaven.” Practically, this means that the allegiance that we pledge first and foremost lies with our Heavenly Father. As sojourners of this earthly land, we must obey our Father. “What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Though you may not agree with Colin Kaepernick, and though he may not be approaching the issue from a Christian perspective, his cry for justice is a cry that we as Christians should be bellowing from the rooftops!

If you’d like to hear a healthy discussion on this issue, listen to this podcast by Pass the Mic, [“Kaepernick, Patriotism, and Peaceful Protest.”](#)

