

The High Calling

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Peter's Persistent Problem with Prejudice

By Stan Key

The recent outbreak of racial unrest across our nation reminds us that bigotry and prejudice are still with us. We can rejoice in the progress that has been made since the Civil Rights Movement but at the same time we humbly recognize that much work remains to be done. While black/white tensions are the most visible expression of racism among us, we know that the ugly reality of tribalism can be found in other relationships as well.

Why would *The High Calling*, a magazine devoted to the doctrine and proclamation of holiness, dedicate one of its issues to the theme of racism? I'm so glad you asked!

The very fact that many will find it odd that a holiness magazine would treat the subject of racism only illustrates the depth of the problem! Many believe this subject is political and the church should not get involved in social issues, but that only reveals people's ignorance of what the Bible has to say on the matter. To leave this issue in the hands of politicians and social activists is to leave it unsolved. Socio-political responses only treat symptoms, leaving the root causes unaddressed. Only the

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Red, brown, yellow
Black and white
They are precious in His sight

gospel of Jesus Christ offers real solutions for the real problems that confront us.

It would be impossible to find a better illustration of both the perversity of racism and the power of the gospel to save than the apostle Peter. Raised in a world where racial boundaries between Jews and Gentiles were strictly enforced, Peter adopted the ugly arrogance of ethnic superiority that characterized his "tribe." To associate with Gentiles (attend an event, enter a house, drink from the same cup, etc.) was unthinkable. Peter

embraced the segregated worldview of his Jewish culture and assumed that the wall that separated him from Gentiles would remain forever.

Acts 10 tells the dramatic story of how the Lord addressed Peter's racial bigotry and enabled him to finally tear down the wall of separation. Although Acts 10 is typically referred to as "The Conversion of Cornelius," the one who really gets converted here is Peter! The story of Peter's vision and subsequent visit to the house of Cornelius is a rich repository of divine truth for those seeking to better understand both the cause and cure of racism.

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We Have a Sin Problem, Not a Skin Problem

By Tony Evans



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Pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship (Dallas, Texas), founder and president of The Urban Alternative, former chaplain of the Dallas Cowboys, author, conference speaker and radio minister, Dr. Tony Evans touches the lives of thousands through his gospel ministry. He addresses the issue of race head-on in his book *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Moody, 2011). The following article, abridged and slightly edited, is taken from chapter three, “Biblical Models of Oneness” (57–70).

One of the most informative and poignant teachings from the Scripture regarding culture, truth, and oneness is the story of Jesus’ encounter with the woman of Samaria in John chapter 4. The Samaritans were a mixed race of Assyrians and Israelites and the Jews typically kept clear of them. This story gives us two overriding principles that are needed to establish true spiritual oneness.

RECOGNIZE COMMON GROUND

In Samaria, Jesus rested at Jacob’s well. Jesus chose this particular well because both the Jews and Samaritans loved Jacob, who was the father of both groups. Jesus was looking for common ground, so he stopped at Jacob’s well and built a bridge of communication by starting with what he and the Samaritan woman could agree on.

The woman recognized right away that Jesus was a Jew. It could be that he looked like a Jew, or perhaps he had a Jewish accent or some other trait that gave a public indication of his racial and cultural heritage. Whatever it was, when Jesus went through Samaria, he did not give up his own culture. He did not stop being a Jew to reach a Samaritan. At the same time, he didn’t let his history, culture, race, and background get in the way of ministering to a woman who had a spiritual need and who would meet him on common ground. Likewise, Jesus allowed the woman to retain her history, culture, and experiences as a Samaritan.

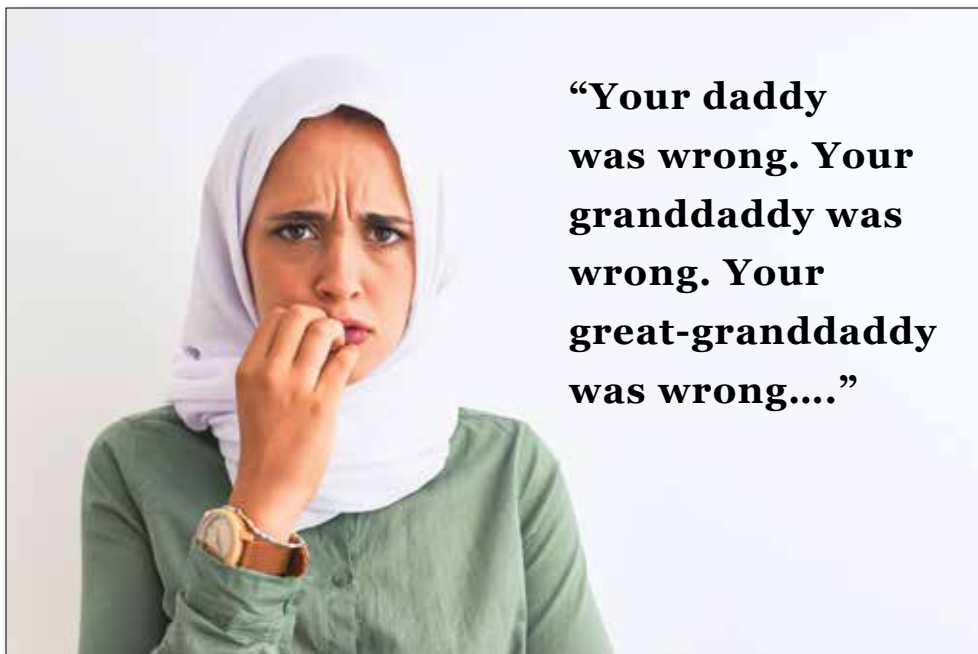
God is not calling us to be something we were not created to be when he calls us to oneness. He is not calling you, if you are white, to like soul music, and I’m thankful that he is not calling me to like country and western. What he is doing, however, is calling everybody to take who we are and to work together toward a common goal—a kingdom agenda.

I’m not sure if you realize this, but whatever race you are now is what you are going to be in heaven. If you are white now, you are going to be white in heaven. If you are black now, you are

going to be black in heaven. You are who you are intentionally and eternally (see Rev. 7:9). So, acknowledging and embracing our differences in a context of oneness more accurately reflects the kingdom of heaven than any other thing.

The Samaritan woman saw that while Jesus looked Jewish, talked Jewish, and dressed Jewish, he didn’t act entirely Jewish because he was willing to do something no other Jew was willing to do—put his lips to her cup. Please note that this was a tangible, public, and social action on his part. In other words, he wasn’t just standing far off saying, “Samaritan woman, you must be born again.” Rather, Jesus was willing to engage her socially. Don’t miss that. If he had not been willing to engage her socially, he would not have had the opportunity to talk to her spiritually.

A lot of times we want to get people to heaven whom we are not willing to relate to on earth. We want to get people to glory whom we are not willing to even talk to in history. But what Jesus did was use the natural cross-cultural opportunity of common ground—Jacob’s well and his need for a drink—to present a message of life to this lady. Through this, Jesus initiated true biblical oneness.



“Your daddy was wrong. Your granddaddy was wrong. Your great-granddaddy was wrong....”

REFUSE TO ALLOW CULTURE TO INTERFERE WITH TRUTH

Our second principle is illustrated

best through the next passage, where the woman says, “Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (Jn. 4:20). What she is saying, in my Tony Evans translation, is, “Jesus, y’all go to church over there. And we go to church over here. You worship that way. We worship this way. We are different. We were raised differently. My daddy taught me that this is how you do it because his daddy taught him that this is how you do it. In fact, my great-granddaddy taught my granddaddy who taught my daddy who taught me that this is how you do it. This is our history and our background and what we are used to doing.”

Jesus responds using rather direct language. He says, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (Jn. 4:22). In other words, “Your daddy was wrong. Your granddaddy was wrong. Your great-granddaddy was wrong. And your great-great-granddaddy was wrong. You, and your people are wrong.”

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Have Mercy, Lord, for We Have Sinned!

By Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith



In their important book *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford, 2000), Emerson and Smith conclude that white evangelicals, despite their denials, often continue to think and act in ways that help to perpetuate the racial

divide in our nation. In describing the history of evangelicalism in America, the authors show how white Christians were complicit from the very beginning in the ugly racial divide that was shaping American culture. The article below, abridged and slightly edited, is taken from chapter two: "From Separate Pews to Separate Churches: Evangelical Racial Thought and Practice, 1700–1964" (21–49).

By all accounts, George Whitefield was a major force in Early American history. Religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom deemed him the "hero-founder" of American evangelicalism, and according to historian George Marsden, "the first media star in American history." Whitefield, it is said, could seize the attention of a crowd simply by pronouncing "Mesopotamia." As the "founder" of American evangelicalism, George Whitefield is an important figure for our purposes. He embodies some of the contradictions we will see in present-day evangelicals—well-intentioned, but adapting the message to fit the sociocultural, racialized context—and he embodies early white evangelicals' views on race.

Whitefield supported the Christianizing of slaves.

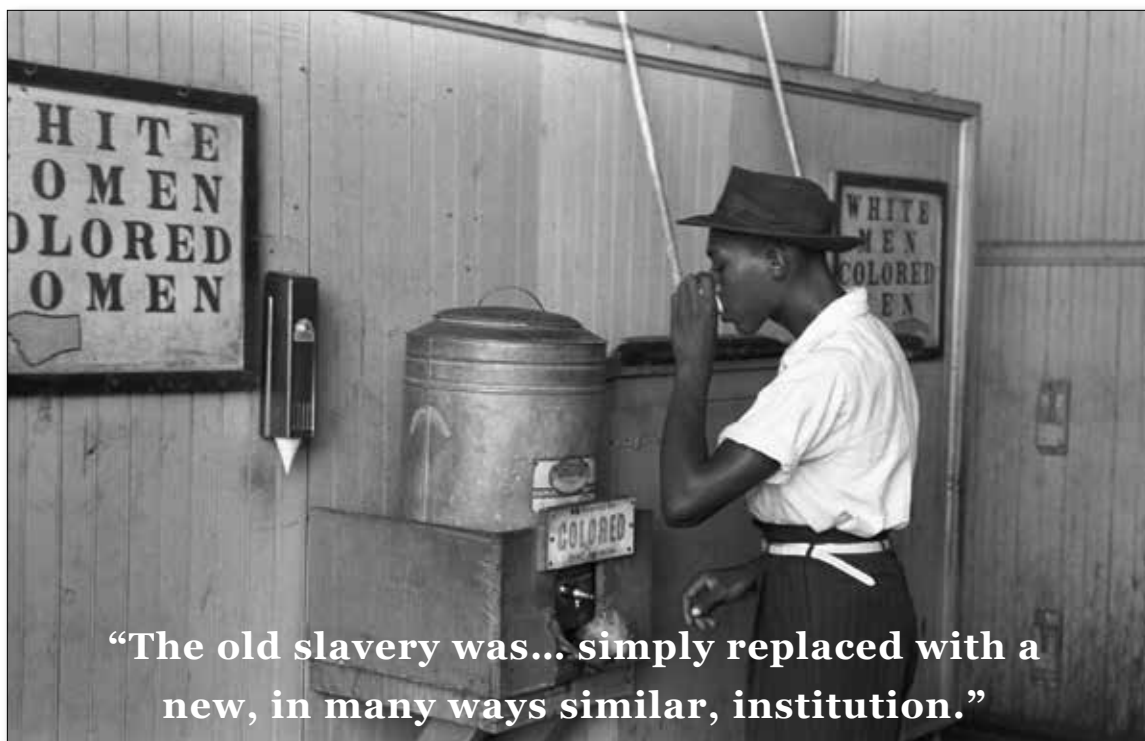
In conducting revivals, he preached to both whites and blacks. As a result of the message shared by Whitefield and other evangelical preachers, blacks began entering the churches in accelerating numbers. Yet even as he preached his message of radical equality in Christ and shared the salvation message with slaves, he was a supporter of slavery. According to Forrest Wood, he was convinced that for the heathen Africans, "bondage was their best insurance of salvation." What is more, in an open letter to planters in the colonies, Whitefield urged kinder treatment of slaves, but noted that cruelty can have the positive effect of heightening "the sense of their natural misery," thereby increasing receptivity to the Christian message.

Whitefield also shared a strong concern for the economic success of the colonies, particularly the newest, Georgia. He testified before Parliament in 1741 in support of the introduction of slavery in Georgia. In 1747–48, when the orphanage in Georgia he co-founded bought slaves (in defiance of the then current legal exclusion), Whitefield, according to Wood, became a slave owner himself. In 1749, in part due to

the efforts of Whitefield, the slave exclusion in Georgia was repealed. By that time, white Georgia Christians had united under Whitefield's message.

A century later, as the nation was struggling with how to handle the issue of slavery, a chasm was forming between the North and the South. The crevice of difference widened over time, as it led Methodists to divide by region in 1844, Baptists in 1845, New School Presbyterians in 1857, and Old School Presbyterians in 1861. With the splits came a hardened, more fully developed defense of positions that further expanded the divide.

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, southern whites, in a mix of culture and religion, developed a variety of pro-slavery arguments. These arguments ranged from biblical, to charitable, to evangelistic, to social, to political. The Bible, the



"The old slavery was... simply replaced with a new, in many ways similar, institution."

defenders argued, does not oppose slavery and in fact, by direct and indirect precept, supports it. Moreover, the chief mission of the church is evangelization and discipleship; slavery allows for the Christianization, spiritual growth, and humane treatment of people who otherwise would miss out on salvation. According to one argument, the curse of Ham (Gen. 9:24–27) rendered Africans an inferior race, and it is a Christian responsibility to protect and provide for them. Slavery allows for social order and limits crime and vice that would otherwise occur. Further, Christians should obey the law, which permitted and protected slavery, and not get involved in merely temporal matters such as slavery abolition.

Not only did southern white Christians see slavery as acceptable and even commendable, but many owned slaves themselves. In fact, in the year before the Methodist split, 25,000 members owned 208,000 slaves; 1,200 Methodist clergy were slaveholders. From 1846 until the Civil War, every man who achieved the rank of bishop within the Methodist

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A More Biblical Sunday Morning

By Soong-Chan Rah



Soong-Chan Rah is professor of Church Growth and Evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. An ordained minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church, he was the founding pastor of Cambridge Community Fellowship Church (Massachusetts), a multiethnic ministry committed to living out the values of racial reconciliation and social

justice in an urban context. This article, abridged and slightly edited, is taken from the book *Letters to a Birmingham Jail: A Response to the Words and Dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by Bryan Loritts (Moody, 2014: 202–19).

When Dr. King penned the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” his world differed vastly from our current twenty-first-century context. Many things have changed for the better over the course of several decades, including legislation that affirms the dignity and rights of African Americans. One salient characteristic among many others, however, stubbornly extends into our time: 11 a.m. Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour in the United States.

This ongoing segregation stands in stark contrast to the demographic realities of Christianity throughout the world and in the United States. One estimate asserts that by 2025 an overwhelming percentage (75 percent) of Christians in the world will reside outside of Europe and North America. Philip Jenkins offers a colorful illustration by claiming that “soon, the phrase ‘a White Christian’ may sound like a curious oxymoron, as mildly surprising as ‘a Swedish Buddhist.’”

The drastic change in the demographics of world Christianity is also evident in American Christianity where changing demographics have resulted in the proliferation of immigrant churches throughout the country. Driving through a Washington DC suburb, a careful observer will note that many older church buildings with a church sign in English out front will have a sign in Korean directly underneath. A visit to any major city reveals a large number of Spanish-speaking storefront churches scattered throughout the city.

Diversity in the makeup of American Christianity, however, has not necessarily resulted in the proliferation of multiethnic churches that encompass this diversity. Recent studies point toward the stubbornness of ethnic homogeneity in the local church. In *United by Faith*, the authors assert that the percentage of Christian congregations that are considered

racially mixed (no one racial group being more than 80 percent of the congregation) is about 5½ percent. Michael Emerson claims that “the vast majority of congregations are substantially less racially diverse than the neighborhoods in which they reside.” His research reveals that American churches are significantly more segregated than American society, even more segregated than schools and neighborhoods.

The persistence of segregation in the American church can be traced in part to the broad influence of the Church Growth Movement (CGM) among American evangelicals in the latter part of the twentieth century. One of the key tenets of CGM is the Homogenous Unit Principle, which claimed that it is easier to convert individuals and grow churches with demographically (i.e., racially) similar people. Church growth occurs most easily, therefore, when you reach out to people who are in your current

network of relationships that tend to fall along homogenous clusters. Racial segregation, therefore, becomes normalized.

It is perfectly normal to want to invite your friends to church, and if your friends are of the same race, ethnicity, and social class, then your church begins to grow along homogenous lines. A prominent book on church growth techniques promotes the concept that a church should identify a target audience to grow the church. The book proceeds to depict the ideal candidate to join the church as a middle-aged white male with

a polo shirt and khaki pants. When I see that picture and read the “type” of person that the church wants to reach, I can easily deduce that I am not welcome at that church.

This way of thinking gave the church permission to operate under *de facto* segregation. The church could define what kinds of people are “like us” and choose to tailor its ministry accordingly. Segregation in the church could be justified for the sake of evangelization and church growth.

However, the sociological motivation for this prioritization diminished the theological understanding of God’s intention for his church. In contrast to the Homogenous Unit Principle, God’s intention for the church was for a multiethnic, racially diverse, and racially reconciled community. The Scriptures testify to this intention. In Micah 4, for example, we are introduced to a vision of God’s kingdom that encompasses the diversity of humanity:



“11 a.m. Sunday morning remains the most segregated hour in the United States.”

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Now, the last time the Samaritan woman brought up cultural differences, Jesus never said a single word about it. But this time Jesus clearly says, “You are wrong.” Why does he address the issue now and not before? Because now God has been brought into the equation. Now there is a spiritual truth on the table. Our differences from each other are not wrong except when our differences bring in wrong information about God.

One of the things that you and I have got to understand as brothers and sisters in Christ is that this divide in our culture and in our nation is because people have chosen to pay more attention to their granddaddy than to their heavenly Father. It is because people have held a stronger commitment to the history of their culture than to the person of Jesus Christ. There has been a more faithful allegiance to background than to the Bible. The problem with race in America is not fundamentally a problem of skin. It is a problem of sin.

Our backgrounds and preferences are legitimate, but when they overrule God, that’s when Jesus says, “You are wrong.” Our cultures must always be controlled by our commitment to Christ. Whenever we make the adjectives *black*, *white*, *brown*, and *yellow* descriptive of Christians, it may mean we have changed Christianity to make it fit a cultural description. The Bible teaches the opposite—we are Christians who are also black, white, brown, or yellow. If anything changes, it is to be our cultural orientation, not our Christianity.

Jesus not only critiqued the Samaritan culture by the truth of God’s Word, but he critiqued his own culture by that same standard. When his disciples complained that he was talking with a Samaritan woman, he rejected their prejudice by telling them that it was more important for him to do the will of God than to succumb to their biases.

The disciples hadn’t been shocked that Jesus was talking with a woman. They had seen him talk to women before. The problem came in that Jesus had been talking to a Samaritan woman. That’s what bothered the disciples.

The principle is that while we can’t control what others in our circles do, like Jesus we can control whether or not we let them stop us from doing what the King of kings has called us to do. Obeying the will of God takes priority over satisfying cultural expectations.

The result of this encounter was one of the greatest evangelistic outreaches recorded in the gospels. It occurred simply because Jesus took the time to engage and connect with another

person from another background than his own. Jesus ended up spending the entire weekend with the Samaritans. Now, keep in mind that he had just met them. Their two cultures don’t even talk to each other. They don’t share water, nor do they drink from the same cup. How do we go from “We don’t talk” to “Let’s hang out together” so quickly? Easy: When Jesus Christ enters the situation and demonstrates the kingdom principle of oneness, he can turn things that are upside-down and make them right-side-up overnight. He doesn’t need a generation to do it. It only takes a minute if he’s got the right people who are willing to live their lives by his rules.

Racial harmony and reconciliation do not necessitate that all churches be integrated at all times into one noncultural robotic format. Don’t misunderstand my point. Jesus didn’t dispose of his Jewish passport, trim his beard, and adopt Samaritan slang. But he did give us a model of the intentional nature as well as the depth of engagement that we are to follow in cross-cultural relationships.

God is not asking African Americans to disregard our rich spiritual heritage and become white in our approach to theology and the full expression of life under the umbrella of a biblical worldview. Nor is God asking white people to adopt other cultural styles of worship and become black in their approach to theology. But he is insisting that, within our differences, we discover a common ground of mutual benefit as we all reflect his truth as revealed in Scripture. When culture does not infringe upon the Word of God, we are free to be what God has created us to be, with all the uniqueness that accompanies our cultural heritage. ✝

Trouble in the Methodist Church

By John Wigger

In his monumental biography of Francis Asbury, John Wigger, professor of History at the University of Missouri, highlights the volatile issue of slavery among the early Methodists. Although Bishop Asbury’s anti-slavery position was clear, the broader church was divided and eventually split over the issue. Taken from *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (Oxford, 2009), this article is an abridgment of pages 122–125, 151–152.

By 1779, Asbury’s opposition to slavery had become so strident that when his journals were first published in their entirety in 1821, the editors removed some of his more vivid denunciations. Asbury’s manuscript journals burned in a publishing house fire in 1836, but portions of his journals published between 1789 and 1802 preserve his views on slavery from the period between 1771 and 1780. From Delaware, Asbury wrote:

I have lately been impressed with a deep concern, for bringing about the freedom of slaves, in America, and feel resolved to do what little I can to promote it... I am strongly persuaded, that if the Methodists will not yield in this point,

and emancipate their slaves, God will depart from them.

In 1780, the northern annual conference held in Baltimore, declared “slave-keeping” to be “contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society.” The preachers agreed to read these pronouncements “in every Society,” telling slaveholders that they had “but one year more, before we exclude them.” Though approved only by the northern conference, these rules reflect growing abolitionist convictions among Methodists in the North and upper South.

In May 1785, when the Virginia preachers met for a conference, Bishop Coke and other antislavery advocates urged them to send the Virginia Assembly a petition calling for “the immediate or gradual extirpation of slavery.” Methodist preachers collected signatures across the state. With the help of the abolitionist General Daniel Roberdeau, who lived in Alexandria and had signed the Methodist petition, Asbury and Coke arranged a meeting with George Washington at Mount Vernon. Following dinner, the two asked Washington to sign the petition. Though

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Letter from a Birmingham Jail

By Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968)



Both a Christian minister and a social activist, Martin Luther King, Jr., became the most prominent spokesperson for the Civil Rights Movement from 1955 until his assassination in 1968. In the spring of 1963, while protesting the racial injustice in Birmingham, AL, Dr. King was thrown in jail. Because a local group of white pastors had written to him

urging him to show more patience, he responded by writing them a public letter, explaining that passive indifference on the part of the church is a worse sin than open hatred. Regardless of one's opinion about King's theology, methods, or personal life, his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand racism both in American culture and the American church. Abridged, this article is taken from a pamphlet published by Perfection Learning Corporation (1990).

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities “unwise and untimely.” Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

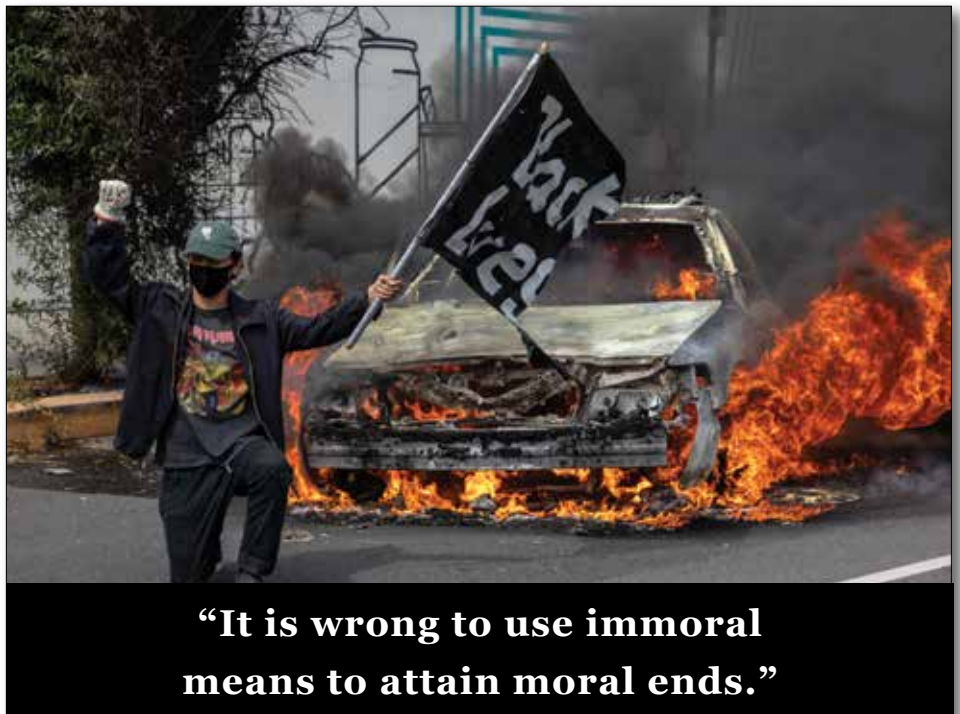
Basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century BC left their villages and carried their “thus saith the Lord” far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. We must come to see that justice delayed is justice denied. We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, “Wait.” But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty-million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she

can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading “white” and “colored”; when your first name becomes “nigger,” your middle name become “boy” (however old you are); when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of “nobodiness”—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

I must confess that I have been greatly disappointed with the



“It is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends.”

white church and its leadership. Of course, there are some notable exceptions. But despite the exceptions, I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery, AL, a few years ago, I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests, and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.

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Corporate Sin

By Thomas H. McCall



Perhaps the greatest racial problem in the white evangelical church today is not prejudice but an emphasis on individualism and personal piety that tends to make one blind to institutional injustice and corporate sin. Tom McCall, professor of theology at Asbury University, addresses this issue in his book *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin* (Crossway, 2019). Abridged and slightly edited, this article is taken from chapter five and the subheading, “Individual or Personal Sins and Social, Structural, or Systemic Sins” (258–70).

Recent work on the doctrine of sin has done much to alert us to the reality of the social dynamic and impacts of sin. Where many modern Christians (perhaps especially modern Western Christians) tend to see sin as the discrete actions of individual persons, theologians and other theorists (including social scientists) from around the world and especially from oppressed or marginalized communities protest that such individualist understandings of sin are far too narrow and myopic. Accordingly, theologians from the “Majority World” (or the “Global South”) as well as liberationist, feminist, and womanist theologians from “the West” argue forcefully that any adequate understanding of sin must account for more than the obvious point that individual persons commit sinful actions. Such insights help us to see the impact of sin on social “structures.”

Whether we are talking about theologies of liberation for Latin America, for women, or for blacks, the theologians of these movements have in common a deep sense that sin cannot adequately be considered in individualistic terms. They insist that sin impacts societal structures and cultural systems, and they are exercised to shine a spotlight on those areas that often lie hidden from analysis and criticism. One need not accept all their judgments (and at various points some liberationist assessments and recommendations are opposed to classical Christian orthodoxy and should be deemed out of step with Scripture), but we should be open to the possibility that they may offer helpful—if sometimes uncomfortable—insights into sin and its impact. In particular, we should be open to any insights that we might gain about the structural impact of sin.

Stephen Ray, for example, illustrates how structural sin can permeate a society to the point where it seems “natural.”

The history of this nation has demarked the appropriate spaces for Black persons and communities [as] ones of exclusion. Put another way, decrepit and underfunded schools that prepare children for an economy which no longer exists, structurally dilapidated communities distant from economic opportunity and surrounded by environmentally threatening industries or their remnants, whose physical and economic condition breeds crime and despair, are taken to be the natural condition of

Black people, thereby leaving unquestioned the ways that fiscal policy, housing practices, and extra-legal violence have created these conditions, again and again.

When this happens, several results follow: there is sin against the members of these excluded communities as they are denied justice in access to goods; there is sin within these communities as desperate people commit acts of moral evil; and this entire process both becomes “normalized” and acts as a further instrument of sinful oppression. This, Ray concludes, offers a snapshot of how sin becomes structurally embedded.

Any adequate account of sin will recognize the reality that sin becomes “institutionalized” as it perverts and warps social structures and institutions—which then in turn become breeding grounds for further sinful activities. Frustrated by the reality that this point is all-too-easily missed, overlooked, ignored, or denied by people who benefit from such institutions



“Sin impacts societal structures and cultural systems.”

while being all-too-painfully-obvious to those who suffer from the hegemony of such systems, theologians “from the margins” insist that [doctrines of sin] must come to a reckoning with the unpleasant but undeniable fact that entire social systems have been built upon evils such as racism, colonialism, sexism, and nationalism.

But the liberationist claims about social sin and structural evil are not free of criticism. In some treatments of “social sin” and “structural evil” by revisionist theologians, we are left with the distinct impression that sin is only (or at least primarily) what the power *oppressors* do and the systems they create—as if such bifurcation is always so neat, tidy, and convenient and as if it were not also possible for the *oppressed* to be sinful too. But is it not the case that many people are both sinned against (through discrimination and oppression) and sinful in their actions toward others? Is it not possible for people who are underprivileged, marginalized, disadvantaged, and oppressed to marginalize and oppress others in turn? Does not this actually

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Start Living Like That!

By Clarence Jordan (1912–1969)



Few white southerners have matched Clarence Jordan's creativity in addressing race relations in the Deep South. Both a farmer and a scholar (Ph.D. in New Testament Greek), Jordan founded Koinonia Farm near Americus, GA, in 1942 as an interracial, Christian, agricultural community. His example helped to inspire Millard Fuller (Habitat for Humanity) and President Jimmy Carter. Jordan wrote a homey paraphrase of the New Testament, imagining the life of Jesus as occurring in the American South. The following is Jordan's rendition of The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37), taken from the *Cotton Patch Gospel* (Smyth & Helswys, 2004).

One day a teacher of an adult Bible class got up and tested him with this question: "Doctor, what does one do to be saved?" Jesus replied, "What does the Bible say? How do you interpret it?"

The teacher answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your physical strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

"That is correct," answered Jesus. "Make a habit of this and you'll be saved."

But the Sunday School teacher, trying to save face, asked, "But... er... but... just who is my neighbor?"

Then Jesus laid into him and said, "A man was going from Atlanta to Albany and some gangsters held him up. When they had robbed him of his wallet and brand-new suit, they beat him up and drove off in his car, leaving him unconscious on the shoulder of the highway.

"Now it just so happened that a white preacher was going down that same highway. When he saw the fellow, he stepped on the gas and went scooting by.

"Shortly afterwards a white Gospel song leader came down the road, and when he saw what had happened, he too stepped on the gas.

"Then, a black man traveling that way came upon the fellow, and what he saw moved him to tears. He stopped and bound up his wounds as best he could, drew some water from his

A More Biblical Sunday Morning *continued from page 4*

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Micah 4:1–2 NIV)

The image in Micah 4 is the reversal of the image in Genesis 11 at the Tower of Babel. In contrast to dispersion from the human construction of the tower, Micah 4 reveals that many nations stream to the mountain of the Lord. Where once people were separated and divided, now people are united and gathered before God. Instead of a tower built as a monument to humanity, the Lord establishes a mountain that provides the restoration of human community. Micah 4 promises the reverse of the curse of Babel. The Lord longs to establish his people as chief among the mountains, to set them on a high place as a standard of community. This community will be a multiethnic gathering place of reconciliation. Many peoples and nations will stream to the church, reversing the curse and setting right what human sin has destroyed.

Unfortunately, the church in the United States falls short of the image of Micah 4. God longs for his people to be presented as a multiethnic community, but that is far from the reality in most local churches, and segregation remains a key characteristic of the church.

The prophecy of Micah 4 finds the beginning of fulfillment in the book of Acts. Acts 2 provides a glimpse of God's restoration and the reversing of the curse. Different people groups are gathered together in a reversal of Genesis 11, even to the point of one unifying language. The church that is birthed is now a reflection of the unity promised in Micah 4 with the sharing of resources and a common worship life.

The New Testament Epistles continue this testimony as God's people are challenged to live a life worthy of their calling and to tear down the dividing walls of hostility. The Epistles provide guidelines on how to live out the multiethnic vision of Micah and the glimpse of the multiethnic future in the book of Acts. This vision culminates in the future hope of Revelation 7:9 (NIV), where we are presented with the image of "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb...."

The challenge of the multiethnic church in the United States today is how we may live in the tension of the promise of a multiethnic community in Micah 4, the inauguration of the multiethnic community in Acts 2, the challenge to live into the multiethnic community in the New Testament Epistles, and the future consummation of that community in Revelation 7:9 contrasted with the reality of a segregated church in the United States. ✪



"But... er... but... just who is my neighbor?"

Continued on page 12

First, consider the height of Peter's spiritual stature.

Few people are surprised when a Nazi, a terrorist, or a hooded member of the KKK express the cruel ugliness of racism. But an apostle of Christ? Not only had Peter spent three years in the best theological education program in the history of the world but also he had experienced a deeper work of grace so that his heart had been cleansed by the sanctifying Spirit of Pentecost (cf. Acts 15:9). For years he had preached the gospel with power and performed miracles. And yet, after all this, Peter was still a racist, an ethnocentric bigot, a Jewish supremacist. It is sobering to realize that even God's saints sometimes have blind spots; they do not see the ugly sins that continue to pollute their ransomed souls.

Second, consider the magnitude of God's intervention.

God knew it would take more than a tap on the shoulder and a polite suggestion to get Peter to see the error of his ways and change his behavior. In what is one of the Bible's most famous miraculous visitations, God gave Peter a vision of a sheet let down from heaven, filled with all manner of animals (clean and unclean) that Peter was commanded to "kill and eat" (Acts 10:13). It is as if Peter was being ordered to eat ham sandwiches, barbecue pork, clams, and other unkosher foods. When Peter refused, God repeated the vision and the command three times: "Eat. Yes, eat. I said, eat!" Racism is a sin that is so deep and intransigent, it takes more than a Bible study, a sermon, a seminar, or even a trip to the altar to deal with the issue. Purging the heart of racial bigotry takes an ongoing supernatural work of divine grace. Thankfully, God is willing to do whatever it takes to open our eyes, purify our hearts, and empower us to change.

Third, consider the tenacity of Peter's resistance.

Peter answered the Lord's threefold command with a resolute, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14). It takes a measure of audacity to tell God Almighty you have no intention of doing what he just told you to do. But if you are the apostle of the foot-shaped mouth, such behavior is not unusual. This was not the first time Peter had said, "No, Lord" (an oxymoron if ever there was one!). On three previous occasions, he had tried this stunt (see Mt 16:22; Jn 13:8; and Mk 14:29). This refusal to eat a divinely provided pig-in-a-blanket was perhaps the ultimate illustration of Peter's twisted values. He was ready to disobey his Lord and Savior rather than break his kosher diet. That is what racial bigotry does to a person's soul. It warps it in such a way that it prefers to defy God's will rather than let go of its pretended racial superiority.

Fourth, consider the impact of Peter's obedience.

The knock on the door downstairs let Peter know that more was going on here than new instructions about food. Humbled enough to be teachable, Peter went with his visitors to the home of Cornelius. An hour earlier, he would not have dared to step foot into this unclean Gentile home. But sanctifying grace had softened his heart enough to discern that God was doing something new, something revolutionary. Entering Cornelius'

home, in a flash of insight, Peter suddenly understood: "I should not call any person common or unclean.... Truly I understand that God shows no partiality.... Jesus Christ [is] Lord of all...." (Acts 10:28, 34, 36). When Peter simply obeyed God's commandment and humbly began to fellowship with those who were different, "the Holy Spirit fell" on everyone present (see Acts 10:44-48). The revival in Cornelius' home soon spread from Caesarea to Antioch, and from Antioch to the ends of the earth. There are no limits to what God can do once racial arrogance is cleansed from the heart!

Fifth, consider the recurrence of Peter's prejudice.

It is troubling to realize that, several years later, Peter relapsed. The story is told in Galatians 2:11-14. Old prejudices die hard. Peter forgot the lessons the Lord had taught him and reverted to his old racist self. In an effort to impress his Jewish colleagues, he stopped associating with Gentiles and went back to the segregated life of Jewish supremacy. Paul, realizing that the very integrity of the gospel was at stake, boldly rebuked Peter publicly:



"When it comes to the sin of racial prejudice, the first question to ask is, 'Lord, is it I?'"

But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (Galatians 2:14)

We can be sure that Peter accepted Paul's rebuke and corrected his behavior because he continued his gospel ministry and went on to write two books of the New Testament. But this sad episode reminds us how deep, pernicious, and intransigent are the roots of racial prejudice. The cure involves more than a single divine zap. Victory comes only when we daily trust God for grace to live in love with those around us—all of those around us.

Dear friends, as you read the articles in this issue of *The High Calling*, would you dare to ask the Pentecostal Spirit of Holiness to help you to see the truth about yourself? When it comes to the sin of racial prejudice, the first question to ask is, "Lord, is it I?" Who knows, perhaps before you have finished reading you, too, will hear a knock at the door. The world is waiting! ✠

In spite of my shattered dreams, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, would serve as the channel through which our just grievances could reach the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again, I have been disappointed.

In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion which made a strange, un-biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.

I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God?"

There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians of being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were called

to obey God rather than man. By their effort and example, they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests.

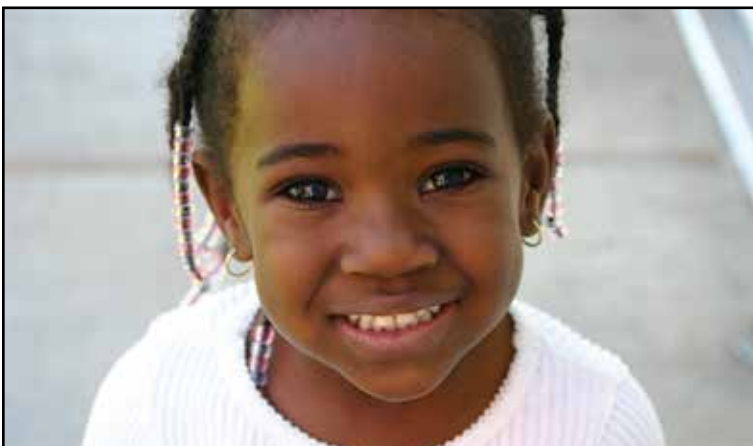
Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is a defender of the status quo. But the judgement of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.

I have consistently preached that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. As T. S. Eliot has said, "The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason."

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty. ✨

"I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." —Martin Luther King, Jr.



Trouble in the Methodist Church *continued from page 5*
they came away from the meeting believing that Washington supported the measure, he refused to sign, which isn't surprising given Washington's views on slavery. Nonetheless, Coke and Asbury weren't that far off in believing that Washington was sympathetic to their cause. He was the only one of the Founders to free his slaves, doing so in his will. Indeed, his intention to free his slaves appears to have taken shape about 1789, a decade before his death and not long after his meeting with Asbury and Coke. ✨

Just for Fun*

By Tony Evans

One day a black man and a white man were traveling in a car together and arguing about what color God is. The black man said, "With all that soul, God has got to be black." The white man said, "But God is so efficient. That means he's got to be white." They continued arguing until they lost track of where they were on the road and crashed. Both men died.

When they entered heaven, St. Peter greeted them at the gate. He asked them what was the first thing that he could do for them now that they were in heaven. The men answered without a second thought. "That's easy because how we got here was by arguing about what color God is. So tell us – is God black or is he white?"

St. Peter said they could see for themselves. He took the men down to the throne room and walked them in. Both men were shocked when they entered the throne room and God said, "Buenos dias, Señores."

*From *Oneness Embraced* (Moody, 2011: 49)

Episcopal Church, South, was a slaveholder. Other southern denominations had similar profiles.

It ultimately took war to settle the slavery question for the nation. But as many suspected would be the case, the old slavery was, after a period of unsettledness, simply replaced with a new, in many ways similar, institution. Further, while northerners questioned and even challenged *de jure* segregation, their own lands were increasingly replete with *de facto* segregation, making their criticisms ring hollow and, indeed, limiting their critique.

After the Civil War, as four million former slaves were trying to find their place in society, white southerners responded by instituting the increasingly harsh realities of the now well-known Jim Crow laws, designed to separate blacks from whites and subjugate blacks in social and economic life. In frustration, African Americans left the white churches en masse to form their own churches. Denied equal participation in the existing churches, the move toward racially separate churches was not a matter of doctrinal disagreement, but a protest against unequal and restrictive treatment. Many white Christians saw the separation as positive and part of God's design. Segregated churches also reduced the risk of the great taboo, interracial marriage.

During this same period, white evangelists, such as D. L. Moody and later, Billy Sunday, became prominent. It is instructive that for these northern evangelists, social reform, which had been a central characteristic of evangelical thought since the 1830s, was dropped in favor of a nearly singular emphasis on personal piety. When Moody and Sunday held revival meetings in the South, they did so on a segregated basis. The racial issue simply was not important to most white evangelicals.

By the 1950s, however, black evangelicals began to speak out. Religious leaders from within black churches led the Civil Rights movement. While many played lesser-known parts

in the beginning, they opened the door for social action by Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy, and a host of other black Christian activists. In a movement centered and most successful in the South, black Christians called, protested, boycotted, and died for an end to Jim Crow segregation. The connection between religious faith and the social movement is a remarkable moment in American religious history, attesting to the power of religion to call for and realize change. When the movement moved north and attempted to address northern race issues, namely ghettos, it was largely unsuccessful.

In the white evangelical world, the story is quite different. Some whites did indeed participate in Civil Rights marches, freedom rides, and the like, but they were rarely evangelical Christians.



“Some whites did participate in Civil Rights marches, freedom rides, and the like, but they were rarely evangelical Christians...”

Rather, they were northern liberal Christians, Catholics, Jews, and non-Christians. Southern evangelicals generally sided against black evangelicals on the segregation issue, and northern evangelicals seemed more preoccupied with other issues—such as evangelism and fighting communism and theological liberalism.

Few can survey this history and deny that there has been at least some progress in race relations. Yet it is ironic that as racial thinking became more egalitarian, and as laws were passed and policies enacted meant to level the playing field, whites and blacks in many ways were growing farther apart.

They had gone from separate pews to separate churches. And with the black power movement, blacks as well as whites began arguing that perhaps we are better off apart after all. In sum, as slavery receded, a formally segregated public sphere rose in its place. By 1964, as the formally segregated public sphere receded, an informally segregated private sphere began to rise in its place. Perhaps most ironic of all, at least in regions where there was co-residence, whites and blacks probably knew less about each other in 1964 than they had in centuries past. Racialization, although it changed in form, remained ever-present. ✦

Corporate Sin continued from page 7

happen? Is not this what the Bible calls *sin*? Does not the Bible clearly teach that *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)? Are we not told—and in no uncertain terms—that *no one* is righteous (Rom. 3:20)?

We should, then, be skeptical of any doctrine of sin that scapegoats some sinners while seeming to leave the rest untainted. At the same time, we dare not miss the valid and important points that are being made by revisionist and “Majority World” theologians. For it is undeniable—from human history and experience as well as from Holy Writ—that the evil actions of powerful people in fact do shape social institutions. In turn, these same systems further foster and foment moral depravity and thus result in ever-increasing human suffering.

While it indeed is true that sin is always *personal* and that *persons* sin, nonetheless it is also true that sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to divine goodness. “Structures of sin” are the expression and effect of personal sins.

We can benefit from the insights of liberation theologians without endorsing all their teachings. But we should not see it as merely “their” concern. After all, the prophets rail against such systems of injustice and oppression. Scripture warns us that our struggle is “against principalities, against powers” (Eph. 6:12 KJV). There are valid and sobering insights here, and we must take them with absolute seriousness. ✦

Start Living Like That! *continued from page 8*

water-jug to wipe away the blood and then laid him on the back seat. He drove on into Albany and took him to the hospital and said to the nurse, "You all take good care of this white man I found on the highway. Here's the only two dollars I got, but you all keep account of what he owes, and if he can't pay it, I'll settle up with you when I make a payday."

"Now if you had been the man held up by the gangsters, which of these three—the white preacher, the white song leader, or the black man—would you consider to have been your neighbor?"

The teacher of the adult Bible class said, "Why, of course, the nig—I mean, er... well, er... the one who treated me kindly."

Jesus said, "Well, then, you get going and start living like that!" ✠

Being Resourceful in the Long Run

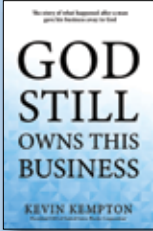
By Charlie Fiskeaux, Special Assistant to the President for Financial Affairs

Some people say that the long run does not matter, because "in the long run we are all dead." But as Christ followers, we know that the long run *does* matter. In his memorable verse, C. T. Studd succinctly stated, "Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last," reminding us that only what is done for our Lord's kingdom will make a positive difference in the eternal dimension.

In the future reckoning we each will face, our resourcefulness may be measured by the extent to which we have invested our temporal resources (time, energy, relationships, physical abilities, and finances) into that which will gain positive benefits in eternity. These long run, eternal investments into our Lord's kingdom can provide a return not only temporally but also eternally.

Consider investing your resources with organizations that are making an eternal difference by being resourceful in the long run. The Francis Asbury Society purposes to be such an organization by proclaiming the message of Scriptural holiness through speaking, publishing, and discipling so that persons are transformed to live wholly devoted to God.

Details for various methods of giving to the ministries of the Francis Asbury Society are available on the website <http://www.francisasburysociety.com/support>. ✠



God Still Owns this Business
By Kevin Kempton
Paperback; 130 pages; \$12.95

Over fifty years ago, Stanley Tam chose to obey God's call by giving United States Plastic Corporation® (USP) away and God has owned it ever since. Because of Tam's obedience, USP has provided more than one hundred million dollars to help expand the kingdom of God. While this story is unique, its example of business for missions doesn't have to be. There are thousands of businesspeople who can do the very same thing. Are you feeling a call to be a business kingdom leader?

The High Calling—January–February 2021

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