

## DISCUSSING RECONCILIATION AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

“What one sees depends on where one stands.”

**Two ways of approaching the challenge of reconciliation:** from man’s lost point of view (2-dimensional – body and soul) or from God’s redeemed point of view (3-dimensional – body, soul, and Spirit)

Jesus taught us to pray: *“Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:10)

Jesus prayed: *“that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me...that they may be perfected (completed, brought to an end, matured) in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me.”* (John 17:20-23)

**What will the reconciled Church look like in heaven? How will we be living together there? What should we, His people, be aiming for here and now?**

	<b>MAN’S VIEW re: RECONCILIATION</b>	<b>GOD’S VIEW re: RECONCILIATION</b>
1	To be attained	Already attained (Rom 5:10-11; Ephesians 2:13-22)
2	Achieved incrementally	Done! (Colossians 1:19-23)
3	Many races	One race – the human race. One in Adam, one in Noah, one in Jesus, one in the Kingdom
4	Biological basis	No material biological difference
5	Humans and races are product of evolution	Humans were created by God (Genesis 1:26-28)
6	Needed because don’t all look alike or live alike – outward appearance and customs	Looks on the heart. Do we yield to God as God and Jesus as Lord? (1 Samuel 16:7)
7	Results in identity divisions – gender/sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc.	Results in oneness – in Christ (Galatians 3:27-28; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:10-11)
8	Emphasizes and seeks to maintain differences / “diversity” of groups	Emphasizes unity while recognizing the uniqueness of each individual person (Romans 12:4-7; 1 Corinthians 12:14-27)
9	Clings to “culture” as essential to identity	Clings to Christ and views “culture” as just the way we each learn to do things, so can be changed
10	Focuses on attaining “fairness,” “equality,” “justice,” “equity” as subjectively defined/seen by man	Recognizes the sovereignty of God and sees “fairness,” “equality,” “justice,” “equity” as objectively defined/seen by God
11	Settles for separate but equal	Holds all things in common (Acts 2:43-47)
12	Seeks reparations for wrongs	Lives in forgiveness and restoration
13	Stems from pride, focus on self, and demand for “rights”	Stems from humility, dying to self, and surrender of “rights” (Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:1-8)
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**Why are we who claim to be God’s people not living in the accomplished reality of reconciliation?**

Here’s how one pastor answered this question: “We have not accomplished this reality because:

(OVER)

1. We have followed the world's lead rather than God's. We imitate the world's methods, listen to them, study them, soak them up, etc. We need to turn our hearts back to God and His Word.
2. We have failed to repent. We won't accomplish the goal until we genuinely lament, confess, and repent of our past failure and recognize the need for change. Some have, but some still deny there's been a problem.
3. We don't have faith. We hear the Bible, but because of our past failures we no longer trust God's power to bring unity. We need to embrace God's glorious vision as laid out in the right-hand column above, and, rather than settling for the passivity of saying, 'we don't discriminate...we don't turn them away...if they come we will embrace them...', we need to actively live out God's Kingdom and righteousness in this area of unity and reconciliation."

**How would we rewrite this quote from Frederick Douglass to apply to reconciliation:** *"There is no Negro problem. The problem is whether the American people have loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough, to live up to their own constitution"*? Fill in the following blanks with your words:

**There is no reconciliation problem in the Church. The problem is whether those who claim to be God's people have \_\_\_\_\_ enough, \_\_\_\_\_ enough, \_\_\_\_\_ enough, to step into being all they are in Jesus Christ and start living His Kingdom life, so the world can see Him.** (John 12:32)

Drawing on the pastor's answer, here are three phrases we might choose: not understood God's Word enough, not repented in brokenness enough, not trusted God and His power enough. (See Matthew 22:29, Mark 12:24.)

**Not living in unity and oneness tells us** we are immature; we are not discipled; we who lead are not preparing/equipping those we lead. *"And He gave some...for the equipping of the saints...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature (complete, perfect), attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:11-13)

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

*He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.* (Colossians 1:28)

**Aren't these the real issues?** If we feel that unbelievers are not interested in hearing about Jesus, could the biggest reason be that they do not see us living in unity? (John 17:20-23) And if we're failing to live in unity, could it be because we have failed to become and make true disciples of Jesus? (Matthew 28:18-20) Do we see these failings as sin? Will we admit our sin, repent (change our thinking about), and, trusting God, actively seek to comprehend and step into the Kingdom life Jesus showed us and gives us? (Mark 1:14-15)

## QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION

What major, more-than-incremental, game-changing steps will I take to fully live in the Kingdom with my Chattanooga-area brothers and sisters who don't look and live like me?

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Whom in the Church will I ask to help me and hold me accountable? \_\_\_\_\_

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How could state and local governments, NGOs, and businesses facilitate my/our doing this?

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Those not living in the Kingdom but who share the desire for attaining reconciliation won't have Christ's heart- and life-transforming view and power. Given this, what steps can we individually and collectively take to encourage, work with, and serve such individuals or leaders of organizations?

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## IDEAS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING

When thinking about making major changes in the Church or society, we often begin with ideas of structural or institutional or organizational changes. However, the most significant action any follower of Christ can take is to intentionally initiate the forging (NOT forcing!) of a personal relationship with a brother/sister who does not look and live like him/her.

Done with prayer and humility, cultivated to the level of mutual sharing and caring, and multiplied throughout the Body of Christ, this one action will do more than anything else to:

1. Develop cross-cultural understanding and empathy about racism's forms and effects;
2. Manifest the unity Jesus prayed for His Church;
3. Open the doors for spiritual awakening among those who do not yet know Jesus; and
4. Pave the way for the structural, institutional, and organizational changes needed throughout society.

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## So where does one begin?

1. Make a conscious decision to establish a friendship with someone from another culture.
2. Praying, ask God to prepare your own heart and the hearts of your family for cultivating such a friendship.
3. Lead/disciple your family to be of one accord about God's perspective and desires for your family to mature in this way and become models of unity in the Body of Christ.
4. Praying, ask God to show you the person(s) whose family He has already prepared, and perhaps already put in your path, for your approach about forming a friendship. Make a list of possibilities from contacts you or your family already have through your work, civic clubs, hobbies, sports and fitness, business dealings (including hairdressers, bank tellers, checkout clerks, etc.), children's school and activities, neighborhood, local church, etc.

If your list is blank, then begin to intentionally place yourselves in situations where you will meet people of other cultures. The easiest way to do this is to visit a church congregation of another ethnicity and start introducing yourself to the pastor and members of the congregation. Be alert for someone with whom you sense a connection.

5. As a family, pray over and prioritize your list of possibilities. Then, starting with the person at the top of your list, courageously begin to intentionally create opportunities to interact with that person and become familiar to one another, recognizing them, calling them by name, making simple inquiries about them and their family, etc. Volunteer information about yourself, casually ask questions (not interrogate), and most importantly, actively listen to and remember what they say.
6. Your long-term (say, 6 to 9 months) goal is to have the person and their family sitting at your kitchen table sharing dinner. But to get to that you will probably first invite the person to meet one-to-one for breakfast, lunch, or coffee. Let them choose the place, and you offer to buy. You may have to ask several times before the person accepts your invitation. PERSIST! Remember this is probably a new experience for him/her too.
7. Repeat Step 6 several times, every two to three weeks. If they want to return the favor by paying, graciously and gratefully let them. Always be willing to invest in building the relationship, but also be as ready to receive as to give. Practice God's "one anothers."
8. During the course of these meetings, tell your story, and invite them to tell theirs. Set the tone for transparency, honesty, and trust by sharing failures as well as successes, hurtful experiences as well as good ones, what God has shown you about yourself, what He has transformed, what He is still working on. Invite the person to ask questions. In short, be real.

As your friend tells his story, actively LISTEN. Picture yourself in his circumstances and experiences. Empathize; how would your life look if you had lived through these situations?

9. Keep praying and aim for the day(s) your two families are all gathered at your (or their) kitchen table sharing their various stories, doing life, sharing needs, and praying for each other. On the way to that you will be blessed – and humbled – to discover:
  - a. Differences in cultures, customs, and views and in communication styles and values
  - b. Biases about people from other cultures that you didn't know you had (Ask forgiveness!)
  - c. There are many ways to live and do life; your way is not the only way or "the right way."

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