

Reconciliation Fellowship

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We are among the many who are worn out by the division and fearmongering that plagues America. We are eager to connect with those offering hope and unity amidst the turmoil. As Christian leaders who are Black (Rickie Bradshaw) and White (Don Allsman), we are committed to forging a common ground where healing can happen. We say, “yes, there is hope. There is a way we can come together.”

This terrible situation is not unprecedented. Over 2000 years ago, there was an ethnic and cultural divide between Jews and Gentiles that was so pronounced that it seemed impossible to bridge. But Paul the Apostle reported how radical reconciliation took place through God’s people, the Church:

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (Eph. 2:13-18).

While the context in Ephesians is an ethnic divide between Jews and Gentiles, the same principle can be applied to Blacks and Whites in America in 2020. But we need to start by recognizing that the Gospel (the Good News of Jesus’ work) is not just good news about “my personal relationship with Christ.” It is far more than that. Ingredient to the Gospel is reconciliation between ethnic groups. So the reconciliation between those of African descent and those of European descent is not just a side issue of politics or social justice, but an essential part of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Most of us have heard or memorized Ephesians 2:8-9 as among the most foundational to our personal faith in Christ: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” This wonderful news declares that each of us can be rescued apart from our works and be welcomed into a personal relationship with God.

But in spite of this great news, stopping there can create a problem. God has even more in store for His creation than simply saving us (individually) by His grace. He not only wants to mend a broken relationship with God, He also wants to mend broken relationships with other people groups. This becomes clear by reading the rest of Ephesians 2, ending with v. 19-22:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

What good news! God not only saves me personally by His grace, but He is also building a dwelling place in which God lives, the construction materials being people from every tribe, nation, tongue, and people (including African Americans and Anglos, see Rev. 7:9 and Mt. 24:14).

But if we are going to cooperate with the Spirit’s construction of this spiritual house, we need to move from theological abstraction into real relationships with others who do not look like us. We need to spend time together and know each other. We need to ask questions and strategize together in order to take concrete actions that advance the Kingdom. We need to realize that reconciliation is a two-way street for both the offended and the offender. The Lord taught us to pray, “forgive us our sins while we forgive those who sin against us.”

On one side, this means resisting vengeance and violence that results in bitterness and further division. It means offering forgiveness before asking to be forgiven. On the other side, reconciliation means humbly listening before offering solutions, seeking to understand before being understood, and resisting quick solutions and denial, which only adds fuel to the fire. It means asking forgiveness even when your intentions may have been pure.

In short, we are in desperate need to learn how to be ministers of reconciliation: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18-19). The power of the Civil Rights Movement is that it originated in the Church among followers of Jesus. We can do this again.

In response, on the fifth Thursdays of a month (starting October 29, 2020 from 7:30-8:30 pm CT), we are launching a quarterly Zoom gathering called *Reconciliation Fellowship*, made up of Black and White (and anyone else who wants to participate) followers of Jesus who are committed to safe and loving dialogue based on principles from the Word of God.

While matters of politics may come up in our dialogue, we believe that the real answers are found in the Word, interpreted by the Holy Spirit, and lived out through His Body, the Church. So we are not trusting in man-made answers to get us out of this divisive environment. Instead, we will pray together, share some opening thoughts from Pastor Bradshaw and Rev. Allsman, then break out into small groups for guided discussion, using scripted questions to start the conversations.

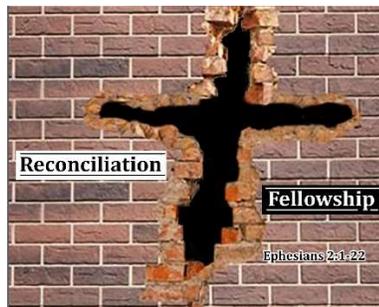
The objectives for our meetings are to 1) create a safe environment for mutual understanding and 2) develop personal relationships that can go on outside of the gatherings. If you would like to participate in this nationwide, online fellowship, go to www.completion.global/get-involved and sign up (only registered people will be admitted into the Zoom).

Perhaps the biggest obstacle that impedes our reconciliation and unity is our pride. People of color are tired of being humiliated and ignored, so pride can kick in. Some Caucasians get weary of being associated with the bad behavior of others, so pride can generate defensiveness or denial. Both sides can be easily offended.

But as followers of Jesus, we should commit to neither quickly offend nor be easily offended. And as we do, we will demonstrate the love of Christ to a watching world, despite our ethnic and cultural differences. Join us to be a part of the solution that reconciles us with one another and brings glory to our Lord Jesus.



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