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HEALING THE RIFT OF RACE AND FAITH IN
JOHNSTON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

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HEALING THE RIFT OF RACE AND FAITH IN
JOHNSTON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

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PREFACE

I would love to say a special thank you to my wife, Lucinda King, for all her hard work and loving support. You are a wonderful wife, mother, and friend. I love you dearly. Another special thank you to our kids, Makayla, Gabe, Lilly, and Ben. You guys have no clue how many times you have been an encouragement to me right when I needed it.

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Will King

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This ministry evaluation is based on the churches of both Johnston Baptist Association (JBA) and the Johnston Missionary Baptist Association (JMBA). Both associations cover the same geographic territory, and both associations cover Johnston county, North Carolina. JBA is a made up of Southern Baptist churches that are primarily white. JMBA is a group of Baptist church that are primarily African-American. These two associations have in recent years worked together to try to reach the community. There is great promise for future opportunities to serve together.

In this project there is an intentional use of certain words to apply to people of the two communities included in this study. I use white and Anglo-American synonymously, as well as black and African-American. Because of negative, unwanted and tainting reasons, this project does not use Caucasian¹ or Negro unless is it a part of a quote by another author. These terms are seen differently in different communities. Words used to describe human beings made in the image of God can be descriptive, but also discriminatory. They can identify and demean. Carter G. Woodson explains,

It does not matter so much what the thing is called as what the thing is. The Negro would not cease to be what he is by calling him something else; but, if he will struggle and make something of himself and contribute to modern culture, the world will learn to look upon him as an American rather than as one of an undeveloped element of the population.²

¹ Sheila Dewan, "Has 'Caucasian' Lost Its Meaning?" *New York Times*, July 6, 2013, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/07/sunday-review/has-caucasian-lost-its-meaning.html>.

² Carter Godwin Woodson, "The Mis-Education of the Negro," accessed May 13, 2019, <https://historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/misedne.html>.

Racial division has plagued Johnston county since before the Revolutionary War. From colonial times until the modern era, race has been a major cause of division. Social class and socio-economic factors have exacerbated racial tensions. Many of the social class and socio-economic divisions in Johnston county have been drawn along racial lines.

The African-American churches and white churches of Johnston county have traditionally identified more with societal norms and mores than with biblical principles that define the church universal. This project brought together black and white believers and taught them the biblical principles of unity to help them empathize with each other in the hope of finding unity for the purpose of working together to impact the community with the gospel.

Johnston County as well as greater North Carolina has a racially charged past. The overarching question I sought to answer was, due to the racial, historical, and cultural baggage within both the African-American and white communities, can followers of Jesus in these communities identify themselves by their faith before their ethnicity? If this is possible, then Christians will have taken great strides to bridge this racial divide.

Context

The ministry context of the JBA and the JMBA is steeped in racialized history. Johnston county had slaves as well as freed men residing within it during the colonial period. This county struggled not only through the period of reconstruction, but through the years of Jim Crow and segregation. Johnston county was slow to adapt to plans to integrate schools. It was even a fight to integrate the public library. Johnston county has dealt with laws to ban interracial marriage as well. There are many examples of how the wedge of racial superiority has driven African-Americans and whites in this county apart, which has been widely reflected in churches.

While schools, libraries, and public transportation have been integrated, churches and neighborhoods are still largely segregated. Prevailing attitudes in Johnston

county reflect the mindset that everyone can play nice if they just stay to themselves. This is not a biblical, God-honoring attitude. However, this mindset is not embraced by all; champions of grace have sought to defy the public narrative of segregation.

The issue addressed directly in this project was racism and prejudice in the believers that make up the churches in the local Baptist associations. I dealt with the way white believers and African-American believers view and respond to each other. The appearance is that Christians have allowed race and ethnic divisions in society to dictate the lack of unity in local churches. These issues remain a point of division among brothers and sisters in the church.

Rationale

The church in America has struggled with racial segregation for centuries. As a beacon for the gospel around the world, the light has been dimmed in regard to how white Christians respond to and empathize with their brothers and countrymen of different ethnicities, primarily African-American.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has a well-documented history of racism.³ The founding of the SBC was largely due to differences in views about race and slavery. From the time before the Civil War to the time of reconstruction, African-Americans have been seen as less than their white counterparts. Throughout the civil rights movement, churches, including SBC churches, were centers for discrimination that misused the biblical text to attempt to justify their hatred of other races. The SBC has attempted to heal some of this hurt through a series of statements that acknowledged their racist past and disavowed racism while desiring racial reconciliation. Despite those

³ Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of The Southern Baptist Convention," 1995, accessed December 3, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention>.

statements, racism is still common in churches across America, including SBC churches.⁴ While Southern Baptists have become known for their standing on the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, they have not yet seen effectual change in culture regarding racism.

The rationale behind this study was that God's Word is authoritative and, guided by the Holy Spirit, can convict the hearts of believers, allowing them to identify by faith before ethnicity, and bring healing and restoration in hearts, churches, and communities. If the Holy Spirit and the Word can change the heart of man, then the hope of racial reconciliation is valid, and the work of reconciliation is paramount for the sake of the gospel.

Chapter 2 of the project defines how believers ought to see race according to God's Word. In John 17:20-23, Jesus prays for the unity of the believers who will come in the future and the Lord asks to bring them together in unity as he and the Father are unified. From there the focus moves to Acts 10:34-35 to see Peter's recognition of gentiles as believers and partakers in the grace of God and the new covenant in Christ. Peter is also confronted with his own ingrained racial superiority towards gentiles. Colossians 3:11 highlights Paul's desire for all believers, "Greeks and Jews," to worship and serve together. This study culminates in Revelation 7:9-10, where martyrs from every nation, tribe, and language are represented around the throne of God, united in their salvation.

Not only do these passages provide the biblical foundations for this project, but they are also the texts at the heart of the lessons taught as part of the project. As followers of Jesus study and hear these scriptures expounded upon and take advantage of intentional opportunities to have pointed conversations about reconciliation and racial empathy, they

⁴ Walter B. Shurden and Lori Redwine Varnadoe, "The Origins of the Southern Baptist Convention: A Historiographical Study," *Baptist History and Heritage* 37, no. 1 (2002): 71-96.

will see hearts and minds changed for the betterment of the kingdom ultimately, but also for the Johnston county and its churches.

Chapter 3 of this project looks at the historical and sociological aspects of racism in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention, North Carolina, and Johnston county specifically. This chapter starts with the issue of race in the larger American context and moves to similar issues in the SBC. From there, the discussion moves into the role of the SBC during the civil rights movement. The study explores eight resolutions put forth and officially voted in by the SBC starting in 1989.⁵ Finally, this study looks at the future hope of racial reconciliation in the SBC and the type of impact that reconciliation could have on the SBC and the kingdom of God at large. While much of what was happening in the SBC was a reflection of larger happenings in society that stretched interdenominationally.⁶

From the SBC aspects the study takes a closer look at how these issues were fleshed out in North Carolina and more specifically in Johnston county. As this chapter dives into issues regarding Johnston county, there are examples of blatant and covert racism throughout the centuries, and in some ways that battle is still being fought against today.

Participants in this study sat through a series of four lessons specifically designed to exegete the four passages of scripture expounded upon in chapter 2 that deal with racial reconciliation and unity of all believers. Following the study, participants engaged in open discussion about their specific views of other races as well as interacting with the texts taught in the lessons. Participants were also given opportunities at the conclusion of each lesson in an informal setting to ask questions about the material.

⁵ Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Race," accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/897/resolution-on-racism>.

⁶ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54.

Each participant filled out a preliminary questionnaire and a follow up questionnaire after the completion of the conference to determine any change in attitude or prejudice. The secondary goal is getting these believers to commit to working together on future projects in the area that would spread the gospel tremendously and extend racial reconciliation further.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to encourage white and African American believers in the Johnston Baptist Association and the Johnston Missionary Baptist Association to empathize and seek unity with each other, in order to impact the community for the sake of the gospel.

Goals

The goals for this project coincided with the mission and vision of JBA, to equip believers to intentionally live out the gospel, regarding the desire to see believers of all races work together in unity for the glory of God. What is learned in this project and its benefits to be reproducible by churches, associations, and cities struggling to get a grasp on racial unity.

1. The first goal was to assess a focus group of white and African American believers regarding their current attitudes of race and unity.
2. The second goal was to develop a series of lessons on a biblical view of race, ethnicity, and unity.
3. The third goal was to increase empathy regarding racial and ethnic struggles among the members of the focus groups through the lessons and the discussions that followed.
4. The fourth goal was to measure attitudinal change by re-administering the initial survey and comparing the answers to the pre-conference survey.
5. The fifth goal was to measure the commitment level of the participants by asking them to participate in future projects that are intentionally interracial and interact with the community.

Research Methodology

The methodology for the research was to test both attitudinal changes that took place as well as commitment to the overarching goal. This is done by executing a conference on unity with both white and African-American participants. The conference consisted of four sessions. Each session included a lesson and a follow-up round table discussion that allowed participants to interact with the information presented during the lesson. We had hoped to have 100 participants who filled out the pre-conference survey, and after they completed their final roundtable discussion filled out the corresponding post-conference survey and commitment opportunity. The commitment to the overarching principle was established through the willingness of participants to commit to work together, intentionally and interracially, on future community projects.

The first goal was to assess a focus group of white and African American believers regarding their current attitudes of race and unity. The focus group was defined as those who attended the conference. The desire of this study was to have 100 participants in the conference. Participants were members churches that are also a part of either the JBA or the JMBA. Each participant filled out a survey upon arrival at the conference.⁷ This goal was considered successfully met when 80 participants completed the initial survey.

The second goal was to develop a series of lessons on a biblical view of race, ethnicity, and unity. The lessons were developed by creating four lessons that would become the main sessions of the conference. The lessons were approved by a panel of experts using a rubric.⁸

The third goal was to increase empathy regarding racial and ethnic struggles among the members of the focus groups at the conference. The conference consisted of

⁷ See appendix 1 for survey. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Ethics Committee prior to use.

⁸ See appendix 2 for rubric.

four main sessions followed by the corresponding roundtable discussions. Success for this goal was determined by 80 percent of the attendees completing 100 percent of the lessons. This goal was achieved by the process of the participants learning the material and interacting with the material during discussions.

The fourth goal was to measure attitudinal change by re-administering the initial survey and comparing the answers to the pre-conference survey. This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test was performed to show a statistical significant difference between the pre- and post-conference surveys. After the last discussion was completed, the initial questionnaire was re-administered and the answers were compared to the initial questionnaire to see if there was an increase in empathy.

The fifth goal was to measure the commitment level of the participants by asking them to participate in future projects that are intentionally interracial and interact with the community. It is the desire of this project for these members to work together interracially to reach the neighborhoods in the area. The project assessed commitment by the percentage of participants who signed up to be a part of this effort. This percentage affirmed the shifts in attitude seen in the surveys. The goal, in addition to the t-test, was considered successful if 80 percent of the participants present committed to be a part of the project.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms used in the ministry project:

Race. A biblical view of race does not match today's current social view of race. The Bible gives evidence that there is only one race, the human race (Gen 3:20). The term *race* has become part of modern-day vernacular. The biological definition of race is not clear because the only race is the human race. *Race* is a sociological construct that is widely used in society today. *Race* is determined by nationality and/or pigmentation. A race may also have specific cultural anomalies and traditions that set one race apart

from another.⁹ For the purposes of this project, *race* is defined as a social construct that differentiates people by culture, region, pigmentation, and/or nationality. The study was primarily looking at racial reconciliation between black Americans and white Americans in this project.

Racism. *Racism* is at the core of this project. Since race has been identified, the definition of racism must coincide. Racism is one race seeing itself as superior to another race. This perceived superiority often manifests itself in prejudice and discrimination.¹⁰ *Racism* is a byproduct of the social construct of race. While race can label an individual and by proxy lump him with individuals of the same designation, *racism* is also not limited to individuals. *Racism* can also be systemic. Prejudice and discrimination can apply to a whole racial group through commonly held stereotypes.¹¹ Stereotypes and prejudices can also be carried out by organizations and institutions against individuals of a particular race or the whole race (i.e., Jim Crow laws).

Ethnicity. Historically, *ethnicity* has been defined as cultural unity among people that may or may not be based upon geography as well. However, as culture is different from region to region, a more modern definition is needed. Edward F. Borgatta explains,

Despite definitional disagreements, there is general recognition that a number of characteristics appear as hallmarks of ethnicity: not all of them will be present in every case, but many will be. They include features shared by group members, such as the same or similar geographic origins, language, religion, foods, traditions, folklore, music, and residential patterns.¹²

⁹ Edgar F. Borgatta, ed., *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2000), s.v. "race."

¹⁰ Michael Kronenwetter, *Encyclopedia of Modern American Social Issues* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1997), s.v. "racism."

¹¹ Anthony Manstead and Miles Hewstone, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), s.v. "racism."

¹² Borgatta, *Encyclopedia of Sociology*, s.v. "ethnicity."

The definitions of *race* and *ethnicity* are similar. Both are social constructs, and both are used to define a group of people by both physical and social distinctions. For the purpose of this project, these terms are used synonymously.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this project was that only those who attended the conference were surveyed. Since this was a census study, all participants who attended the conference were surveyed, but not every church member from both the JBA and JMBA.

Another delimitation was that this conference, and therefore this project, only focused on believers that were a part of either JBA or JMBA churches. For members of either the JBA or JMBA churches, surveys were only given to those over the age of 18.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was assessing attitudinal change. To mitigate the desire to measure attitudinal change, the study also looked at the commitment level of the participants to follow through on what was taught in the conference.

Conclusion

The JBA and the JMBA cover a large area, with many churches having predominately white or predominately African American members. These churches do not work together to reach their community. This project met with believers from the churches in these associations and through a conference their attitudes regarding race and ethnicity were assessed and they were challenged biblically to be unified. After the initial survey was re-administered, they were asked to commit to a project that would intentionally impact the community interracially.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR UNITY

This chapter looks at four specific texts that address the issue of unity, regardless of ethnicity. This desire for unity is seen through the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-23, Peter in Acts 10:28-29, Paul in Colossians 3:11, and then through the saints in glory in Revelation 7:9-10. There is harmony of thought on this issue from passage to passage.

These passages were chosen because of how well they tie into each other and the flow of thought from one to the next. In John 17:20-23, Jesus prays for the unity of the church. He is not only praying for the church that existed in that moment, but also for those who would believe because of their witness. Acts 10:28-29 introduces Peter's struggle with ingrained racial bias. Peter is confronted by God regarding his own racial bias. Colossians 3:11 shows specifically how Paul seeks to breakdown social constructs that act as barriers to the proclamation of the gospel. Finally, Revelation 7:9-10 was chosen because it is the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23, the fruit of Peter overcoming his bias, and the fulfillment of Paul's directive to overcome these social barriers to the gospel.

John 17:20-23

In John 17:20-23, Jesus is praying in the garden of Gethsemane. He is fully aware of what lays before him in his mission to save the world from its sin. John 17:20-23 says,

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just 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 have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are

one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.¹

Jesus knows the pain, torture, betrayal, and rejection that await him in the next few hours. In this passage, Jesus has already prayed for the disciples that are with him. He knows what he and they are about to endure, but his prayer shifts from his current disciples to future disciples who will come after them because of their witness and ministry. The focus of this section of his prayer is not only future believers, but the unity of those believers.

The word *one* is used four times in this passage. Jesus is praying specifically for the unity of the church. All four uses of *one* are used to indicate unity. He does not simply address that believers are to be unified, but also the way that believers are to be unified. Jesus points directly to the relationship between the Father and himself as the utmost example of unity.

His request of the father has direct implications to the Godhead and the relationships therein; believers should emulate those relationships in the church. Jesus is specifically petitioning the Father for a perichoretic relationship between the persons of the trinity. In these moments before Jesus goes to the cross to redeem believers from their sins, he prays for that which the Godhead will work out in the sanctification of believers. Bruce Ware writes, “So our sanctification is done by the triune God, with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each participating in different but complementary ways. How wonderful is the unity and diversity of the trinitarian Persons.”² This view is further reinforced in the last use of *one*, where Jesus asks that his followers be “perfectly one” as the Father and Son are. The unity of all believers is to be perfectly one in harmony. Followers of Jesus are to reflect that perichoretic relationship inside the church for the purpose of expanding the kingdom and ultimately bringing glory to God as believers bring more redeemed people to glorify him.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

² Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2005), chap. 1, Kindle.

A progression of thought and a connection is established between unity and evangelism. In verse 20, Jesus transitions from praying for his current disciples to future disciples that will believe because of their witness. In this transition he establishes the priority of evangelism in the life of his current disciples. There is no room for doubt that other disciples will come after them, because of “their word.”

In verse 21, he moves from evangelism back to unity when he states that “they may be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us.” This statement not only moves believers to unity, but also provides the means by which believers find unity and the penultimate example of unity. Jesus uses his relationship with the Father to show how He and the Father are connected. Jesus directs his followers to be united in the Father and the Son as they are in each other. Followers of Jesus find unity as believers in God himself, which supersedes race, ethnicity, gender, or nationality.

Herman Ridderbos explains that unity among believers is not the ends, but simply the means to the ultimate unity:

What seems to be of fundamental importance for its interpretation is the repeated description of this unity: “as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, may they also be [one] in us” (vs.21), “as we are one” (vs. 22), and “I in them , and you in me,” with the addition “that they may become completely one” (vs. 23). The church’s final goal is not unity as such, however it is understood, but “unity in us” being one “as we are one,” where “even as” not only indicates a resemblance between the church’s unity and the unity between the Father and the Son, but also gives the church’s unity its ground and character.³

The idea of finding unity in Jesus is in correlation to Jesus’ teaching in John 15 about abiding in the him as the Vine and believers are the branches and the Father is the Vinedresser. Jesus followers are to find unity as believers as each of one strives to abide in Christ they will be united with other brothers and sisters in Jesus.⁴ Believers cannot separate the love they have for Christ with the unity that they are to have in the body of

³ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 560.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 568.

Christ. This is a prevalent theme in John's first epistle (1 John 2: 9-11, 3:11-24). If Jesus' followers love God, then they must love those that God loves. As each of one abides in Christ individually, God works in and through them collectively.

Jesus addresses the reason for this unity: "So that the world may believe that you have sent me" (v. 21). This unity is counter intuitive to the sin nature that plagues all of creation, which seeks division and self-propagation. The fact that believers exude unity in Jesus to the world bears witness to the validity of the gospel at work in them. The words "so that" show that what He is about to say is the purpose for what He has stated previously. Believers are to be unified "so that" the world will believe the testimony of the gospel.

The portion of verse 21, "so that the world may believe," means that Jesus' desire was not only for Jewish believers, but that the message of the gospel was meant to reach the nations and those nations would be included in this unity. The "oneness" in this passage is meant to go beyond nationality or ethnic origin. Jesus intended for his followers to do what no one else does: live a unified spiritual life despite national and ethnic divisions. He intends for his followers to be unified with other believers and therefore reflect the unity that the Father and Son have in each other, which would validate the gospel and attract the world to the good news. Those who see this holy unity and are drawn to this gospel can in turn become believers in Jesus and join in that unity, further reflecting the unity of Father and Son by the indwelling of the third person of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, continuously growing the kingdom through love and reflecting God's glory in the church. Referring to the unity called for in this passage, George Beasley-Murray states,

The Church is the embodiment of the revelation and the redemption of Christ before the world, so that the world may not only hear that Jesus is the Christ, who has achieved redemption for all, but they may see that the redemptive revelation of the

Christ has power to transform fallen men and women into the likeness of God and to bring about the kind of community that the world needs.⁵

Verse 22 says that the glory Jesus receives from the Father, He gives to his followers. That glory being eternal access and harmony with the Father, no longer being enemies of God (Rom 5:10), but being adopted as sons into the family of God (Eph 1:5). The glory Jesus receives from the Father he shares with believers and is itself the source of unity as believers abide in Christ (John 15). As we abide in Jesus as the Vine and we are the branches, the life of the branches is in the Vine and it is the Vine that gives the branches the ability to bear fruit. The life that the branches experience through the Vine is the same glory that believers experience by adoption into the family of God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Andreas Kostenberger addresses the glory imparted to believers in his commentary on John. Kostenberger points out that Jesus is not sharing the preexistent glory, but the glory that has been a hallmark of his ministry, which culminates in the cross. This is the same glory that Jesus followers share in their calling as disciples to carry on the gospel. Believers are united in Jesus in the same way that He is united with the Father, they also are united in their mission to take the gospel to the lost.⁶

Verse 23 reiterates the relationship between the Father and the Son as the source of unity among believers. In verse 21, Jesus uses the phrase “just as” to show what type of relationship believers should have with each other in comparison to the relationship the Father and Son have. He again uses that phrase “just as” in verse 23 to show how believers will be loved by the Father in the same that Jesus is loved by the Father. Unity to one another founded in the grace of God through Christ Jesus also means that through

⁵ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 303.

⁶ Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 498.

the righteousness imputed to believers by Christ, they can receive the same love Jesus receives from the Father (Rom 3:21-22).

This love that believers receive, like Jesus, from the Father is so that the world will know that his followers are indeed to be found in Christ. There is another repetition of the phrase “so that the world will” in verse 23 as well. It was first used in this passage in verse 21, “so that the world may believe” and in verse 23 it says, “So that the world may know.” These purposes mirror each other. In verse 21, the unity of the church together in Jesus is that the world may believe, and in verse 23 that same unity is reiterated so that the world may know. Leon Morris put it this way, “They already had a unity of sort. But this unity is not regarded as being sufficient. There is to be a closer unity, a ‘perfected’ unity. As in verse 21 the unity of believers is to impress the world.”⁷ The world is to know two things: Jesus was indeed sent by the Father to redeem people, and the love the Father has for the Son is extended to those who believe and know that Jesus is the Christ, the only Son of God.

This unity is not to be achieved by some ecumenical syncretism, but through genuine worship of God in adherence to the Bible. D. A. Carson explains,

It (unity) is not achieved by hunting enthusiastically for the lowest common theological denominator, but by common adherence to the apostolic gospel, by love that is joyfully self-sacrificing, by undaunted commitment to the shared goals of the mission with which Jesus’ followers have been charged, by self-conscious dependence on God himself for life and fruitfulness.⁸

The high priestly prayer of John 17 does not directly address issues of race or ethnicity, however, the implications for race and ethnicity are robust both in this passage and the application of the passage. One can also see the fulfillment of this prayer in Revelation 7: 9-10 which is addressed later in this chapter. Jesus’ plan for the nations is

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 651.

⁸ Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 568.

inherent in who he is as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing to all nations.

Acts 10:28-29

Acts 10:28-29 is a small part of a much larger story in which God opens the door for Peter to share the gospel with gentiles. Before this event, Peter's ministry was limited to just the Jewish community. All of Acts 10 is about Peter's ministry to the gentiles through a centurion named Cornelius. In verses 28-29 one can see why Peter, as a Jew, would hesitate or decline the invitation to go to Cornelius. One can also see God's intervention in Peter's thoughts about other nations, and how God changed his heart in that regard. Acts 10:28-29 reads, "And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. So, when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.'"

The greater context of chapter 10 is that Cornelius has a vision in which he speaks with an angel. The angel directs him to send for Peter. Cornelius sends two of his men and a soldier to Joppa to fetch Peter. Peter goes up on the roof of a house to pray, where he goes into a trance and has a vision in which God lowers a sheet from heaven with a diverse group on animals, reptiles, and birds on it. God tells him to "kill and eat. Peter refuses, claiming that those animals were common or unclean. God rebukes Peter and asserts that what he has "made clean do not call common." While Peter is trying to figure out what the vision meant, the Spirit tells him that men have shown up looking for him. Peter meets Cornelius' men and he returns with them.

Cornelius had called together his friends and family. When he saw Peter, he fell on his face and worshipped Peter. Peter corrects him, and retorts that he is simply a man. Afterward, Peter and Cornelius entered to find many folks gathered together, and verses 28-29 are the beginning of his ministry to those gentiles.

Peter begins his address, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation.” This passage hinges on the word unlawful (ἄθεμιτος), which translates as “lawlessness or unlawful.” This same word is used in 1 Peter 4:3 to mean disgusting or detestable.⁹ Peter is referring to the Old Testament teachings as he heard them from his rabbis growing up. It is reference to the law of Moses (Exod 34:15-16). Simon J. Kistemaker gets to the heart of the issue when he writes, “From infancy, every Jew has been told that being in the house of a Gentile and eating with him constitutes a violation of Jewish law.”¹⁰

Exodus 34: 15-16, Leviticus 18:24-30, Deuteronomy 7:3-8, and Ezra 9:11-12 are about the nation of Israel not entering marriage covenants with other nations and these passages specify why. They say specifically to avoid mixing with other nations so that the Israelites would not become idolaters and defiled by the wickedness of other nations in the promised land. It was a rabbinical tradition to impose a stricter application than what was in the text. While Peter’s assertion was vaguely rooted in Scripture, it mostly perpetuated the bias of the rabbis. It was a prejudice that would have been taught to him by the teachers of his community. This prejudice is further reflected in the word used for “another nation” (ἄλλόφυλος). This socio-religious term would have demarcated other nations in a less than favorable light, specifically used from the Jewish perspective.¹¹ Peter owns his previously held erroneous bias. He confesses the way that he previously saw people of other nations.

This prejudice would have been common to the culture in which he grew up. It would have not only been affirmed by the religious leaders of the day, but also reinforced

⁹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. “ἄθεμιτος.”

¹⁰ Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 387.

¹¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd ed., electronic ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), s.v. “ἄλλόφυλος.”

at home and in the interactions and attitudes he would have observed. This is reflected in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). This would not have merely been a random teaching of a rabbi, but something that spoke to the heart of the way the nation of Israel viewed other nations. Darrell Bock uses an example from Josephus that states that imprisoned Jews would only eat figs and nuts to prevent themselves from becoming unclean.¹²

Peter explains the reason it was abnormal, and then asserts two words in Scripture that always seem to wreck the human biases: “But God.” God intervened in Peter’s wrong perception of other nations. The pattern in these two verses is that Peter held a wrong belief, God interceded and corrected that wrong belief, and Peter responds in obedience. John Polhill remarks, “Since God had shown himself no respecter of persons, neither could Peter be one anymore.”¹³

Peter responds in obedience with an audience that is poised to hear what he has to say and he starts off with verses 34-35: “So Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.’” The word he uses for nation here is ἔθνος, which is a more neutral term used to refer to nations or other ethnicities.¹⁴ He moves from showing his bias with the term ἀλλόφυλος to ἔθνος, which is another reflection of the change of heart he has experienced.

This encounter completes the reversal of thought that Peter had held previously. This corrected view of other nations is reflected in the Abrahamic covenant as God

¹² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 394.

¹³ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 258.

¹⁴ Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), s.v. “ἔθνος.”

promised Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to all nations. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. Peter is now being used as a conduit of that blessing by bringing this message of grace and peace to the gentiles. The promise seen in Genesis 15 is seen throughout the Bible (Gen 26:4, 28:14; Ps 72:5-17; Jer 4:2; Acts 3:25; Gal 3:7-9, 16) and reflects God's plan, which was in motion before Peter existed.¹⁵

Colossians 3:11

Colossians 3:11 says, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." In this passage, Paul is writing a letter to the church in Colossae to rebuff syncretistic philosophies that have made their way into that church. In chapter 3, Paul is addressing specifically who believers are as new creatures. Verse 11 considers the equality of all believers regardless of nationality, legal standing, culture, or social caste. This verse is paralleled by Galatians 3:28, which in similar fashion seeks to break down these social constructs that serve as barriers to the gospel.

Verse 11 starts with a conjunction. The word ὅπου is translated as "here," but in this instance it is figurative. It is not referring to a specific place, but instead, specifically, to the church.¹⁶ In referring to the church, Paul is drawing together the previous statements about who believers are in Christ to a crescendo that eliminates social barriers.

The first social construct Paul targets is the division between the Jews and the gentiles. This portion of the verse tears down the wall between those who are God's chosen people and those who are not heirs of Abraham. Paul is espousing salvific equality for all who find salvation in Jesus, regardless of nationality. By eliminating the division between Jew and gentile believers can be one holy nation under the Lordship of Jesus. There is an

¹⁵ Bruce Riley Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 149-51.

¹⁶ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, s.v. "ὅπου."

inherent pronouncement against nationalism. No one nation of people is greater than any other. There is no greater example of biblical nationalism than God's chosen people becoming one holy nation with gentiles.

In Colossians 2:6-23, Paul argues against a form of syncretism that sought to bond the message of the gospel with the legalism of the Judaizers. Paul's contention for the gospel against legalism is thwarted by his declaring that there is no "Greek and Jew." The legalism being thrust upon this new church by those who claimed to have faith in Christ was foundationally destroyed by declaring that believers are one in Jesus.

"Circumcised and uncircumcised" was a reference to one's ceremonial or legal standing as a Jew. As a Jewish male, one would have been ceremonially circumcised eight days after birth. This use of "circumcision" is a further reference to the Judaizers that would use this symbol of the Abrahamic covenant to oppress gentile believers that had not grown up in Jewish context. This sentiment is reinforced in Philippians 3:2 where Paul refers to the Judaizers who argued for the circumcision of new gentile believers as "those who mutilate the flesh."

"Barbarian, Scythian" is reference to a barrier of culture, specifically to those who were gentile, but were not Hellenistic. Barbarian is used to connote someone who would be considered savage or uncivilized. The same can be said for the Scythian title. The title of Scythian does have some geographic references to Asia, also making a statement that all are welcome into the family of God.¹⁷ Whereas the two previous examples Paul uses contrast with each other. This example is somewhat redundant in that both Barbarian and Scythian refer to people who are uncivilized or savage. However, Barth and Blanke note that while both terms refer to people from East Africa, they would have widely been known to refer to "Scythian" as representing white ethnicities and "Barbarian" as

¹⁷ Albert Barnes, *Ephesians-Colossians, Barnes on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 277.

representing black ethnicities from the same region. This statement addresses not only on inclusivity of geography but also of race or pigmentation.¹⁸ This is a further expression of the inclusivity of those that find grace in Jesus, and that the grace of Jesus does not show partiality or prejudice. Welcoming those into the kingdom of God that are uncivilized or considered savage would have been social taboo for that day, especially with those who had a Jewish background.

The term “Jews and Greeks” would have spoken specifically to the Jewish audience in the church that saw themselves primarily as God’s chosen people, and everyone else was either Greek or simply gentile. However, “Barbarian and Scythian” would have resonated with the Greek believers as they viewed everyone as either Greek or Barbarian, including the Jews in the category of Barbarian.¹⁹ This point of view not only would have told both the Jews and the Greeks that they are equal, but would have also directly challenged the views that they were superior to those outside their nationalistic confines. N. T. Wright describes, “The ancient world, just like the modern, was an elaborate network of prejudice, suspicion and arrogance, so ingrained as to be thought natural and normal.”²⁰

“Slave, free” is a designation that crosses cultural lines, but goes deeper to the way believers see people. In the first century, slaves were not seen as people, but as property. F. F. Bruce does a masterful job explaining this concept:

For Greeks and Romans alike, a slave in law was not a person but a piece of property. Aristotle could define a slave as “a living tool, as a tool is an inanimate slave.” But within the believing community slaves as much as free persons were brothers and sisters “for whom Christ died.” Paul did something revolutionary when he sent

¹⁸ Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke, and Astrid B. Beck, *Colossians*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 416.

¹⁹ Robert M. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 254-55.

²⁰ N. T. Wright, *Colossians & Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: IVP, 1986), 140.

Onesimus back to his former owner Philemon “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave—a dear brother,” since to the previous temporal bond between them there was now added the bond which united them “in the Lord” (Philem. 16).²¹

In a slave culture that devalued human beings as property, the gospel set them free spiritually, but also gave them equality with those that “owned” them. The good news of Jesus became a common ground where slave and free people could serve, work, and be persecuted for the sake of the gospel together. It also created an atmosphere where a slave could excel using his or her spiritual gifts and talents to the benefit of the kingdom. In the church, a slave could lead or disciple his master. The gospel crushes all societal divisions among God’s people.

Whereas the other distinctions seen were to change the way one sees those that are different than them, this statement of “slave or free” was a source of liberation from societal oppression. Other distinctions could be considered oppressive as one sees another race as less deserving of honor than their own, but Paul goes even further to destroy the distinction of overt oppression of slavery by those who make up the church.

In summation for this passage of Scripture, Wright again does a masterful job of grasping the eternal significance of this issue:

These distinctions, Paul declares with breath-taking challenge, have become irrelevant in Christ. The “powers of the world” did indeed hold the human race in their grip, as men and women allowed their habits of thought and action to be dominated by them. Paul’s counter-claim, set before the church as a still unfinished agenda, is that these barriers and habits are, in terms of God’s proper will for human creatures, neither natural nor normal. They are, ultimately, a denial of the creation of humankind in the image of God. That is not to say that differences cease to exist. It is to say that differences of background, Nationality, colour, language, social standing and so forth must be regarded as irrelevant to the question of the love, honour and respect that are to be shown to individuals and groups.²²

²¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 150.

²² Wright, *Colossian and Philemon*, 140.

Revelation 7:9-10

Revelation 7:9-10 is not only about the inclusion of all saints, but it is also a reference to the victorious salvation that the saints have received. The verses read,

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

This is the fulfillment of Jesus prayer back in John 17. Verses 9-10 represent a shift from what had been written in verses 1-8. Verses 1-8 portrait the nation of Israel being brought through suffering and persecution into an eternity with God, but verse 9 picks up with a new vision that includes not only the nation of Israel, but “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.”

Verses 1-8 are about the persecution and destruction that is about to befall the earth. An angel tells four other angels to wait on their task of destruction until a specific number of people (144,000) have been marked by God. The 144,000 represents 12,000 people from each of the tribes of the nation of Israel. Verses 1-8 are specifically about the salvation of Israel, but contrast with the opening portion of verse 9 that moves from a definite number to “a great multitude that no one could number.” Verses 1-8 picture an earthly salvation from persecution for the Jews, but the next vision (vv. 9-10) shows the completion of that salvation beyond the Jews to the gentiles. This shift from the nation of Israel to every nation is more than just an ethnic inclusiveness, but transcends tribe, culture, class, and pigmentation.

Between these two passages is also a sense of flashing forward. Verses 1-8 show the nation of Israel on the brink of destruction but about to be rescued from it, whereas verses 9-10 show a multitude of people representing all of humanity that have been rescued. Verses 1-8 show a people on the brink of destruction; verses 9-10 show a people victoriously celebrating.

The term “a great multitude that no one could number” is defined by John as containing “every nation, from all tribes, and peoples and languages.” Robert Mounce

notes, “These four designations occur together in Rev 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; and 14:6 (also with the modification of one member in 10:11 and 17:15). It is interesting that the order differs in each case.”²³ This multitude is a theme throughout the book of Revelation, but it is also a fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.²⁴

Robert L. Thomas points out that there is substantial debate as to who this group of believers is. He asserts that these are not just a representation of all believers across all time as some have espoused, but that they are intricately connected to those martyred during the time of Great Tribulation. The white robes being worn by all those mentioned in the great multitude is another factor that places this great multitude in the time of the tribulation.²⁵ Clearly not all scholars agree with the assessment that these people represent only martyrs because after the judgement all believers will have their robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

There are further debates about this group of people and what they represent depending on the way one views this period of the tribulation in relation to the millennial reign of Christ. Thomas sets up an interesting argument that is echoed by many other scholars: “The idea of a millennial setting for the scene has distinct advantages. The Feast of Tabernacles, which is reflected in this scene, was a feast of rest (Deut. 16:13-15; Neh. 8:15) and a type of millennial age. The cry of ‘salvation’ in 7:10 recalls the ‘Hosanna’ (i.e., ‘save now’) uttered during the same feast (Lee).”²⁶

Stephen Smalley shares this view but supports not only what this great multitude of believers are saying, but also by what they are waving:

²³ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 162.

²⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 162.

²⁵ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 484-85.

²⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 485-86.

However, in Revelation 7.9 (and 15-17), as in John 12.13, allusions to *Succoth*, the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, may also be present. (The refrain chanted with variations by the onlookers at the triumphal entry, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!,” according to all four Gospels, derives from Ps.118; and this Hallel Psalm formed part of the Tabernacle liturgy, as well as being sung at Passover and Dedication.)

The Feast of Booths was the most important of all the festivals in Judaism. It occurred at the crown of the year, when the harvest was complete; it celebrated the presence and protection of Yahweh during the Exodus wanderings, and anticipated the consummation of the messianic age (note the eschatological background to the feast in Zech.14; see esp. verses 4, 16-19).²⁷

The great multitude in Revelation 7:9-10 is the culmination of the all the Feasts of Tabernacle. Jesus has ushered in the second Exodus. He has set the captives free and the they are crying out “salvation” as a saved people. They are the harvest, which is celebrated, and God receives all the glory. They are waving palm fronds that give imagery not only to the Feast of Tabernacles but also to the Triumphal Entry.

G. B. Caird speaks specifically about the symbolism of the palm fronds. He says that the palm fronds are a symbol of victory.²⁸ Ultimately, the rescue and salvation of all believers are found in Jesus’ victory over sin and death on the cross. This view fits well with the references to the Feast of Booths and the alluding to the Triumphal Entry. The palm fronds, representing victory, draw together the idea that all the saints will worship him together from every nation, tribe, language, and people because they have found victory in Jesus.

All these events serve as a reflection of the reality that is to come for all believers. Regardless of race, color, language, tribe, region, class, or socio-economic status, all are saved by the same savior. All shout with one accord that salvation belongs to him alone, and all wave palm fronds, wearing the same white robes.

²⁷ Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2005), 192.

²⁸ G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 100.

Conclusion

The four passages in this chapter clearly show God's desire for those called unto salvation to be unified regardless of race, color, language, tribe, region, class, or socio-economic status. This is seen first in John 17 as Jesus was praying for the unity of future believers in the garden of Gethsemane. He is praying for those who will be saved by grace to be "one as he and the Father are one."

In Acts 10, God is dealing with Peter in a vision to send him to minister to those in Cornelius' house and confronting Peter's erroneous view regarding other nations as they interact with Jews. God changed Peter's perspective to free him to share the gospel with gentiles.

Colossians 3 shows where God has landed Paul theologically on the issue of unity in the church. Paul addresses these perceived barriers not only regarding ethnic heritage, but also as these social barriers relate to nationalism, class, and slavery. Paul destroys well-entrenched thoughts of prejudice in the church in Colossae.

These views are further emphasized in Revelation 7:9-10 as together all nations, languages, tribes, and people representing those saved by Jesus, praising his name and celebrating their victory. Together as one church, with no distinction, they worship together around his throne. The final picture portrayed in Revelation is one of diversity unified by a common bond found only in Jesus. In the same way that God corrected Peter's thinking about other nations, and Paul proclaims equality in Christ, so must all believers actively seek to purge themselves of prejudice.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS

Southern Baptists are more haunted by the ghosts of white supremacy and racism than most denominations. While the specter of racialized injustice and evil left no corner of American religious life untouched, our family of churches has had a particularly sordid and tragic part to play in this story. In fact, we helped invent the ghosts themselves and then baptized them in pseudo biblical and theological categories.¹

Racism is an issue that has plagued the United States and the Southern Baptist Convention since their inceptions. The antipathy of viewing one's own ethnicity as superior to another's has been an albatross around the necks of Americans for centuries. Racial superiority seems to be the sin that was socially defended and is now ignored.² The issue of racism in the United States and the Southern Baptist Convention is a complex landscape. More pointedly, the issue of racism in Johnston County, North Carolina, is still a battle being fought in the hearts and minds of her citizens. The issue of racial superiority has not fully been addressed in the public square to the extent that racial injustice is still a social ill that must be actively combated.

How does one celebrate the achievements of the great heroes of the faith when at the same time they were making advancements for the kingdom of God, the church was actively working to shut people out because of the color of their skin? Baptist heroes like W. A. Criswell, Billy Graham, Lottie Moon, Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others were moving to advance the kingdom of God but were divided in the worship of

¹ Jarvis J. Williams and Kevin Jones, *Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention: Diverse African American and White Perspectives* (Nashville: B & H, 2017), chap. 2, Kindle.

² Jones, *Removing the Stain of Racism*, chap. 3.

God by the color of the skin that God gave them. This ideological misnomer has been ignored by the majority but has not gone unseen or inexperienced by the minority.³ This ideological contradiction should create a greater sense of urgency in the church for racial reconciliation because that which society and government have failed to do Jesus commands to be in the church.

This chapter explores the historical and social issues that surround racism and how it betrays the unity that Christians are called to have in Jesus, as seen in chapter 2. This chapter looks at historical examples that have framed the current heightened ethnically charged society. This chapter starts by looking at the role of racism in the United States, and then look at racism inside the Southern Baptist Convention, and finally look at how racism in North Carolina and specifically in Johnston County has shaped the church in this area.

A Nation in Peril

The United States has a long history of oppressing black and brown people. From its role in the slave trade, to the Jim Crow laws, to continued modern day institutional racism, the United States has failed to adequately address its role in the oppression of black and brown people. The effects of this oppression are far reaching. They socially, economically, and spiritually effect both black and white segments of the community. Failure to address these issues of equality primarily affect the black community negatively, but these various social and governmental systems were put in place to benefit the society at large, that is primarily the white community. Slavery and Jim Crow laws existed to exploit the black community to the benefit of the white community. With the death of Jim Crowe, the US saw the rise of mass incarceration that primarily effects the black community.

³ Jones, *Removing the Stain of Racism*, epilogue 1.

When one segment of the community is benefitting by the oppression of another segment of the community, deep seeded resentment is sure to follow. These unfair policies not only affect the way these two segments of the population relate to each other, but because of the longevity of the oppression, both segments of the community have taught their children about this sense of racial superiority, which has compounded resentment, fear, and anxiety that exists in these segments of the community.

Psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum, in *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, talks about the psychological factors that have created a highly racialized society for both African and Anglo Americans. She addresses the norms that children learn at the pre-school level that affect the way they perceive themselves and others which set the stage for their views as adults.⁴ She discusses how many Anglo-Americans live under illusion that racism is a problem of the past:

But in fact, in almost every audience I address, there is someone who will suggest that racism is a thing of the past. There is always someone who hasn't noticed the stereotypical images of people of color in the media, who hasn't observed the housing discrimination in their community, who hasn't read the newspaper articles about the documented racial bias in lending practices among well-known banks, who isn't aware of the racial tracking pattern at the local school, who hasn't seen the reports of rising incidents of racially motivated hate crimes in America—in short, someone who hasn't been paying attention to issues of race. But if you are paying attention, the legacy of racism is not hard to see, and we are all affected by it.⁵

The issue of the role of racism in the United States is well documented and there are more stories of racial injustice in society and the church than what can be contained in this chapter. The goal of this chapter is to frame the need for this project historically and socially. This chapter addresses the malignancy of racism in the US and the church's role in its problem, as well as the hope for the future.

⁴ Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 32-37.

⁵ Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together*, 3.

Carl F. H. Henry writes,

Today's pharisaism has forgotten what Jesus stressed: namely, that what is unclean is not external to a man but lodges in his very heart and spirit. By contrast it views external social structures as alone wicked and mankind as their victim. The Bible teaches that no one—not the humanist, not the revolutionary, not even the most prestigious evangelical—is impervious to a contaminated self.⁶

Henry captures the essence of the heart and conflict that resides inside of man. Even those who profess faith in Jesus struggle with their sin nature. In this country's history and in the history of many wonderful institutions, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, some who been those redeemed by the grace of God have sinfully promoted the oppression of other men because of a false notion of racial superiority. Some were right about their need for salvation, but completely wrong in their view of man. One can look backwards and see the evidences clearly enough, but evidences still exist today. These evidences of racial superiority press the question: has this sin been atoned for if it has not been repented of?

Slavery in the United States

The first slaves were brought from Africa to the US in 1619, to Jamestown.⁷ America was still made up of British colonies. Slavery in America dates to before the United States was the United States. The US has benefitted from slave labor since before its inception.⁸ Before it was even officially the US, it was established that Africans were less human than the Anglo-Europeans who were coming to America, fleeing religious persecution in England.

There is a horrible irony in how those people fleeing religious persecution in England came to America and yet actively participated and supported a slave trade that

⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society: Promoting Evangelical Renewal and National Righteousness* (New York: Multnomah, 1984), 14.

⁷ John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (New York: Random House, 2000), 65.

⁸ Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 45.

devalued and oppressed others who are made in the image of God. They fled oppression to turn around and oppress others. The issue of slavery and the atrocities that happened therein are still open wounds in the US.

White slave owners primarily in the South had the benefit of free labor. For almost 250 years the US benefitted from free slave labor. The whole US benefitted. Anne Farrow goes so far as to say and support that “cotton created New York.”⁹ While farmers in the South used slave labor to produce various cash crops, like cotton and tobacco, the products that were made from these resources were sold at a much cheaper rate because the labor was essentially free. Farrow writes, “Cotton was more than just a profitable crop. It was the national currency, the product most responsible for America’s explosive growth in the decades before the Civil War.”¹⁰ If farmers had to pay people to farm their land or harvest their crops, then the cost of everyday products from clothes to cigarettes would have been much more expensive. Therefore, even the abolitionists who fought against slavery benefitted from it in some ways.

The profitability of slavery does not include the lucrative business of slavery itself. Slave trade was its own industry. People were bought, sold, and auctioned off as property. Families were torn apart to make more money and to prevent revolts. If slaves were taken from their families, there would be less reason for them to rebel at the mistreatment of their family members because they were not present to see it. The stronger and healthier a slave looked, the more money he or she would fetch at the slave market. Slaves were a status symbol for the Southern aristocracy. The cost of a slave in 1850 was akin to someone having a second home in today’s market.

The abolition of slavery through the Emancipation Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln not only set the slaves free, but also destroyed much of the wealth that existed in

⁹ Anne Farrow, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), 4.

¹⁰ Farrow, *Complicity*, 4.

the South. Much of the wealth that existed was intricately tied to the slave trade. The slaves who had been purchased as property were now free, which meant a total loss of all investment. This also means that the labor which had been free would now have to be paid for. Slave owners were dealt an economically crushing blow. Many of the fortunes that existed in the South had been predicated on unethical, immoral, and unbiblical treatment of other human beings, and it came to a rather swift and devastating end.

The movement of freedom that swept the South from the exhausted proclamation is best captured by Doris Kearns Goodwin:

From a long way off, Lincoln had seen the inexorable approach of emancipation: “Whoever can wait for it can see it; whoever stands in the way will be runover by it.” Speaking in a similar vein he said, “I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me.” Yet if events greater than the president swept him toward emancipation, the timing of the Proclamation was largely a consequence of his choice and his determination.¹¹

Emancipation was coming and there was no stopping it. Goodwin talks directly to the struggle that Lincoln endured to bring forth the Proclamation.¹² While the abolition of slavery may have been inevitable, he was not a passive player in the story; he was an active agent for this change. The effects of emancipation spread throughout the South, and freedom was not without hardship for the slave.

Just because the slaves had gained their freedom did not mean that they had gained equality with whites.¹³ If one were a slave who had just been set free, then he would most likely have no job, no housing, no education, and a lot of angry white people who feel cheated because of him. They were freed in hostile territory, but still treated as less than human. They were freed into a government controlled by white people, in a land

¹¹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Leadership in Turbulent Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 233.

¹² Goodwin, *Leadership in Turbulent Times*, 233.

¹³ Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 41.

that was predominantly possessed by white people. They were freed from the chains of slavery, but freed to what?

They were freed to abject poverty. They were freed into a hostile environment that resented them not only because the white slave owners lost their fortunes when the slaves were freed, but because they lost sons, brothers, fathers and cousins in the war that set them free. They were set free with nothing.

The Civil Rights Era

The post-slavery, Reconstruction era, of US history is wrought with stories of overt discrimination, prejudice, and violence toward African Americans by whites. These stories stretch from the Reconstruction era well into the Civil Rights movement and even to today. The catch phrase of “separate but equal” was the mantra of the Jim Crow South where there were bathrooms for “whites only” and then there were the “colored” bathrooms. This segregation extended to water fountains, places to eat, places to travel on public transit, schools, and churches. These various institutions were definitely separate, but not equal. This time also included the blind eye of the justice system to rape and lynching. While African Americans were free from slavery, they were not free from the crushing weight of social injustice.¹⁴

The story of Emmett Till is a profound example of the enormity of the plight of the African American, as a 14-year-old African American boy who was lynched for whistling at a white woman. The brutality of Till’s murder is only overshadowed by the acquittal of those who killed him.¹⁵ There are many other stories from Harry T. Moore¹⁶

¹⁴ Charles A. Gallagher and Cameron D. Lippard, *Race and Racism in the United States* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2014), 2:634-35.

¹⁵ Paul Finkelman, ed., *Encyclopedia of African American History 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4:468-71.

¹⁶ Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of African American History*, 3:375-76.

to Martin Luther King Jr.¹⁷ to Medgar Evers.¹⁸

Many churches in the South during the civil rights era relegated their African American brothers and sisters in Christ to sit in the balconies or auditoriums of the church because they were not welcome to sit with the white folks in the church. These people were African-American believers that were lucky enough to get into the church. Amidst the increasing tension in the South from the Brown vs. Board of Education decision that sought to integrate schools, churches were facing their own need for integration.

Joseph Kosek in “Just a Bunch of Agitators” references a book by Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God*, who speaks directly to the overt racism: “Despite the moderation of Southern Baptist leadership, this exclusionary tradition was widespread, with a 1963 survey showing that 90 percent of churches in the denomination barred African Americans from membership.”¹⁹ Kosek addresses the phenomenon of kneel-ins where groups of all black or ethnically mixed groups would go to a church and sit in the pews to make the point that the church should not be divided upon racial lines. His archetype for the article where the kneel-ins happened is First Baptist Church of Atlanta. These kneel-ins were a form of peaceful protest to show that African American Christians would not be welcomed into a primarily white Southern Baptist church. They overwhelmingly proved their point.

With a society in ethnic upheaval, the church remained silent. Many churches continued the rhetoric of isogetical teaching to oppress African American believers. The churches in America, primarily the South, were not only guilty of sins of omission, they were also guilty of the commission of sinning against brothers and sisters in the faith.

¹⁷ Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of African American History*, 3:99-111.

¹⁸ Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of African American History*, 2:170-71.

¹⁹ Joseph Kip Kosek, “‘Just a Bunch of Agitators’: Kneel-Ins and the Desegregation of Southern Churches,” *Religion and American Culture* 23, no. 2 (January 2013): 235.

Modern-Day Issues

America is still a largely Anglo-American dominant society. African Americans have made advancements and have added greatly to the US. as a nation. However, African Americans face continued discrimination in areas of education, housing, criminal justice, wage equality, and even banking practices. This is a tangled issue at best as it relates to resolving the wounds of the past. Some feel that the past should remain in the past; however, others today are still being crippled by the oppression of the past. The oppression of the past has restricted many people's ability to build a better life today.

While the African American community has made major leaps forward since the post-slavery era, they have had to move forward in the midst of great opposition. African Americans have moved from being 3/5 of a human being, according to the Compromised Plan, to leading from the highest political offices in the land. They have moved from petitioning local, state, and federal governments for the right to vote, to petitioning the people to be voted for. While African Americans have fought to truly be equal under the constitution and in the eyes of other Americans, they still are still fighting for things that the white community considers a given.

Unfortunately, a great deal of opposition still exists. It exists in unfair housing policies, unfair wages, unfair hiring practices, and unfair education opportunities. Because the wounds of the past have not been adequately triaged, there is a lingering infection of distrust and skepticism from the African American community toward governmental authority.

“White flight” and gentrification have been an economic reality for the black community that has limited them economically. When African Americans move into a desirable neighborhood, property values go down. As property values have gone down, whites fled the cities for the suburbs. As they left, property values continued to go down. As property values plummeted, less affluent people moved into these neighborhoods until areas that were once the nice areas to live, in certain cities, have become ghettos of

poverty. In these poorer areas there is more crime. The crime is tied to the poverty, not the pigmentation of its residents.

As cities have grown and some of these neighborhoods have become popular for young white millennials, there has been an influx of higher income families. This influx has caused property values to go up. As these prices go up, so do the taxes on these properties, and now people who had been abandoned decades ago have built up locally-owned businesses that are getting put out of business by big box stores moving in to cater to the budding higher income population that has moved in. These local people are losing their homes and businesses to gentrification and have to move and start over somewhere else.²⁰

Economically, the African American community has done well at building up their own economy inside a larger Anglo-American economy. They have established businesses, schools, hospitals, and churches. They have also watched as those things which were built as memorials of defiance to Jim Crow have been lost to gentrification. Movements like Black Lives Matter have been thrust to the forefront of the news repeatedly over the past few years because of perceptions of police brutality toward African Americans. Popular media has capitalized on a fear of governmental authority and made it center stage in the news, which has exacerbated long-held fears that the African American community has had of law enforcement. Images of young African American men and women being beaten with batons, having dogs attack them, or being sprayed with fire hoses for simply marching in protest to the system that was overtly working against them resonate in the minds of younger African American who have heard these stories. African Americans see and hear stories in the news of police brutality toward other African Americans and those that lived through it before are scared while

²⁰ Patrick Feller, "Neighborhood Gentrification across Harris County:1990-2016," Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Rice University, December 2018, https://kinder.rice.edu/sites/g/files/bxs1676/f/documents/KI%20Research%20Report_Gentrification%202.pdf, 23-24.

those that are dealing with it now are angry. This perceived injustice only further serves to create a climate of fear and angst.

While there may not be fire hoses and police dogs being turned on peaceful demonstrators, there is an overwhelming fear associated with law enforcement's overt prejudice, discrimination, and abuses of the past with modern day practices. While public officials in many cities have taken measures to assure the public that it is a new day, fear persists because the past has not been assuaged. Churches by and large have sought to resolve the tension but have fallen short in part due to their own segregation from each other. Some denominationally, but mostly self-enforced ethnic segregation.

Racism in the Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was started in 1845, as it split from the Triennial Convention over issues of racism. Conversations about splitting to form a southern convention were recorded as early as 1835.²¹ William Barnes captures this issue when he says, "Of all the divisive issues in American life in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, slavery cut the deepest because it was at once a political, economic, social, moral, and religious issue."²²

As tensions over racism grew between the North and the South, so tensions grew inside the Triennial Baptist Convention. The issue was pushed to the forefront on December 17, 1844, as slaveholders were banned from being missionaries through the Triennial Convention. Southerners were frustrated by a convention that they were giving money to that would block them from living out their calling to be a missionary because they owned slaves.²³

²¹ William Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention 1845-1953* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1954), 18.

²² Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention 1845-1953*, 19.

²³ E. Luther Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History* (New York: University Press of America, 1995), 8-9.

For southerners, slavery was economic issue, and had not yet become a moral issue. They clearly saw themselves, as white people, to be racially superior to black and brown people. In their minds, this superiority pacified their consciences on the issue of owning another human being. Slavery was simply “free” labor that they had purchased, “fairly.” This perspective was undergirded by preaching and teaching an isogetical understanding of the curse of Ham from Genesis 9:25.

Therefore, in 1845, Baptists from the South decided to start their own missions sending organization. This was the birth of the SBC. As the Triennial Convention split, its remaining churches formed the American Baptist Mission Society, which in 1950 became the American Baptist Convention.²⁴ The SBC’s roots were formed and founded in slavery. As awful as it is, the largest Christian denomination in the world began over the issue of slavery. While Southern Baptists are the largest Christian denomination in the world that sends more missionaries around the globe than any other denomination, they have a stain of racial prejudice that has not yet been removed.

The issue of slavery in the South was more pertinent to affluent southerners because they were the only ones who could afford slaves. Many of the poorer southerners saw it initially as a non-issue because they simply could not afford to own slaves. There were anti-slavery sentiments expressed by southerners of a lower economic status because of their inability to own slaves.²⁵ By proxy, those who owned slaves were also the ones who gave the largest contributions to the Triennial Convention and hence they felt betrayed over the issue of slavery. Slavery was partially how the affluent whites of the South got rich and how they helped to fund the very convention that was condemning their means of gaining said wealth.

²⁴ Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 8.

²⁵ Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention 1845-1953*, 19.

Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, makes a poignant remark as to the origins of the SBC: “In fact, the SBC was not only founded by slaveholders; it was founded by men who held to an ideology of racial superiority and who bathed that ideology in scandalous theological argument.”²⁶ While slavery was indeed the catalyst that started the SBC, ethnic superiority did not end with the abolition of slavery. Southern Baptist churches and leadership in those churches actively fought against the Civil Rights movement in the twentieth century and some today still fight against the current civil rights injustices that plague the African American community.

During the civil rights era of the US, the church was reticent in its efforts to fight against integration. African Americans were not allowed to sit with Anglo American believers in most churches, especially in the south. Most African American believers were either ordered to sit in the balcony, basement, or some other segregated section reserved only for African Americans.

Following the Supreme Court’s decision on *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), many Southern Baptist leaders spoke out against integration and desegregation. One of the heroes of the SBC, W. A. Criswell, former pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, made scathing remarks against desegregation in a series of speeches in 1956. In an article for the *Journal on Southern Religion*, Curtis Freeman captures the sentiments of Criswell when Freeman writes, “True ministers, he argued, must passionately resist government mandated desegregation because it is ‘a denial of all that we believe in.’”²⁷ Speaking against desegregation Criswell says,

Don’t force me by law, by statute, by Supreme Court decision . . . to cross over in those intimate things where I don’t want to go. Let me build my life. Let me have

²⁶ Jarvis Williams and Kevin M. Jones, *Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: B & H, 2017), 3.

²⁷ Curtis W. Freeman, “The Fiery Sermon,” *The Journal of Southern Religion* 10 (2007): 1.

my church. Let me have my school. Let me have my friends. Let me have my home. Let me have my family. And what you give to me, give to every man in America and keep it like our glorious forefathers made it—a land of the free and the home of the brave.²⁸

African Americans were not welcome in white Southern Baptist Churches and white Southern Baptists were not concerned with the injustices and struggles that plagued their African American brothers and sisters in Christ. This was the religious landscape of the South during the civil rights era and Southern Baptists were at the heart of this issue. While not all Southern Baptists were of this same racial opinion, those who did seek to bring light to the plight of the African-American struggle would have to pay a price.

In April 1961, Martin Luther King, Jr., preached in chapel at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary by invitation from professor Henlee Barnette. Barnette faced harsh criticism for this decision and according to some was almost fired for it. In reaction to King coming to speak at SBTS, 200 Alabama Baptist Churches stopped supporting the seminary financially.²⁹ The correlation between those churches giving and the seminary's allowance of an African American preacher to speak is a reflection of the greater tension felt in churches all over the South.

The pervasive racism that has marked this country since its inception has also been a hallmark of the church in America, specifically the SBC. As churches have lived out this cultural nuance, African American brothers and sisters in Christ have had to endure in spite those efforts. They have had to deal with a multitude of racial onslaughts from individuals and institutions.

The SBC's numerous resolutions in its annual convention have brought little resolution in pervasive attitudes that are still resentful. In 2017, the SBC accepted a resolution that condemned the "alt-right" movement in the US. Even this resolution that

²⁸ Freeman, "The Fiery Sermon," 2.

²⁹ Baptist News Global, "Pioneer Baptist Ethicist Henlee Barnette Dies at 93," October 21, 2004, accessed May 10, 2018, <https://baptistnews.com/article/pioneer-baptist-ethicist-henlee-barnette-dies-at-93/#.WvR9htPwbVo>.

was carefully written by African American pastor Dwight McCissic was revised by a predominately white committee before being presented to the SBC for vote. The vote was met with some consternation from those that did not agree with it.

In 2017, almost 150 years after the abolition of slavery, the SBC is still in turmoil over issues of race. The resolution by McCissic is an indicator of continued underlined tensions. There has been a surge in measures to bring reconciliation among whites and African American believers in the SBC by leaders like Danny Akin, and Russell Moore.

Issues of paternalism, white guilt, and white privilege are on full display in the modern-day SBC, but national conversations to address these and many other such racial issues have begun. The goal of seeing a unified church that worships Christ as King is at the forefront in the hearts of those that seek reconciliation.

Racism in North Carolina and Johnston County

As a part of the Deep South, North Carolina has a long lineage of racial superiority. Slavery existed in North Carolina during the colonial period and carried the antebellum era to the Civil War. Slavery laid a groundwork for racial superiority and resentment from both whites and African Americans through the civil rights era to modern day. Slavery in North Carolina was not as fast-paced as Virginia and South Carolina in the early days because of the treacherous coast lines that made it difficult for ships to find their way to shore. Slaves, therefore, were mostly imported from Virginia and South Carolina.³⁰ Jeffrey Crow, Paul Escott, and Flora Hatley Wadelington write, “Between 1730 and 1767 the black population grew from approximately 6,000 to 40,000.

³⁰ Jeffrey Crow, Paul D. Escott, and Flora J. Hatley Wadelington, *A History of African Americans in North Carolina* (Raleigh: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2011), 3.

While much of that growth resulted from natural increase, more than half of it probably represented slave imports, particularly during the period 1755 -1767.”³¹

During this period of colonial slavery, slavery was not only for the rich. Crow reports, “On the eve of the American Revolution 40 to 60 percent of the household owned slaves.”³² Starting as early as 1715, North Carolina tried to legally define the boundaries for slaves and how they were to interact with others in the community. These forms of legislation continued to become stricter and make life more difficult not only for the slave, but also for the freed black person. Laws were enacted that defined the punishment for runaway slaves and laws that also impedes the ability of slaves to converse in gatherings.³³ This rising tension made church and religious gatherings more difficult. Many slave owners feared that the messages that the slaves would hear would insight them to riot. Other slave owners refused to let their slaves be baptized for fear their slaves would be freed by that act. Many tried to evangelize the slaves, but this proved even more difficult as laws were passed prohibiting the education of slaves. They were not allowed to be taught to read or write, which drastically impeded their ability to read the Bible.³⁴ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington explain,

The Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s occasioned the first burst of religious enthusiasm that brought many slaves to Christianity. Evangelists such as George Whitefield exhorted blacks as well as whites to accept Christ. The equalitarian implications of the revivalists’ message disconcerted many whites who feared that conversion of the slaves would lead to insurrection.³⁵

Baptists in particular had a sordid history with slave owners. Slaves were permitted, during this period, to participate fully in worship, and if they were sold or

³¹ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 3.

³² Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 3.

³³ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 6.

³⁴ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 27-30.

³⁵ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 28.

traded to another farm or plantation in another area, they were given letters of dismissal so that they could be placed in another congregation. Crow, Escott, and Wadelington's writing captures the evangelistic inclinations of Baptists during these earlier days of slavery: "Testimonies, baptism, and disciplining of whites and blacks took place in common."³⁶

After the American Revolution, slavery took an even darker turn during the antebellum era. Ownership of slaves moved from being common amongst many families, not just the upper elite to being just the upper elite. Many farms could not afford slaves, but the larger plantations could. In North Carolina, crops like tobacco, rice, corn wheat, and cotton required much slave labor and each crop seemed to have not only its own season, but also its own frustrations and obstacles.

The black population grew considerably before and after the American Revolution. Crow, Escott, and Wadelington write, "The number of black people in North Carolina increased from 140,000 in 1800 to 361, 522 in 1860. As a percentage of the total population, blacks also increased—from 29.3 percent in 1800 to 36.5 percent on the eve of the Civil War."³⁷ With such an increase in the population came fears of uprisings. To detour uprising, laws became stricter, as did the penalties for breaking these laws. Slave families were in constant threat of being ripped apart, which was common. The whipping and beating of slaves became well known among the slave community. It was also common for a slave to receive forty lashes with a cat of nine tails. In some instances, eighty or even one hundred lashes had been dispensed with sickening results.³⁸ Other forms of

³⁶ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 29.

³⁷ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 51.

³⁸ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 59, 60.

torture were used as well. Beatings, hanging, and lynching were all part of the reality that the slaves faced, even in Johnston County.³⁹

Due to the extreme severity of slavery, ripping apart of families, abuse, manipulation, and general evil that exuded from slave owners to their slaves, a mindset developed quickly in the minds of slaves that was passed down from generation to generation. This quote by Crow, Escott, and Wadelington seems to grasp it best:

Even children were taught by their parents or aunts and uncles to be suspicious of whites. “Gifts” from the master were probably nothing more than the clothes or rations that were slated for distribution anyway. Medical care represented not kindness but the owner’s desire to protect his valuable investment. Slaves believed that the whites always had their own interests at heart and that these were diametrically opposed to the interests of black people. Experience had instilled this belief, and few incidents in the slaves’ lives ever challenged its validity.⁴⁰

The level of distrust and of malalignment between these communities continued through the times of slavery and through the reconstruction and into the Jim Crow era. The acts of racial superiority on the part of whites has been audacious and appalling. To see people not only discriminated against because of their pigmentation but added to this is the fact that faith did not play a significant factor in making life better for people of color, much less gain them equality.

Johnston County has a rich history of agriculture. As such, it also has a rich history of slavery. In 1860, 31.8 percent of the population of Johnston County were slaves;⁴¹ almost a third of the people living in Johnston county on the eve of the Civil War were slaves. As the war ended and slaves were freed from the farms and plantations they were left in a hostile territory. While they were free from slavery, they were not free from the effects of the angry white former slave owners. They may have been free, but there was still no justice for them and a long road ahead.

³⁹ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 21.

⁴⁰ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 64.

⁴¹ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 71.

Attempts to reunify families was on going. Many did not know whether their family members were dead or alive. Some had simply been traded to neighboring slave owners, but others were states apart. The struggle to try to put families back together and to regain some semblance of order amid hostility became the focus of the black community. While they tried to reconnect with those they had lost, they also had to take care of the very real physical needs that lay before them.⁴²

In the reconstruction and post reconstruction era, tensions between these two communities stayed extremely high and were further charged by the Ku Klux Klan that had a dominate presence in the piedmont region of the state. The Ku Klux Klan operated as a home-grown terrorist organization. They tormented, beat, lynched, killed, and forced people to leave their homes in search of safety. They were not only a terror to the black community but also to white republicans who were trying to help the black community get established. White democrats vehemently tried to legislate racial divides to put these two communities at odds with each other, and the knights of the Ku Klux Klan were their henchmen.⁴³

With the black community trying to find its footing and the white community largely trying to undermine those efforts, the United States Supreme Court made a ruling that set the stage for Jim Crow. Crow, Escott, and Wadelington explain,

In 1896 the Supreme Court of the United States, in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, decreed that “separate but equal” facilities (which in fact were never equal and always discriminatory) did not violate the constitutional rights of black citizens. During the decade of the 1890s, one southern state after another passed laws or constitutional amendments depriving black citizens of their right to vote. A vicious white-supremacy campaign in 1898 launched this process in North Carolina, and the adoption of a constitutional amendment in 1900 completed it. Immediately, new “Jim Crow” laws began to appear on the books of state and local governments, requiring segregation and discrimination in one area of life after another.⁴⁴

⁴² Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 82, 83.

⁴³ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 89-92.

⁴⁴ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 95.

The white supremacy campaign referenced is elaborated on in a *News and Observer* article published on March 5, 2004: “Wilmington race riot of 1898 ushers in Jim Crow Era to NC, ‘White supremacists stormed through the city in 1898, shooting blacks and burning a black-owned newspaper. . . . Accounts put the death toll anywhere from seven to several hundred, and it is thought that as many as 1,400 fled the city, losing homes and businesses.’”⁴⁵

In the wake of Jim Crow, churches became the epicenter for the black community in how they socialized. Church gave the black community a place where there was common dignity, and a place where one could receive respect and be seen for who one is. Black churches in North Carolina became increasingly important as it gave black folks a place to voice their frustrations, vent their grievances, and find community and understanding.⁴⁶

Though no longer slaves, the African American community in North Carolina, as in much of the South, was an underclass of humanity in the eyes of the dominant white community. On September 17, 1954, in the *Smithfield Herald*, an article was written in favor of segregation that quoted former governor Charles B. Aycock. Aycock was known as the governor of education as he opened numerous new schools and expanded education greatly throughout the state. This article quotes Aycock giving the commencement speech at the North Carolina State Fair for Negroes in 1901:

No thoughtful, conservative, and upright Southerner has for your race aught but the kindest feelings, and we are all willing and anxious to see you grow into the highest citizenship of which you are capable, and we are willing to give our energies and best thoughts to aid you. . . . But to do this it is absolutely necessary that each race should remain distinct, and have a society of its own. Inside of your own race you can grow as large and broad and high as God permits, with the aid, the sympathy, and the encouragement of your white neighbors. If you can equal the white race in achievement, in scholarship, in literature, in art, in industry, in commerce, you will

⁴⁵ Josh Shaffer, “Museum Foreseen at Site Where 1898 Race Riot Began,” *The News and Observer*, March 5, 2004, 6.

⁴⁶ Shaffer, “Museum Foreseen,” 98.

find no generous-minded white man who will stand in your way; but all of them in the South will insist that you will accomplish this high end without social intermingling. This is well for you; it is well for us; it is necessary for the peace of our section.⁴⁷

While to this day Aycock is seen as a champion of education in the state of North Carolina, and he has an astounding legacy, his remarks in this statement pandered to the desires of the African American community to grow and prosper but also to the white community's desire to remain separated and superior. However, education became one the largest battlefronts in the fight to breakdown segregation and "Jim Crow" laws in North Carolina.

On May 18, 1954, the *News and Observer* covered a story on the Supreme Court of the United States decision of May 17, 1954 to integrate Washington DC schools. They ruled that segregation was unconstitutional. In this article they quote a former governor of North Carolina, W. Kerr Scott, who said,

I had hoped that the Supreme Court would reaffirm its own historic decisions approving equal, but separate, school facilities and services for members of the white and Negro races. I have always been opposed, and I am still opposed, to Negro and white children going to school together. It is my belief that most white, and Negro citizens of North Carolina agree on this point.⁴⁸

The surrounding articles and editorials are about others who were disappointed with the ruling and articles that affirmed segregation in North Carolina schools. While politicians acknowledge the disparagement regarding dollars spent per child between white children and black children, they show that the increases for black children have been much higher from 1940 to 1952. Though there was a disparagement between what was spent between white and black children, white children clearly got more money toward education.

The 1960s proved to be a racially turbulent time for the state North Carolina as there were many sit-ins and open demonstrations of civil disobedience to highlight the

⁴⁷ Oscar R. Rand, "Aycock's Views on Segregation," *Smithfield Herald*, September 17, 1954, 9.

⁴⁸ "Decision Answers Big Question, Poses Others," *News and Observer*, May 18, 1954, 6.

lack of justice for African Americans on a national scale but more pointedly here in North Carolina. In light of all of this, integration did not make its way to Johnston county until 1965. Johnston County Schools were integrated September 1, 1965. *Smithfield Herald's* headline read, "Smooth Opening," and the sub headline read, "113 Negros End Segregation."⁴⁹ This headline was not at all true. While there may not have been any open violence that day, there was open hostility and the violence and hatred were still to come. In an article written in *Essence* magazine in 2008, Rhonda Joy Mclean articulates what it was like as one of those children who integrated:

This was 11 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* had outlawed racially separate and unequal public education. Smithfield went kicking and screaming into that post-segregationist world only after a court order gave Black students the option of enrolling in the Whites-only local schools. Mrs. Cora Boyd—my segregate grandmother, the woman who taught me to read when I was 3 and who was the superintendent of the colored schools—went around telling all the Black eighth-graders how this new Freedom of Choice program worked. She explained that the books were better over there, and there were lab opportunities and higher-level math. Mrs. Boyd was looking for students who could withstand the challenges of bringing down a wall."⁵⁰

Freedom of Choice was North Carolina's plan for statewide integration. It gave parents of both races the opportunity to enroll their children in any school of their choosing, but if they enrolled in a school outside of their districted area, they would have to secure their own transportation. In Johnston County some in the African-American community took advantage of the program, but no white students did. Statewide, 113 students took advantage of the Freedom of Choice plan, but there were only 4 in Johnston county. Rhonda Joy McLean explains, "Three girls and one boy enlisted for what really was a war. And it was unrelenting: I believe the boy left after one semester. Of the girls, Jacqueline and Patricia were both 14; I had just turned 13. We had no clue about what we

⁴⁹ "113 Blacks Bring Integration to Johnston County's Schools," *Smithfield Harold*, September 3, 1965, front page.

⁵⁰ Katti Gray, "Rhonda Joy McLean: My Testimony," *Essence Magazine*, February 2008, 174.

would come up against, but I am certain that we were in our right place, doing what God wanted us to do.”⁵¹

In another *Smithfield Herald* article, from October 26, 1965, just a little over a month from the first steps at integration an elementary school in Kenly (Johnston County) was bombed. Bagley Elementary was an all-black elementary school that had a single stick of dynamite thrown through one of its windows. While there was definite damage, it did not destroy the school, but it did reinforce the message that they were not welcomed in Johnston County.

In 1967, As racial tensions rose in Johnston County and across the state, the Ku Klux Klan decided to mark their territory in Johnston County with a billboard on highway 70 that read, “This is Klan Country” and “Fight Integration and Communism. Join the United Klans of America.” The billboard pictured a white knight of the Ku Klux Klan sitting upon a horse with its front legs in the air as the white knight of the Ku Klux Klan brandished his torch. This billboard sent a clear message to all the inhabitants of Johnston County, both black and white, and is still talked about today as a stain on the county.

The sign came down ten years later with some animosity. Bruce Siceloff writes, “Klansmen brandished shotguns and hurled rocks at photographers in an effort to dissuade them from recording the event, but there were no shots fired and no one was injured.”⁵² There were at one time three separate billboards, but the one on highway 70 was the most elaborate and prominent. In the late the 1970s the Ku Klux Klan, while in decline, was still openly operating unashamedly in Johnston County.

As fear in the white community continued to rise over tension between the two communities, the *Smithfield Herald* published an article that grasped these sentiments

⁵¹ Gray, “Rhonda Joy McLean,” 174.

⁵² Bruce Siceloff, “Signing Off: Klan Greeting Topples after 10 Years,” *The News and Observer*, March 27, 1977, front page.

expertly recapped in a speech given by D. S. Coltrane, chairman of the North Carolina Good Neighbors Council, on February 26, 1968. Coltrane addresses a coming “Black Power Movement” to North Carolina that would bring violence and further division. His speech recognizes many of the physical needs in the African American community that were being ignored. He grasps this need in his closing: “If we start now and do all we can to meet the needs of people and resolve the problems that cause frustration, I do not believe we will have a long, hot summer in North Carolina.”⁵³ This warning went unheeded in Johnston County.

As racial tensions seemed to come to head in many regions of the south, they also came to a head in Johnston County, North Carolina, and on April 4, 1968, when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, they boiled over. There were acts of violence and civil unrest. Tensions and open hostilities took root in the community. A curfew was put in place to try to curtail the violence. In an attempt to assuage the tensions and restore peace, the First Baptist Church of Smithfield took a unanimous standing vote to approve a statement of solidarity. The statement was to stand against violence and bigotry. The statement was a needed attempt to heal the rift that already existed between the black and white communities in Johnston County.⁵⁴ This rift became more apparent by the assassination of King. Other such statements of unity were also published in the paper by the Good Neighbors Council.⁵⁵

The white population wanted peace, but they were not willing to make the necessary changes to bring about equality for the African American community. They essentially wanted an end to the tension without sacrificing any of their leverage.

⁵³ Thomas J. Lassiter, “Smithfield Not Immune to Racial Disturbances,” *Smithfield Herald*, February 27, 1968, 3.

⁵⁴ “Good Neighbor Council Appeals for Racial Peace and Justice,” *Smithfield Harold*, April 9, 1968, 1.

⁵⁵ “Good Neighbor Council,” 1.

In 1969, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People issued a statement to the Johnston County school system that was published in the *Smithfield Harold*. The Heading reads, “NAACP Forecasts ‘Rude Awakening’ if Present School Policies Continue.”⁵⁶ The article was in reference to the miseducation of African American students. They were accusing the Johnston County Board of Education of intentionally not educating African American students to the qualifications required to be hired by the Board of Education. There was a disparagement between the business classes offered and the fact that only two students were considered qualified to work in the Johnston County Board of Education; both of those former students resigned for reasons not cited in the article.

The Voting Right Act of 1965 was another monumental shift in the political rights of African Americans in North Carolina and gave them the voice they had been searching for to decide who would represent them in Washington.⁵⁷ Other legislative movements are captured this way, as explained by Crow:

Additional legislation in 1965, 1968, and 1970 in the area of voting rights lowered other barriers to black voting in North Carolina. The “grandfather clause,” the poll tax, and the literacy test had been used to prevent blacks from voting in the Tar Heel State. The Supreme Court of the United States declared the grandfather clause unconstitutional and overturned the poll tax. The Voting Rights Act ended the literacy test as a requisite for blacks to have the franchise.⁵⁸

As time moved on, open hostilities took a back seat to subversive bigotry. There may not have been open oppressive legislation or even overt acts of racism by local citizens in grand fashion, but racism in Johnston county and much of the South took on a more covert attitude. A resignation on the part of white citizens saw integration and

⁵⁶ Herman D. Lawson, “NAACP Forecasts ‘Rude Awakening’ If Present School Policies Continue,” *Smithfield Harold*, May 6, 1969, 6-A.

⁵⁷ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 205.

⁵⁸ Crow, Escott, and Wadelington, *A History of African Americans*, 205.

living in the same community as just the way things were going to be, but they did not have to like it.

In Johnston County, life continued to go on and racial bias between the white and black community continued, but it has become even more obvious in the resegregation that has taken place. As interstate 40 came through Johnston County it connected many of the small towns and gave them greater access to Raleigh and it gave those working in Raleigh greater access to peaceful country living. There has been explosive growth in Johnston County and it changed the make-up of the county, especially in the areas of housing and education.⁵⁹

Northerners have migrated south to Johnston County and have chosen Clayton in which to live. Clayton has a higher white population and nicer schools. As people flock to Clayton, house prices have continued to rise, which in turn has increased revenue from taxes, which has aided in building newer facilities. This influx into Clayton has created a willful segregation on the part of the citizens of Johnston County. Smithfield has outdated educational facilities and lower test scores, while Clayton's facilities and students are doing much better. This perception has swept throughout Johnston county. Katherine Paige O'Hale captures this sentiment: "The recent trend toward resegregation—racial and socioeconomic—highlights the considerable losses in school equality that have occurred over the last decade."⁶⁰

In an interview with Kelton Hinton, the Associational Missions Strategist for the JBA, he spoke of being excited about the future and hopeful for how white and black churches could work together in the future. At one point he said,

I would like to establish a working relationship with the Johnston County Missionary Baptist Association. Our two organizations are very similar in doctrine and practice.

⁵⁹ Katherine Paige O'Hale, "The Strange Career of Freedom of Choice: The Story of the Johnston County, North Carolina Schools" (MA thesis, University of North Carolina, 2007), 4.

⁶⁰ O'Hale, "The Strange Career of Freedom of Choice," 1-3.

We share many fundamentals in common between us, not least of which are our overlapping territories. Both of us serve "Baptist" churches in Johnston County and beyond. I would love to see us partner together in missions, evangelism and leadership development and training. I feel like working together we would have a better opportunity to impact ALL of the population of this county and beyond for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁶¹

Conclusion

Racism and discrimination have plagued the US for centuries. The US, North Carolina, Johnston County, and The Southern Baptist Convention have all been affected by the issue of racism and are also complicit in the ongoing injustice. For centuries, African American brothers and sisters in Jesus have been segregated physically, educationally, economically, and spiritually from their white counterparts.

If Christians can bridge this divide, heal this hurt, and learn to serve the kingdom for the cause of Christ together, it will be a great show of relevancy to a world that finds the gospel irrelevant. It will speak volumes to the love of God working through believers to heal and overcome.

⁶¹ Kelton Hinton, interview by author, Johnston Baptist Association Office, Selma, NC, June 18, 2019.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

The basic purpose of this project was to heal the rift between race and faith in Johnston County, North Carolina. This project was originally going to take place in Houston, Texas, and Houston was to be the target of the research in regard to healing racial divides; however, I moved from Texas to Clayton, North Carolina, and was both encouraged and warned about doing a project on racism in Johnston County.

Johnston County is beautiful place with wonderful people, but it has a horribly difficult racialized past. Those hurts of racism run deep in this county. They date back to slavery and extend through the civil rights movement to more recent times where clear racial strife still exists.

While there was a great need for a project of this scope in many different counties and regions throughout the country, the need was evident in Johnston County, North Carolina. Warnings acknowledged, but not heeded, the project plowed ahead for God's glory. The results of this project were encouraging and the sign up conducted at the end of the conference for those interested in future work to heal this rift was also encouraging.

This project took place in a conference format. It was held over a weekend, Friday night and Saturday, which allowed participants to process the information in an intentional order. Each of the four lessons built upon the one before it; lesson 1 was from John 17: 20-23, lesson 2 from Acts 10: 28-29, lesson 3 from Colossians 3:11, and culminated at the final lesson found in Revelation 7: 9-10.

While preparing for this project in Houston, I spoke with a few African American pastors about their participating in the project as a presenter. They would teach

the lesson for one of the four passages. Because I had only lived in Johnston County for seven months when the project occurred, I had not yet built the relationships to know who I could reach out to as presenters for some of the project lessons.

Preparation

As chapter 2 was written, the biblical foundations for the project itself became the lessons of the project. Each of the four passages discussed in chapter 2 became one of the foundational lessons taught during the project. The cultural, social, and historical information learned as chapter 3 was developed became a lot of the contextualization for the biblical foundation.

The main points brought up in these passages became most evidently seen in the stories of racial discrimination and prejudice, both inside and outside of the church. These stories of prejudice and hatred developed the modern illustrations for the biblical texts being presented.

There was an abundance of material. So many biblical texts speak against racial discrimination and the way it limits the reach of the church that there simply had to be a limit to the number of passages taught. In the same way there was a plethora of information about the racialized history of Johnston County, North Carolina. That abundance of available information forced me to focus in on the stories that best illustrated the biblical passages being presented.

Outlines were developed and small conversations were had with locals on an informal level with no mention of the project to gauge just how raw this topic might still be. These informal conversations were a litmus test to the need of this project beyond the academic hopes, but ultimately to the gospel implications that the biblical texts may have for Johnston County.

Much of the preparation for the conference was in its publicity. Both the JBA and the JMBA were notified about the conference and their assistance was sought regarding helping promote and even facilitate various aspects of the conference. The JBA

executive director was instrumental in helping me spread the word about the conference and drawing interest to the subject matter. Not only did he help spread the word and recruit participants, he also attended.

The JMBA was difficult to get in touch with as they do not have a working website and their executive officer, who is referred to as their moderator, only returned one phone call. They offered their assistance, but never followed through. Several more follow up calls were made to enlist their assistance. Eventually, about a month away from the conference several JMBA churches were contacted directly with an invite to be a part of the conference. This is not a disparagement against the JMBA, but simply what happened.

The African American participants that attended had heard about the conference through the efforts of the JBA. The JBA helped me recruit a worship leader for the conference who is African American. The JBA also sent out publicity emails to all its churches and others.

An event was created on Facebook to help advertise the event and invitations were sent out through that event. Artwork for this event was created on a website called Canva, which allowed me to tailor the artwork for the invitations to exact sizes that was needed. Flyers were also made with the same artwork as the online invitations and were passed out at the local JBA pastors' meeting, where pastors were encouraged to attend the conference with their church members. Each pastor was given a flyer with a business card and my contact information.

A video commercial was made and put on Facebook to advertise the conference. It was shared by many conference attendees and was posted directly to the event invitation on Facebook.

In preparation for the conference I also bought folders, highlighters, pens, coffee, water, and baked goods for those in attendance. The supplies were brought to the conference location in advance and organized for the conference

To ensure complete anonymity, participants were given a folder as they entered the conference on Friday. Each folder had a unique alpha-numeric code written on the inside. That same alpha-numeric code had been written on the pre-conference survey that was already in the folder. The initial survey was marked with an orange highlighter in the upper right corner of the survey to indicate that it was the initial surveys. Participants turned in their initial surveys as they completed them but kept their folders so that they would still have their alpha-numeric code for reference the next day when they filled out the post-conference survey.

The post-conference surveys were marked in a similar fashion by a blue highlighter in the upper right-hand corner. However, the post-survey did not have the matching alpha-numeric code pre-written on the survey. The code was in the folder which they brought back with them for the second day of the conference. The participants were required to write the code in the blue shaded portion of the survey. Post-surveys were not given until the completion of the final session of the conference.

The Project

The conference began on a Friday night. With session 1. The session itself took about 30 minutes. Thirty minutes was given before the session for the participants to fill out their initial surveys, and another 30 minutes was given at the conclusion of the first lesson for participants to discuss the material and ask questions in an informal setting.

Sessions 2, 3, and 4 were on Saturday. Each session was approximately 30-45 minutes. Between sessions, participants were given 20 minutes to discuss the previous sessions material and ask questions. At the conclusion of session 4, participants were given time to discuss the material and ask questions before taking the post-survey. The post-survey took approximately 20 minutes.

Session 1

The first session lasted approximately an hour and a half, which included the time necessary for the initial surveys to be completed and returned. The first session was a lesson from John 17:20-23. The attendees were introduced to the idea of racial division in the church as it exists in Johnston County, North Carolina. Next, the passage from John 17 was read. The lesson targeted the primary idea of the passage, which was Jesus' desire for the church to be unified as the Father and Son are unified. The reasons for this level of unity are laid out in the passage: "so that the world may believe" (v. 21), and "that the world may know" (v. 23).

Participants were shown the direct correlation between their unity and their witness as believers to the world around. Participants were shown the clear contrast between the racial divisions that exist in churches and the unity that Jesus prayed for believers to have. Participants were challenged directly to explore their own personal biases and how they may be impeding their ability to strive after the great commission.

As the lesson concluded, participants were dismissed for the evening with the closing instruction of returning the next morning with their folders containing the alpha-numeric code. The session was then closed in prayer. Discussions and questions were in the foyer for approximately 30 minutes. Participants were jovial and conversational as they exited the building. Many conversations ensued in the parking lot following the first session that clearly showed that participants were engaging with the material and processing the implications.

Session 2

The second session was the following Saturday morning. It lasted approximately 50 minutes. Before the start of session 2, participants were encouraged to gather early for coffee and refreshments. Similar conversations regarding the discussion from session 1 could be heard in the foyer before the beginning of session 2.

Session 2 was a lesson from Acts 10:28-29, which is the story of Peter and Cornelius. This lesson began introducing the idea that, at a young age, many people are taught discrimination and prejudice by authority figures, and many people do not challenge those suppositions unless directly confronted. The lesson paired that thought with text by introducing the context of the passage and the greater story behind the verses being covered.

Lesson 2 then introduced Peter's own admission of taught bias and how he had been raised or influenced to see others from various nations as sub-Jewish—that, somehow, they were less human because they were not Jewish. Peter held to this idea even as he taught the good news of the gospel, until God intervened and directly confronted the poor theology that had affected his ministry. The lesson then looked at the effects of what happened when Peter was confronted and how he was faithful to God's directive to go to Cornelius and share the good news. Next, participants were introduced to the idea that these ingrained biases can be rejected and ministry limitations that are not biblical can be eliminated. Participants saw the effects of the Holy Spirit on the gentile church in Cornelius' house.

Participants were challenged to look into their own thoughts and suppositions to see where they may have been discriminating or viewing people as less than themselves because of what they had learned from an authority figure such as a parent, teacher, law enforcement, pastor, or others. Participants were challenged to seek out biases in their own lives and look at two very important words in verse 28: "but God." Participants were challenged to see how God might confront their personal views, thoughts, and even biases toward other human beings made in the image of God, especially other believers.

This session was followed by a brief intermission in which participants were encouraged to talk amongst themselves about the information provided in the sessions thus far as they partook of the refreshments provided in the foyer. Participants responded in kind and spoke freely of the material discussed as they enjoyed the baked goods.

Following the fifteen-minute intersession, participants were encouraged to return to their seats as the third session was about to commence.

Session 3

The third session was approximately 50 minutes. The third session was from Colossians 3:11. In this lesson, participants were encouraged to ask themselves in what ways God had broken down barriers in their own lives. They were encouraged to think of ways or areas in their own lives where they had erected barriers or had practiced some form of racial, political, nationalistic, or socio-economic prejudice.

The first idea discussed in this lesson was how Paul intended for every believer to put on the “new person” (Col 3:9-10). As believers become who Jesus has called them to be, how do they identify with other believers. After introducing this imperative of putting on the “new person,” participants saw how Paul addressed barriers in his day that still affect us today.

Participants were introduced to the barrier of nationalism and how nationalistic views can contaminate the desire to reach the world with the gospel. Paul confronts this when he declares “neither Greek nor Jew” (Col 3:11). These nationalistic divisions that had separated believers in their ability to work together were dashed.

The next barrier addressed was legalism. Paul asserts that “circumcised and uncircumcised” were both apart of the body of Christ (Col 3:11). Paul was directly addressing the Judaizers that were telling new gentile believers that they had to be circumcised to truly be Christians. Paul quickly dispels that myth (Col 3:11; Phil 3:2-3).

The next division that Paul addresses is one of pigmentation, civil, and geography, as he says “barbarian, Scythian” as one group was from a particular region of Africa and the other from Asia (Col 3:11). He addresses geographic division in that manner, and then addresses the pigmentation issue because barbarians, who were from Africa, were of a darker skin pigmentation, and the Scythians of Asia were of a lighter

skin pigmentation. He also addresses the issue of being considered civilized, because both groups were considered uncivilized.

The fourth and final division that Paul addresses in this passage is that of “slave or free” (Col 3:11). When addressing this particular division, the social construct of slavery was introduced and the differences between the atrocities seen in the South were somewhat different than the social contracts many slaves entered into around the world. However, participants were shown how the gospel is the same to the slave and the master. Participants saw how a slave outside the church could in theory be his master’s discipler inside the church.

After session 3, participants were given another fifteen-minute intersession, and again encouraged to discuss the information contained in the previous sessions. At the conclusion of this final intersession, participants were encouraged to return to their seats as they started the fourth and final session.

Session 4

The fourth session took approximately an hour and fifteen minutes as the participants not only heard the information conveyed in the lesson, but also completed the post-conference surveys. The post-surveys were collected after completion. The conference was then closed in a word of prayer.

The fourth session was grounded in Revelation 7:9-10. This passage introduced the idea that, ultimately, Jesus’ prayer of unity would come to fruition. Participants heard how believers “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,” would be present around the throne of God. They were encouraged to think through their part in bringing this picture of unity to fruition.

Participants were challenged with one main question as this lesson concluded, “Is Jesus worth it?” Is Jesus worth the changes that need to take place in the lives of believers, in churches and in communities? What might happen if followers of Jesus believe that He is worth it? There would be a movement of God among the unbelievers of

this land if they saw the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of believers to heal the rift between race and faith in Johnston County, North Carolina.

The pre- and post-conference surveys were kept separate after the completion of the conference until they were matched with their corresponding alpha-numeric code so that answers could be compared, question for question. This survey showed the average percentage of change in the opinions of the participants. While subjects were anonymous, the alpha-numeric code showed the shifts in opinions as individuals and as a whole.

As participants of the conference were leaving, they were given the opportunity to sign-up to be a part of future projects to continue to heal this hurt and bring racial reconciliation to their churches and community. Of the 38 attendees, 27 responded and signed up—71 percent of the attendees signed up to be a part of the solution to racism moving forward.

Post-Project Analysis

After the surveys had been collected, they were paired with their corresponding alpha-numeric code. The data was then analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the lessons and to determine whether they had succeeded in changing the attitudes and perspectives of participants. The results are categorized in this section.

The pre- and post-conference survey was borrowed from Adam Griffin's doctoral project, "Designing an Effective Approach to Racial Reconciliation in the Communities of Dallas, Texas, through the Village Church," and adapted to fit the context in Johnston County, North Carolina. The questions break down into three general categories. The table is also borrowed and adapted from Griffin's project.¹

These classifications make it much easier for the analysis of the data. Next are the results of a couple of key questions from each category. The first seven questions of

¹ Adam Edward Griffin, "Designing an Effective Approach to Racial Reconciliation in the Communities of Dallas, Texas through The Village Church" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 75-76.

the survey establish the demographic information and some information about why people live in Johnston County.

The first question of the survey was not numbered with the others, but the first request was to check “I agree to participate” or “I do not agree to participate.” Out of 36 participants, all 36 marked that they “agreed to participate.

Table. Categories of questions

Category	Question #
Demographics of respondents	1, 2, 3
General Perspectives on Racial Reconciliation	
Regarding the history of race relations	9, 10
Influence of the home and family on racialization	20, 34
Personal involvement in racial reconciliation	7, 12, 29
General opinions on race and racism in Johnston County	8, 11, 14, 33
Local Church Practices Regarding Racial Reconciliation	
Awareness of and opinion on their church’s current strategy	13, 16, 19, 22, 23, 24, 31, 32
Perspective on the diversity of their church	15, 18, 25, 28
Comfort level with church practice	17, 26
Their church’s Communication about racial reconciliation	21, 27, 30
Social Circle Homogeny	
Levels of homogeny in social circles	4, 5, 6

Demographics

Question 1 asked, “What is your role at your church?” Of participants, 7.89 percent said that they were a Pastor/Elder at their church; 10.5 percent were deacons; and 81.5 percent were church member, but not an elder or deacon. This question established the role participants play in their local churches. The logic behind this question was that if a participant was a pastor or deacon, he may hold more influence than someone who was a member.

Question 2 asked, “What is your ethnicity?” The possible answers for the question were, White, Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Native American or American Indian, Asian / Pacific Islander, Indian, or Other. Out of those possibilities,

only White and Black or African American were chosen: 89.4 percent of participants were white; 10.5 percent of participants were black or African American. The majority of those in attendance were white. The project had a few African American participants, but the majority were white. The project did not have any other minorities that were in attendance.

Question 3 asked, “How long have you lived in Johnston County or the surrounding area?” The answers to this question ranged from 0 to 74 years. The average amongst the participants was 28.75 years.

Participants were of varying ages, but there was a good number of senior adults in attendance. This is significant because many of the adults in attendance were around Johnston County when some of the historical, cultural, and social illustrations took place. They remember the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the chaos that ensued in Johnston County in the wake. Some of them were local children when the schools integrated, and they remember the tension.

The next section looks at questions from each of the three sections that show significant shifts in the attitudes and perceptions of race and ethnicity.

General Perspectives on Racial Reconciliation

Question 7 asked, “What factors contributed to you living where you do (check all that apply).” The possible answers for this question were: square footage, safety, cost/price, schools, extended family, network of friends, neighborhood quality, missional opportunity, existing relationships with others nearby, proximity to work/recreation, living near people I’m ethnically comfortable with, and other. Of participants, 34.21 percent chose “Square Footage”; 36.84 percent chose “Safety”; 68.42 percent chose “Cost/price”; 21.05 percent chose “Schools”; 42.1 percent chose “Extended Family”; 13.15 percent chose “Network of Friends”; 42.1 percent “Neighborhood Quality”; 18.42 percent chose “Missional Opportunity”; 23.68 percent chose “Existing relationships with

others nearby”; 31.57 percent chose “Proximity to work/recreation”; 10.52 percent chose “Living near people I’m ethnically comfortable with”; 18.42 percent chose “Other.”

Not surprisingly, that cost was the primary factor in why people live where they do. Only 13.15 percent chose to live where they do because of their friends, which shows that the economic reasons were an important factor in why they chose to live where they do.

Of the participants, 10.52 percent chose to live where they do because they were comfortable with the ethnicity of the people who lived there. Out of the four people who chose this response, only one was African American. Did that African American mean that he or she was more comfortable not living near white people? Was it because he feels safer living near people that look like him? However, the African American person who picked this response also checked his desire to live near friends, extended family, and proximity to work/recreation. In other words, he loves his community. The three white people that chose this response may not have done so out of a sense of racial superiority or ingrained bias, but simply from a sense of fear. However, they may have also checked the box because of a sense of loving their community as well. The white participants that checked this box also checked boxes for extended family or proximity to work/recreation. Interestingly, both the African American and the white participants who checked the box next to this response also checked the box next to “Cost/price.” There are many variables as to why they may have checked that box, but even “Cost/price” may very well have been influenced by the ethnicity of those living in said neighborhood.

Question 8, “Our country has serious race issues.” In the initial responses to this question, 0 percent marked Strongly Disagree, 5.4 percent marked Disagree, 2.7 percent marked Disagree Slightly, 35.13 percent marked Agree Slightly, 32.43 percent marked Agree, and 24.32 percent marked Strongly Agree. In the post-survey the responses were as follows 0 percent marked Strongly Disagree, 0 percent marked Disagree, 5.4 percent marked Disagree Slightly, 21.62 percent marked Agree Slightly,

37.83 percent marked Agree, and 35.13 percent marked Strongly Agree. There is a shift in this response as the responses that fell on the disagree part of the spectrum went down in the post-survey and those on the agree portion of the spectrum went up tremendously. Agree moved from 32.43 percent to 37.83 percent, while Strongly Agree moved from 24.32 percent to 35.13 percent. None of the options on the disagree portion of the spectrum grew.

Participants got the message that there is still a significant issue of race and racism in the United States. Some in attendance had lessened the impact of racism in their own minds but were swayed during the presentations to see that it is still an issue affecting people today.

Local Church Practices Regarding Racial Reconciliation

Question 16, “Those who lead on the stage in your church do not represent adequate diversity.” The answers to the initial survey were as follows: 13.5 percent Strongly Disagree, 29.72 percent Disagree, 8.1 percent Disagree Slightly, 10.8 percent Agree Slightly, 32.4 percent Agree, and 5.4 percent Strongly Agree. The answers to the post-survey were as follows: 8.1 percent Strongly Disagree, 2.7 percent Disagree, 18.9 percent Disagree Slightly, 13.5 percent Agree Slightly, 43.24 percent Agree, and 13.5 percent Strongly Agreed. There was a major shift in the responses to this question. In the initial survey 29.72 percent responded with Disagree, but in the post survey only 2.7 percent responded that they Disagreed. The Strongly Disagree category also saw a drop from 13.5 percent to 8.1 percent, but the Agree choice grew from 32.4 percent to 43.24 percent, and the Strongly Agree option moved from 5.4 percent to 13.5 percent.

There was a clear indication that the respondents realized a lack of minority reflection from the stages in their churches, as 89.4 percent of the participants were white. This is a reflection of white churches in Johnston County not representing minorities from the stages in their churches. That is not to say that these churches do not want

minorities to be attenders, but do they want them in leadership? Do these churches want to be represented on stage by minorities? While I may not be able to draw those conclusions from this one question, I can say with certainty that minorities are not represented in that capacity, whereas they may not have recognized it before the conference, they did after the conference.

Question 28 asked, “I contribute to racial bias in Johnston County.” The responses to the initial survey were as follows: 48.64 percent Strongly Disagree, 37.83 percent Disagree, 8.1 percent Disagree Slightly, 5.4 percent Agree Slightly, 0 percent Agree, and 0 percent Strongly Agreed. In the post-survey, the answers were as follows: 27 percent Strongly Disagree, 40.54 percent Disagree, 8.1 percent Disagree Slightly, 18.9 percent Agree Slightly, 2.7 percent Agree, and 2.7 percent Strongly Agree. The question is a direct representation of the hearts of the participants regarding their view of racism and need to for racial reconciliation. Again, it is important to keep in mind that 89.4 percent of the participants were white.

Of the participants, 48.64 percent initially responded that they Strongly Disagree that they contribute to racial bias in Johnston County, but in the post-survey that number had changed to only 27 percent, which is a huge shift from the initial survey. That is tempered slight by the rise from 37.83 percent in the initial survey to 40.54 percent in the post survey that simply Disagree.

This change in mindset can be seen on the other side of these percentages. In the initial survey only 5.4 percent Agree Slightly, but 18.9 percent Agree Slightly in the post-survey, and from 0 percent that Agree to 2.7 percent that Agree, and from 0 percent to 2.7 percent that Strongly Agree. While clearly not everyone saw themselves as part of the problem, quite a few of them saw their role in the problem.

Acknowledging one’s role in the problem does not necessarily preclude that one will become a part of the solution, but because participants were brothers and sisters in Christ, there is hope. The hope is found in that the stimulus for change was the Word

of God. If God's Word can begin the process of helping them see their role in the problem or even their being willing to consider that they might even have a role in the problem is indeed hopeful for racial reconciliation.

Social Circle Homogeny

Question 4 asked, "Think of your ten closest friends excluding your family. How many of them are a different ethnicity than you?" The answer for this question was somewhere between 1-10. The participants had an average of 2.1 friends who were of a different ethnicity than they were. The limitation in this question was how the participant defines "friend." Depending on one's personality, they might define it in a much broader sense than someone else.

Question 5 asked, "What percentage of your coworkers are white/non-Hispanic?" The possible answers were 0-20%, 20-40%, 40-60%, 60-80%, 80-100%. The answers were as follows: 18.42 percent of participants chose 0-20%; 15.78 percent chose 20-40%; 18.42 percent chose 40-60%; 7.89 percent chose 60-80%; 42.1 percent chose 80-100%. Participants may have gotten a bit confused on this question. I doubt as to whether 42.1 percent of the participants worked in an environment that was 80-100% made up of minorities. I would especially hold to that doubt considering that 89.4 percent of the participants were white.

Question 6 asked, "What percentage of your neighbors are white/non-Hispanic?" The possible answers were 0-20%, 20-40%, 40-60%, 60-80%, 80-100%. The answers were as follows: 34.21 percent chose 0-20%; 10.52 percent chose 20-40%; 15.78 percent chose 40-60%; 15.78 percent chose 60-80%; 26.31 percent chose 80-100%. This question poses the same problem as the previous. Since the questions were worded similarly, the same misinterpretation took place. Another possible alternative to participants being confused by the question is the influx of people moving to Johnston County from outside of North Carolina. Many of the people moving here are doing so because of the schools and housing market. As Raleigh continues to expand, so does the housing market.

As houses get bigger and the price per square foot remains about the same more, more people are moving to Johnston County because they can afford a nicer house in a “better” area. The housing market could play a role in the way that this question was answered.

Conclusion

Throughout this process, from beginning to end, the issue of race and racism has popped up in subtle and not so subtle ways. There is hope for Johnston County that they will see Jesus’s desire for racial reconciliation and even greater unity in the bigger picture of who the church is. There is hope that the shifts outlined in the questions and percentages show a trend of movement in the hearts of believers because of what God’s Word says.

There should most be future study on racial reconciliation not only in Johnston County, but in other regions of the country. This project could easily be replicated in any church, association, state convention, or even larger contexts. It is adaptable contextually to the culture. It would have worked very well in Houston, Texas, and has worked remarkably well in Johnston County, North Carolina.

The next question is, where does the church go from here? That will be an ongoing answer, that one hopes will not be finished until unity and harmony in the body of Christ are achieved. Some will think that can only happen in heaven, and maybe so, but the same God who fitted believers for heaven lives in those believers, shares his desire for unity in the body and works in those believers for His glory. I am hopeful.

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATION,
AND CONCLUSION

Wake up from sleep! For the Christian, being woke means to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, to walk as he walked—as reconcilers, ambassadors, and advocates in a divided world. When we put on Christ, we put on his identity and choose to engage how he would, not the way our flesh is inclined.¹

It is not an easy task to approach the issue of racism in any culture. This project began in the metropolitan area of Houston. Such a large diverse population painted a much different picture of the racial landscape than that of Johnston County, North Carolina. After living in the Houston area for over ten years, God called my family and I to Clayton, North Carolina to pastor a church. I was graciously allowed to move the focus of my project from Houston to Johnston County.

The cultural climate in Johnston county is wrought with racial tension from centuries of oppression, ill will, and malicious behaviors. The racialized history of Johnston county is thick with stories of overt and outright racist behaviors. This project bridged the gap between race and faith in the heart of those that follow Jesus in Johnston County. Can believers overcome their racialized past and identify and unify with other believers despite their ethnicity? The answer is overwhelmingly, Yes!

While it is great to come together for a conference on racial reconciliation, followers of Jesus must wait to see how these brothers and sisters in Christ respond to and take care of each other after the conference is over. Will Christians seek to continue to listen and understand each other? Will they seek to advocate for those who are

¹ Dhati Lewis, *Advocates: The Narrow Path to Racial Reconciliation* (Nashville: B & H, 2019), 37.

different from them, even when they gain nothing from it? Will Christians help those in need that are different than them, even if it costs them to do so? Will followers of Jesus live counter culturally for the sake of the gospel?

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to encourage white and African American believers in the Johnston Baptist Association and the Johnston Missionary Baptist Association to empathize and seek unity with each other, in order to impact the community for the sake of the gospel. The basic premise is that the Word of God is enough to change people's hearts. The Bible is powerful enough to weed out the sinfulness of racial superiority.

Chapter 2 laid the biblical foundations, which became the core of the teaching text for the project. As the lessons delved into John 17, Acts 10, Colossians 3, and Revelation 7, listeners were confronted not only with Jesus' own desire to see the church unified in perfect unity as the Father and Son are unified, but also showed how God led one of the apostles to overcome deeply ingrained prejudice.

My hope is that the ongoing ramifications of this project stretch for many years in new church partnerships and neighborhoods being reached with the good news across racial lines. As pastors and lay people alike hear the message of racial reconciliation through God's Word, I hope that they will be moved to continue these conversations and look deeper into the Scriptures to see the plethora of biblical texts that address this issue.

Evaluating the Projects Goals

The first goal was to assess a focus group of white and African American believers regarding their current attitudes of race and unity. The project accomplished the first goal through the initial survey, however the participant goal of 80 participants was not met. We only had 40 participants. Those participants were given the survey, and 37 completed both the initial and post-conference surveys. Three participants filled out the

initial survey but did not return Saturday for the last three sessions of the project, so they did not do the post-conference survey.

This goal was further fulfilled through the responses in the survey. While some questions specifically targeted views of race and racial reconciliation in their own churches, other questions more broadly dealt with their personal views of race and racial reconciliation as a whole. An example of one of those broader racial questions would be question 8, which read, “Our country has serious race issues.” In the initial responses to this question, no one marked Strongly Disagree, 5.4 percent marked Disagree, 2.7 percent marked Disagree Slightly, 35.13 percent marked Agree Slightly, 32.43 percent marked Agree, and 24.3 percent marked Strongly Agree. In the post-conference survey the responses were as follows: none marked Strongly Disagree or Disagree, 5.4 percent marked Disagree Slightly, 21.62 percent marked Agree Slightly, 37.83 percent marked Agree, and 35.13 percent marked Strongly Agree. There was an obvious shift in responses to question 8. Of the participants, 89.4 percent were white. Many of those in attendance in their initial survey did not see racism as a major issue facing the United States. There was a definite aloofness to the issue of racism in America. That issue was thoroughly introduced throughout the biblical and historical aspects of the four lessons. Participants engaged with the material as seen in the questions reviewed in chapter 4.

The second goal was to develop a series of lessons on a biblical view of race, ethnicity, and unity. This goal was accomplished during the writing of chapters 2 and 3. As I delved into the texts of Scripture and saw the ramifications of not living out the Scripture throughout our country’s history and its long-lasting effects on the culture, the four lessons fell into place. It was amazing to see how the applications of the texts expounded in chapter 2 were so clearly seen in the history found in chapter 3. I assembled a panel of experts to review the lessons and gauge those lessons based upon the rubric found in appendix 2. The panel found the lessons to be sufficient or exemplary in all areas.

The third goal was to increase empathy regarding racial and ethnic struggles among the members of the focus groups through the lessons. The numerical goal for successfully completing the third goal was to have 80 percent of the attendees to complete the lessons. Out of the 40 participants who attended the conference, 37 completed the surveys. Therefore 92.5 percent of the participants finished the lessons and surveys. This goal was successfully completed.

This emphasis on empathy was driven home not only by the clear teaching of God's Word, but also by showing the historical errors of believers in the past. It was clearly seen in the examples that this racialized behavior was not simply seen in the South or even in North Carolina, but in Johnston County where these people live, work, and attend church. This is most clearly seen in question 28, which addresses one's own bias.

Question 28 asked, "I contribute to racial bias in Johnston County." The answers to the initial survey were as follows: 48.64 percent Strongly Disagreed, 37.83 percent Disagreed, 8.1 percent Disagreed Slightly, 5.4 percent Agreed Slightly, and none responded that they Agreed or Strongly Agreed. In the post-conference survey the answers were as follows: 27 percent Strongly Disagreed, 40.54 percent Disagreed, 8.1 percent Disagreed Slightly, 18.9 percent Agree Slightly, 2.7 percent Agree, and 2.7 percent Strongly Agree.

There was an obvious shift in the way participants saw their own behavior in light of the racial problems facing Johnston County. In the initial survey not one participant answered that they Agree or Strongly Agree that they contribute to the racial bias in Johnston County. The majority actually answered in the opposite, 48.64 percent of participants Strongly Disagreed that they contributed to the racial bias. However, in the post-conference survey only 27 percent of the participants responded that they Strongly Disagreed. While only 2.7 percent said that they Agreed, and another 2.7 percent said that they Strongly Agreed, 18.9 percent said that they Agreed Slightly, and

that is up from 5.4 percent in the initial survey. This shows that while not everyone in attendance saw that they were a contributing factor to the issue of racial bias in Johnston County, many participants had a change in attitude toward this issue.

This issue comes home to the church in question 16, where participants were asked, “Those who lead on the stage in your church do not represent adequate diversity.” This question shows not only the desire of the participants to acknowledge the issue of racial bias in Johnston County, but do they see it reflected from the stages of their churches. The answers to question 16 on the initial survey were as follows: 13.5 percent Strongly Disagree, 29.72 percent Disagree, 8.1 percent Disagree Slightly, 10.8 percent Agree Slightly, 32.4 percent Agree, and 5.4 percent Strongly Agree. The responses to question 16 on the post-conference survey were as follows: 8.1 percent Strongly Disagree, 2.7 percent Disagreed, 18.9 percent Disagreed Slightly, 13.5 percent Agree Slightly, 43.24 percent Agree, and 13.5 percent Strongly Agreed.

The biggest change was seen in those that answered that they Disagreed. That statistic moved from 29.72 percent of the respondents marking Disagree to only 2.7 percent. Participants that marked Agree on the survey grew from 32.4 percent to 43.24 percent, and those that marked Strongly Agree moved from 5.4 percent to 13.5 percent. This shift denotes that not only do they see the racial bias apparent in their county, but that bias might just be reflected on the stages of their churches. There is no direct correlation of course, but there is evidence of an attitudinal change in the participants of the conference.

The fourth goal was to measure attitudinal change by re-administering the initial survey and comparing the answers to the pre-conference survey. A t-test was performed on the pre- and post-conference surveys to determine that there was *t* value was 3.91, which showed that there was a statistically significant difference the pre- and post-conference surveys. The *p* value was .0002, which showed that it was not by chance that these changes occurred.

This attitudinal change was also clearly highlighted in some of the questions represented. Question 7 gave a great picture of the why people live where they live in Johnston County. Question 7 asked, “What factors contributed to you living where you do (check all that apply)” The possible answers for this question were: square footage, safety, cost/price, schools, extended family, network of friends, neighborhood quality, missional opportunity, existing relationships with others nearby, proximity to work/recreation, living near people I’m ethnically comfortable with, and other. Of the participants, 34.21 chose “Square Footage,” 36.84 percent chose “Safety,” 68.42 percent chose “Cost/price,” 21.05 percent chose “Schools,” 42.1 percent chose “Extended Family,” 13.15 percent chose “Network of Friends,” 42.1 percent chose “Neighborhood Quality,” 18.42 percent chose “Missional Opportunity,” 23.68 percent chose “Existing relationships with others nearby,” 31.57 percent chose “Proximity to work/recreation,” 10.52 percent chose “Living near people I’m ethnically comfortable with,” and 18.42 percent chose “Other.”

Of the 4 participants that chose “Living near people I’m ethnically comfortable with,” only one of them was African American. This raised several additional questions that I wish I could have followed up with. Why did they choose that? Was choosing that option directly connected to one of the other options, like “Extended Family” or “Network of Friends”? The one African American that chose this answer also marked both “Extended Family” and “Network of Friends” as well as “Proximity to work/recreation.” The three white participants that made that selection also marked either “Extended Family” or “Proximity to work/recreation.” They had not indicated “Network of Friends,” which raised several more questions. Were they more comfortable with ethnicities like themselves because they were closer to family? Was there a sense of safety in the ethnic make-up of their community?

As stated in chapter 4, there seemed to be some confusion at two questions designed to understand their community and work environments. Questions 5 and 6 were

set to help explain the ethnic make-up there-in. Question 5 said, Estimate: “What percentage of your coworkers are white/non-Hispanic?” The possible answers were 0-20%, 20-40%, 40-60%, 60-80%, 80-100%. The answers were as follows: 18.42 percent chose 0-20%, 15.78 percent chose 20-40%, 18.42 percent chose 40-60%, 7.89 percent chose 60-80%, and 42.1 percent chose 80-100%. The participants may have gotten a bit confused on this question. I have doubts as to whether 42.1 percent worked in an environment that was 80-100% made up of minorities. I would especially hold to that doubt considering that 89.4 percent of the participants were white.

Question 6 said, Estimate: “What percentage of your neighbors are white/non-Hispanic?” The possible answers were 0-20%, 20-40%, 40-60%, 60-80%, 80-100%. The answers were as follows: 34.21 percent chose 0-20%, 10.52 percent chose 20-40%, 15.78 percent chose 40-60%, 15.78 percent chose 60-80%, and 26.31 percent chose 80-100%. The same doubts that I had in the responses to question 5 also apply to question 6. The answers are just not consistent with what is seen in the participants or the communities that make-up Johnston county. One other possible explanation other than the participants reading the question wrong is the influx of minorities into Johnston county from all over the country. People in general are moving to this area, not just minorities, because housing prices are cheaper per square foot than most northern states and there is an expanding job market in the Raleigh area.

The fifth goal was to measure the commitment level of the participants by asking them to participate in future projects that are intentionally interracial and interact with the community. This goal was overwhelmingly positive in the reception by those in attendance. While not all participants sign up, many had a great deal of interest in the continued vision of this project. For this goal to have been considered successful, it would have needed an 80 percent sign up rate, however only 71.05 percent of the participants signed up to be a part of future work to heal the rift of race and faith in Johnston County, North Carolina. While the percentage was not high enough to be

considered successful, it does bode well for future success in bridging this gap and healing this rift.

Future projects to continue this work will strive to bring churches of different ethnicities together for the sake of understanding each other while intentionally serving the community together. These projects will include a homeless ministry, pregnancy crisis ministry, and others, as opportunities arise. Discussions are underway with local civic leaders to find needs that churches can meet by working together.

Overall, the goals were in accordance with the purpose and overall vision for this project. They not only helped create a measure for success or failure in this venture but helped guide the process.

Strengths of the Project

One of the major strengths of the project was in fulfilling the need to address racial tension that still exists and is changing in the community of Johnston County, North Carolina. As people with different backgrounds and perspectives move to the Johnston county area, they bring with them new ideologies that challenge long held localized beliefs about race and ethnicity that had rarely been challenged by outsiders. There is an abundant need for more conversations and future research in the area of race and ethnicity, not only in the south, but throughout the United States. The strength of this subject matter is that as people's views are engaged, one gets to see these walls of social segregation come down. I heard the conversations that ensued as participants shared how their perspectives had been changed.

Another strength of this project was the format. Completing the project in a weekend conference format, as opposed to a series of lessons taught over many weeks, allowed the participants to be inundated with the material. The project addressed the issue of racial reconciliation from multiple passages of Scripture and connected that with relevant cultural historical data that allowed the participants to clearly see the errors of the past. Addressing this issue in a weekend conference format allowed participants time

to think through the material. Using the weekend conference format also helped the participants see the progression of thought from one lesson to the next lesson whereas that might get missed if the lessons were separated by a week.

A third strength of this project was the empathy for other races/ethnicities. The conversations that took place after the sessions was a great indicator of ongoing empathy. I have heard from people who did not attend the conference but would like to learn more about how our racialized society and history has impacted our unity as the church. The president of the Johnston County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Gettys Cohen, Jr., attended the conference and extended an invitation to me to come speak at their annual meeting. He has also, invited Kelton Hinton, executive director of the JBA to attend the monthly meetings.

Weaknesses of the Project

One of the weaknesses of this project was the weekend conference format. While this format was a strength, it was a weakness as well. It allowed for participants to be inundated with the material, but it did not allow for the ongoing benefits of doing this project over multiple weeks. This format was in part because of the scope of the project. Because the project was targeting the whole of Johnston County, it would have been difficult to cover the material in four weeks and maintain the participation throughout.

The second weakness of the project was its scope. The initial thought of wanting to reach those outside one local church was good, but it did create difficulty with coordination and communication. There never seemed to be a good time that worked for the majority of the churches. In the end, I set the conference date and advertised the information to whoever could make it.

Another weakness inherent in the subject matter was the unknown bias that may exist in the minority community as well as the majority community. Since the event was hosted out of Bethesda Baptist Church, a pre-Civil War, predominantly white

church, that may have been an unintended roadblock to predominantly African American churches attending.

What I Would Do Differently

I would not recommend moving across the country in the middle of research and writing a project. While this move was unavoidable, it certainly created a strain on the ability to focus. Attempting research and writing on one area of the country after moving to another area of the country was difficult. It was also difficult to get back on track with the project while getting acclimated to a new area, new church, and new role in the church.

I would not recommend switching the focus of the project either. The change in focus was a huge setback in the process and involved twice the research. The project was originally to take place in Houston, Texas, but due to moving the focus was shifted to Johnston County, North Carolina. Houston and Johnston county are very different areas. The demographics and the racialized history are vastly different.

If I were to do this project again, I would limit the scope to my own church, and not my whole county. While the intention and desire were good, logistics were difficult. It was difficult to coordinate all the parties involved and to get churches to commit. Many churches simply could not commit, not because they disagreed with the premise, but because of schedules. The scope of the project also made follow up difficult. If I would have done this project only in my church it would be easier to address how to move forward. While I still can and will have those conversations in my own church, I can only suggest that the other participating churches would do the same.

If I were doing this project again, I would want to have the ability to not only compare ethnicity, but also age. On the survey, I should have asked, “What is your age?” because in Johnston County a generational rift may very well reflect varying views of racial bias.

Another aspect of this project that I would change is that I would not teach all four of the sessions. Bringing in an African American pastor from Johnston County would most likely have improved the turn out from the JMBA churches and given more investment in the project from the African American community.

I wish someone had told me to manage my expectations a bit for this project. I am a dreamer and I hope that the goal of seeing Jesus honored through brothers and sisters in Christ being reconciled despite a racially charged culture will be more than a dream. It will take more than one conference for that to happen, but it would be great if this was the spark that started the fires of reconciliation in Johnston County.

I would also push the project further out so that there was more time for publicity and enlistment. If this project were done in one church, it would not be difficult to communicate through the usual avenues of church communications, but to do it on a wide scale I would start earlier and even create a coalition of pastors to help get the word out about the project.

Theological Reflections

While only four passages were used in chapter 2 to build the biblical foundations for this project, though many passages in the Bible deal with issues of race and racial superiority. All these passages are in agreement and harmony with each other. They create a united voice that screams that pigmentation and cultural differences are not to separate followers of Jesus. Christians will all worship Jesus together around the throne. These man-made divisions are sinful and they deny the *Imago Dei*. John Perkins writes,

The oppressor and the oppressed reflect a damaged image of God—and long to express their creativity and dignity in a healthy way. For very different reasons, both the oppressed and the oppressors can be hard to love. But Jesus calls us as His followers to love our enemies and also to care for the downtrodden, whether they are in a concentration camp in Germany or in a halfway house in Jackson, Mississippi. Dignity is worth the fight.²

² John M. Perkins, *Dream with Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 137.

Scripture teaches that all people are created in God's image. It does not say that those of a certain pigmentation are more in God's image than others. Therefore, it is a sin to treat any human being as less than another because of different pigmentation. This direct disregard for the *Imago Dei* is a direct interference with biblical missiology and ecclesiology. It is problematic that while the SBC was striving to send missionaries to the ends of the earth, including Africa, they were actively oppressing and discriminating against their own countrymen who had ethnic origins in some of those same countries.

The theological marring of the *imago Dei* allowed white believers to see black and brown believers as less human than them. This created an ecclesiological misstep that calculated African Americans as unworthy members of the church. This was ultimately another example of the church following the norms set by society and not the church setting the norms for the society in which it exists. In Acts 10, Peter confronts ingrained ethnic superiority. It took a vision from the Lord to change his perspective, which ultimately changed the scope of his ministry and impact for the kingdom as a whole.

Recommendations

Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention has made strides to turn the tides of racial tension in the convention. The SBC must move beyond good intentions and resolutions. It must not allow churches who are actively seeking to discriminate against other believers because of the color of their skin to remain in the Southern Baptist Convention. A book referenced several times in this project was *Removing the Stain of Racism in the Southern Baptist Convention*, and I believe that removing churches from the SBC that are inclined to uphold racist ideologies is necessary to remove said stain.

There has been a great deal of conversation in the SBC and its entities, such as the North American Mission Board and the Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission, as well as the seminaries of the SBC, about social justice and the church's role in addressing the needs therein. Many churches have relegated the need for racial unity in

their communities by either ignoring the issue altogether or by fostering a false ideology that the local government will somehow bring the people together. For racial reconciliation to occur, there must be a willingness to help those affected by racial discrimination and bias. This issue is as much a socio-economic issue as it is an issue of race or racial superiority. Churches must do more than have good intentions, they must invest in their communities.

The Johnston Baptist Association

The Johnston Baptist Association has an opportunity to bridge the gap of racial injustice with the faith of both black and white followers of Jesus. I applaud the heart of the leaders in the JBA as they seek to bridge this gap. Kelton Hinton, the executive director of the JBA, is challenging pastors and church leaders to move and grow together as they seek to make disciples for Jesus Christ in Johnston County.

Race relations in Johnston County would be improved if the JBA hosted intentional opportunities for both white and black church leaders to talk about local issues and how they affect the various communities. Predominantly white churches need to know issues to address and how they can advocate for their black, Hispanic, and Asian brothers and sisters.

Bethesda Baptist Church

Bethesda Baptist Church can do many things to help bridge this racial gap in the community. Bethesda intends to prayer walk multifamily housing areas in Johnston County. The church will also build intentional relationships with churches in the area to reach the lost, celebrate diversity, and find ways to advocate for each other. Bethesda Baptist Church will embody the change necessary across the landscape of Johnston County and the whole of the Southern Baptist Convention. Some amazing SBC churches, such as The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, and Grace Alive in Orlando, are

currently doing this, and Bethesda will seek to learn from them as they continue to bridge racial divides in their communities.

This project stretched me in many ways. I came into this project after hearing Kevin Jones speak at a luncheon about his experiences. While I cannot say that I could relate to his experiences, I can say that on a very human level I was moved by his transparency and the sense of injustice that he adequately conveyed. Marquez Ball engaged with me on the issue of racial injustice repeatedly and helped me see current, historical, and social issues through his eyes and that of his congregation. Ball never gave me an easy answer but was loving enough to confront with the truth.

I entered this project seeing myself as not being racist. But I soon realized that racism is not that simple. Most people tend to mask the intimations of their hearts with their intentions and surround themselves with people who do the same but miss the challenge of engaging with those that may see issues differently. Subconsciously many of those same people avoid situations and conversations that would challenge the way people think or see the world around them.

All Christians

As it pertains to the issue of racial superiority in the white community, white believers have assuaged their own consciences. They want to have a heartwarming moment of togetherness, but then go back to their white churches and let the other minority churches go on with their lives. White believers tend to say things to themselves like, “I never owned slaves” or “I haven’t benefitted from slavery” or “I’m not racist, I have black friends.” There must be a movement greater than just a heartwarming gesture. White and African American churches must be in the trenches of spiritual warfare together. They must fight for the souls of their community together. That starts with every Christian loving and being committed to each other.

The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 could be helpful in understanding how churches should respond to each other. When Zacchaeus was confronted by Jesus and

was the recipient of grace and mercy, his response was to actively seek to right the wrong to the best of his ability at his own personal cost to the glory of God. He did what was right because it delighted God and brought glory to Jesus. What if the church sought to right the wrongs of its past and fight for the needs of those in the present at their own personal cost, not solely for the benefit of those they fight for but because it would bring glory to Jesus and draw unbelievers to Him?

Further Reading

Much has been written on this subject and much is continuing to be written.

Below is a list of twelve books that I recommend for further reading on this topic.

Robin DiAngelo—*White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism*

Tony Evans—*Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, The Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together*

John Hope Franklin—*The Free Negro in North Carolina*

Vincent Harding—*There Is a River: The Struggle for Freedom in America*

Brian Loritts—*Right Color, Wrong Culture: The Type of Leader Your Organization Needs to Become Multiethnic*

Charles March—*God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights*

Eric Mason—*Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*

Russell Moore—*The Gospel and Racial Reconciliation* (The Gospel for Life Series)

John Perkins—*One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love*

John Piper—*Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian*

Jennifer Ritterhouse—*Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*

George Yancey—*Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility*

Personal Reflections

The conference as a whole went very well. The attendance could have been better, but the conference was still fairly well attended and the feedback and receptivity of those in attendance was positive.

The passages chosen for this project and explained in chapter 2 created a progression of thought that tied in well with the cultural and historical data outlined in chapter 3. This made the biblical implications more readily apparent to the participants as they processed the current day implications.

One of the best things to come out of the conference was not only the comments that people made to me privately about how their opinions had been changed or challenged, but also the interest shown in continuing to challenge these precepts in Bethesda Baptist Church and around Johnston County.

One particular response to the project that was significant was that one of the participants of the study was Gettys Cohen, Jr., president of the Johnston County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Cohen also extended an invitation for me to speak at their meeting in January 2020.

This opportunity will affect my personal leadership in that I will pursue opportunities to hear from, learn from, and partner with my African American brothers and sisters in Christ. I will seek them out as partners in coming up with real life solutions to real world problems. I have learned that there is a perception in the African American community that white people think they have all the answers to solve the problems in the African American community and others as well. I am not saying that I agree with this perception, but the perception is the reality from which many operate. Therefore, I must be sensitive to this perception. White leaders must not walk into conversations about racial reconciliation assuming they know how to heal these rifts. Leaders, all leaders, need to listen to other ideas and enlist their thoughts and help in forming solutions to these problems.

Conclusion

This project has shown me much about not only what it means to be united as a follower of Christ, but simply to be human. There is such an ease and natural instinct to how people seek to set themselves over others, even if it is only in their minds. The hubris that all people allow to malign their thoughts, feelings and actions is seen so clearly in how they treat those around them. Austin Channing Brown explains,

When you believe that niceness disproves racism, it's easy to start believing bigotry is rare, and that the label *racist* should be applied only to mean-spirited, intentional acts of discrimination. The problem with this framework—besides being a gross misunderstanding of how racism operates in systems and structures enabled by nice people—is that it obligates me to be nice in return, rather than truthful.³

It can be difficult to decipher thoughts and intentions of one's own heart and almost impossible to decipher others, but the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word of God can indeed change and shape the most grotesque malevolent attitudes into that of Christ if believers will submit themselves to Him. Believers must do more than simply acknowledge the faults of their past.

Christians must seek to live out the teachings of Scripture in regard to being the body of Christ, the church. Followers of Jesus cannot afford to simply refrain from doing wrong but must seek to bring justice to churches and communities to the glory of God. The church must be proactive in espousing justice for the oppressed, not only in their communities, but around the world. Let believers love each other as Christ loves them. Let believers pick up their crosses and follow Him together. Let them live out the gospel in unity.

³ Austin Channing Brown, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (New York: Convergent Books, 2018), 101.

APPENDIX 1

ASSOCIATIONAL RACIAL RECONCILIATION SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate in is designed to broadly evaluate the current understanding of Johnston County Baptist Churches initiative to positively impact racial reconciliation in Johnston County, North Carolina. This research is being conducted by William King for the purposes of collecting data for a ministry project to serve local churches. In this research, you will answer a few fill in the blank prompts as well as make selections in several multiple-choice responses. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this Church Racial Reconciliation Survey and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

- I agree to participate
- I do not agree to participate

1. What is your role at your church?
 - Pastor, Staff
 - Deacon
 - Member/attender but not elder, deacon, or staff
2. What is your ethnicity?
 - White
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - Black or African-American
 - Native American or American Indian
 - Asian / Pacific Islander
 - Indian
 - Other
3. How long have you lived in Johnston County or the surrounding area? _____ year/s.
4. Think of your ten closest friends excluding your family. How many of them are a different ethnicity than you? _____
5. Estimate: What percentage of your coworkers are white/non-Hispanic?
 - 0-20%
 - 20-40%
 - 40-60%
 - 60-80%
 - 80-100%

6. Estimate: What percentage of your neighbors are white/non-Hispanic?
- 0-20%
 - 20-40%
 - 40-60%
 - 60-80%
 - 80-100%
7. What factors contributed to you living where you do (check all that apply)
- Square footage
 - Safety
 - Cost/price
 - Schools
 - Extended family
 - Network of friends
 - Neighborhood quality
 - Missional opportunity
 - Existing relationships with others nearby
 - Proximity to work/recreation
 - Living near people I'm ethnically comfortable with
 - Other _____

Continue on next page

Using the following scale, circle your agreement with the statements below.

SD = Strongly Disagree AS = Agree Somewhat
 D = Disagree A = Agree
 DS = Disagree Somewhat SA = Strongly Agree

8. Our country has serious race issues.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. In Johnston County, being white is an advantage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. In Johnston County, racism is more of an individual issue than an institutional one.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. I have an intentional, growing relationship with someone who is significantly different from me for the sake of the gospel and racial reconciliation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. The history of race relations in the US has an impact on today's race relations.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. It would be best to move on from studying or exploring racial history since it is fraught with racial tensions.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. The staff and leadership of your church adequately reflect the ethnic diversity of Johnston County.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. The staff and leadership of your church adequately reflect the ethnic diversity of our county.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. Those who lead on the stage in your church do not represent adequate diversity.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. The way my church encourages its members to talk about sin and share their personal struggles makes me feel like I might not belong there.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. Your church cares about racial reconciliation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. Your church has a clear, well-known strategy for addressing racial reconciliation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. Your church's current work for racial reconciliation is making a big difference in Johnston County.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. Your church staff should speak more often about racial reconciliation from the stage.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. Following a sermon about racial reconciliation, your church does a good job of maximizing opportunities for follow through.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

23. Your church's strategy for starting campuses and planting churches displays an obvious commitment to racial reconciliation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. Your church is raising up ethnically diverse leaders to plant churches and lead campuses.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25. Your church should change their worship service "welcome" to incorporate inclusive language like "this is a place where it's ok to not blend in."	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26. Your church should tell more "stories" highlighting racial reconciliation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27. Minority voices are well represented at your church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28. I contribute to racial bias in Johnston County.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
29. I personally and actively work for racial reconciliation in Johnston County.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30. It is better for my church to compel members to form diverse relationships organically rather than to programmatically organize them.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31. It is better for my church to provide some organized methods for attendees to form diverse relationships rather than to compel them to happen organically.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32. My race is an important aspect of my identity.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
33. My parents were one of the most significant influences into how I view race.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
34. I believe most bias is learned in the home.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Survey from Adam Edward Griffin, "Designing an Effective Approach to Racial Reconciliation in the Communities of Dallas, Texas through The Village Church" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), appendix 2.

APPENDIX 2

RUBRIC TO ASSESS LESSONS AND ROUND TABLE
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS CURRICULUM

Lessons to increase empathy and unity interracially¹

1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The Title of the session clearly informs the participant that the topic.					
The content of the lessons are based upon a clear understanding of the biblical text being taught.					
The main points of the lessons can be clearly identified in the particular passage of scripture being examined.					
Methodology					
The stated goal for the lessons are clear and contribute to the objective of challenging men to unity and empathy.					
The lessons provide clarity as to the need for empathy and unity in the church.					
Applicability					
The lessons provide specific time for all the participants to ask questions.					
The lessons provide a specific time for all participants to give feedback.					

¹ Rubric adapted from Jonathan Goforth Winningham, “Developing and implementing a Training Curriculum for Perspective Deacons at First Baptist Church, Montverde, Florida” (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 95-96.

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ABSTRACT

HEALING THE RIFT OF RACE AND FAITH IN JOHNSTON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

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Chapter 1 grasps the overarching issues surrounding the goal of reconciling faith and race in Johnston County, North Carolina. This chapter lays out the goals and other vital aspects to the project itself, such as research methodology.

Chapter 2 lays the biblical foundations for the basic premise of racial reconciliation. The chapter supplies the biblical motivation and ethos behind why this project is necessary. It looks primarily at the words of Jesus in John 17, Peter in Acts 10, Paul in Colossians 3 and the saints around the throne of God in Revelation 7.

Chapter 3 covers the historical and social implications that surround the issue of race in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention, and ultimately in Johnston County, North Carolina. It paints a detailed picture of the struggle that has long existed between African Americans and White Americans.

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