

2 Biblical Principles for Dealing With Racism

I am a white woman, raised in South Carolina, talking about race. I face a number of easy pitfalls when writing on this subject. I am more aware than not of the pitfalls. For I have fallen in them many times while trying to better understand racial struggles, particularly while working with our PTA on the issue at my boys' school.

Even when trying to help, I have sometimes harmed. When trying to create access, I have at times put up unseen barriers. When trying to speak carefully to heal, I sometimes speak ignorantly in ways that harm. I have some gracious friends of color who have gently pointed such things out to me, and I am thankful for them. Pitfalls surround me as I talk about this, yet I feel burdened by two biblical principles that push me to speak, to act, to put off complacency and to get engaged in the struggle. To put off the fear of saying something wrong and just say something, rather than choosing the safety of quiet and its friend, complacency, that often follows in its wake.

There are many angles in our current news cycle from which we could approach a discussion of race. Issues around the Charleston massacre and the Confederate flag have eclipsed discussion of police brutality the last few weeks. I will eventually talk about the dear souls in the Charleston massacre whose grace makes me weep each time I think about it. But this post, around police brutality, has been percolating for a while, and I finally feel I can put some thoughts into words.

Bible principle No. 1 is that those in authority are always called in Scripture to restrain their authority for the good of those they serve and protect. Be it parents, elders,

husbands, police-authority was always given for the good of those under the authority, and authority was given to serve those under their authority. At some point in conservatism, we reacted against those we counted as rebellious against authority with a dogmatic glorification of authority. But Jesus says that leaders must serve. The hallmark of authority in the kingdom of God is self-sacrificing service. The hallmark of authority in the kingdom of God is *benefit* for those under them.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25).

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger ... " (Eph. 6:4).

"Likewise, you husbands, live considerately with your wives, giving honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they too are also heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7).

"I exhort the elders who are among you, as one who is also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, take care of them, not by constraint, but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly. Do not lord over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

"But Jesus called them to Him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. Whoever would be great among you, let him serve you, and whoever would be first among you, let him be your slave, even as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many'" (Matt. 20:25-28).

Consider also Bible principle No. 2—to whom much is given, much more is required. With privilege comes responsibility. With greater privilege comes greater responsibility.

“For to whom much is given, of him much shall be required. And from him to whom much was entrusted, much will be asked” (Luke 12:48).

At this point I must, as a white woman, consider what benefits being white has afforded me. By the mere fact that I was born white in the United States, evidence shows I received an advantage over my peers of color born in the same circumstances, the same city of the same family income level. I actually know without a doubt that I was privileged to be born white in my circumstances in my particular home town.

My circumstances are so crystal clear, particularly around the access to education I had in my home town that my black peers did not, no one had to work to convince me of my own white privilege. I don't care to deal in depth publicly with those circumstances, but I think about them privately a good bit.

Couple principle No. 2, to whom much is given, much more is required, with principle No. 1, that authorities given by God need to restrain their authority to serve those under their protection, and you start to see a biblical philosophy form, particularly around the issue of police brutality. First, no one can brush such brutality aside by saying that the person under authority shouldn't have been doing whatever they were doing in the first place. Again and again, this view results in sifting through the background of victims of police brutality to expose whatever character flaws and moral issues one can find. When I see memes of this nature (“Just don't break the law”), I want to spit. Of course, we should all be obeying the law! But disobedience by one under authority never justifies disobedience by the one in authority over them. Never, ever, ever. It isn't just the restraints in our

Constitution that should keep us from such reasoning, for God Himself calls the one with greater authority to greater restraint.

We understand such restraints in some relationships. When my child hits me in a tantrum, I am not justified in responding in kind. I am called to be measured in my response every last time, and if I feel that I am losing control, I need to step back until I regain self-control and can re-engage in the conflict as the mature one of authority called to de-escalate the conflict and discipline the child.

The entire point of authority is to restrain sin and evil, not heap new sin and new evil on top of a conflict. And if you can't navigate that difference, you do not have the maturity needed to be in authority. With authority comes responsibility.

I worked with our neighborhood crime council briefly a few years ago. I met several kind, thoughtful police officers that were very helpful in our community. I also met a very rude, unhelpful officer that seemed primed to escalate, not de-escalate, a conflict.

As each of us, black or white, engage our voices for the good of our communities, the second type of officer will be exposed and disciplined so that the first type of officer becomes the norm in our precincts. But as God's kingdom comes and His will is done, this type of restraint of authority should characterize each of us more and more in whatever roles we play in leading/serving/protecting another in an authority relationship. We all have a responsibility to use the gifts and access we've been given for the good of all in our communities.

"Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public." Cornel West (HT:)

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books, including The Gospel-Centered Woman. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*