

# 3 Suggestions for Solving Some of America's Social Ills

This Fourth of July marks the 244th anniversary of the signing of our nation's Declaration of Independence.

With all the social unrest we are facing right now, it is good to note that our nation's beginning was not like other nations'. It did not originate from a colonial settlement, political treaty or military victory. It came about when men peacefully articulated their grievances with an insensitive, foreign government around the premises that "all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

Current social justice activists insist that their public protests are all about getting justice for George Floyd, a black man murdered in Minneapolis at the hands of a white policeman. This was captured on video and stimulated protests and metropolitan mayhem across America.

Early, peaceful protests were used by some as a cover for riotous mobs, looters and arsonists in many major cities. Recently, mobs have taken to toppling historic statues and memorials on public properties across our country. Vandals started a fire in and sprayed graffiti on St. Paul Episcopal Church, across the street from the White House. This is not the only house of worship to be attacked. How is any of this violence getting justice for George Floyd? Lawless anarchy demeans our history and may destroy our future.

Now, after nearly two and one-half centuries of this grand experiment of a democratic republic, one must ask, "Where have we gone wrong?" Do we still believe that all men are created equal and have God-given rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Do our laborious legislation and

bureaucratic regulations provide a level playing field to assist in *equal opportunity* for all? Or, do we believe in the socialistic demands for *equal results* for everyone? These are a few of the questions and thoughts I've been thinking in this season.

As we approach this Fourth of July, please allow me to make three suggestions toward solving some of our social ills at this critical American juncture.

1. **Take a deep breath.** In the nine-minute video of George Floyd's terrible murder, face down on the street in Minneapolis with two officers on top of him and one with his knee pressed against the critical artery in his neck, he cried out several times "I can't breathe!" That statement subsequently became an identity slogan and is featured on T-shirts and memes everywhere today.

*But we can breathe.* We can choose to take a collective deep breath and mentally sit down at the table of human brotherhood.

Take a deep breath before you react. Don't take the law into your own hands. Study Paul's wise instructions in Romans 12:17-21. A year from now, would your grandmother—or God—say your action was "a fine, good thing you did. I'm proud of you!"?

2. **Fight racial injustice from a biblical perspective.** The Bible teaches the values of human love, respect and justice. Happiness in this life comes from having peace with God and man as we learn to live justly and work honestly for our daily bread. It all sounds great, objectively. It is sometimes challenging to live it out, subjectively.

In the short letter written to Philemon, a believing Gentile who was a slave owner, the apostle Paul complimented him for his "love for all of God's people" (Philem. 1:5, NLT), before

appealing to him to receive back a runaway slave named Onesimus (Philem. 1:9), whose name meant “useful” or “valuable.” Onesimus apparently had *repented* and become *obedient to Christ* and *useful to God’s people*. He was now one of the saints, God’s consecrated people.

Paul played with the meaning of Onesimus’ name when he mentioned that “formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me” (Philem. 1:11, NIV). The appeal was twofold: receive him back: “both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord” (Philem. 1:16b).

Paul gracefully guilt-shamed Philemon when he said, “I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel” (Philem. 1:13). And, again, when he presented this proposition: “If you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me” (Philem. 1:17). Finally, Paul used this bit of psychology, “I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask” (Philem. 1:21b).

Circumstances and actions of our past cannot always be changed, but they can be reviewed from a biblical perspective and transformed for good and for God, going forward (see Philem. 1:16). We may not be able to do all that is needed for racial equality and social justice for all but what we can do, we must do—especially for brothers and sisters in Christ.

**3. In an atmosphere of Christian brotherhood and mutual love, let us be slow to take offense at words and actions of others.** In this racially and politically charged period in our country, it seems anything and everything can become a trigger for hostile reactions and accusations.

In 1 Corinthians 13:5b (TLB), the great love chapter, Paul writes that “Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly

even notice when others do it wrong.”

Let’s be determined to show love by being slow to take offense at microaggressions and hardly even notice if/when others actually do us wrong (see Rom. 12:17-18). Just as others may not know what you have experienced or the memories and emotions of your past, you do not know their life histories or hurts. Let’s remember Christ’s words from the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34a, NIV).

Don’t take offense. Leave any perceived offense for God to vindicate, in His time and way (see Rom. 12:19-21). Instead, Paul taught “let love be your greatest aim” (1 Cor. 14:1a, TLB).

May this be our prayer:

“O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far and to those who are near; Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh... through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 2019)

Happy Fourth of July, and may our God continue to protect and bless these United States of America! {eoa}

**Gary Curtis** served in full-time ministry for 50 years, the last 27 years of which he was part of the pastoral staff of *The Church on The Way*, the Van Nuys, California Foursquare Church. Now retired, Gary continues to write a weekly blog at and frequent articles for digital and print platforms. Gary and his wife live in Southern California and have two married daughters and five grandchildren.