

Shane Idleman: What Can Happen When We Focus Solely on the Cross

Martin Luther King Jr., in the “Letter from Birmingham Jail” on April 16, 1963, wrote, “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”

I hold the same opinion today.

We are all Americans; more importantly, we are Christians. We are in this together. Our future and our children’s futures are at stake.

Evil forces are seeking to dismantle us by destroying our unity. (Sermons on this can be found [here](#).) Christians need to speak up against all forms of racism and injustice when they see or experience them. “Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented” (Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor).

As I continue to read the news feeds, my heart immediately goes out to the children being raised in today’s environment (many with no fathers to guide them) viewing this world through the dark lens of hopelessness and fear presented in every form of communication around them. But what if we looked through a different lens—a biblical lens?

—Yes, some people used the Bible to support slavery. That was wrong. But evil people have always tried to pervert the Word of God to support their godless agendas. It is happening in our own day with so-called Christians twisting Scripture to support gay marriage and abortion. For example, watch this Fox News clip of me debating a “Christian” professor about the topic of Jesus being OK with abortion. My hands tremble even

writing this.

–Instead of taking down every statue, why don't we teach history again? Auschwitz stands in Poland for a reason—so people will not forget.

–What if more people knew that many of America's founders were responsible for planting the first seeds of equality and for the eventual end of slavery in America? People who want to incite anger and hatred reject this truth because it doesn't fit their narrative or their agenda that America is evil.

–What if we remember all the parents who lost sons (more than 300,000 from the Union side alone) fighting for freedom during the Civil War?

–What if we truly comprehended that we are all made in the image of God without a racial hierarchy?

–What if we stopped allowing the secular media to shape our thinking and instead got back to the Bible? Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report . . . think on these things." How are you doing in this area?

–What if we understood that what some define as racism in the church is not racism at all but preference? We all "prefer" certain settings and styles of worship. Ethnic groups as well as age groups generally have preferences that are based on experience and upbringing—on what is familiar and comfortable.

–What if we erred on the side of grace and didn't always assume that a person—white or black—was a racist?

–What if parents fostered unity instead of promoted division? Racism and division are not inherited; these sinful patterns are taught, and children are influenced heavily by the ideals

of their parents.

—What if we acknowledge that the true source of this conflict is spiritual and that we are in a battle against a common enemy (see Eph. 6:12)?

We Need Spiritual Reform Over Social Reform

Sadly, those who do not forgive or release bitterness, anger and hurt never experience freedom, happiness or *true* restoration. Ephesians 4:31–32 encourages us to “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, outbursts, and blasphemies, with all malice, be taken away from you. And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.” Without this change of heart, hope is elusive.

Advocates of the lie of “separation of church and state” have held Americans in bondage for far too long. How much longer will we allow their godless agenda to remove God from America? God’s Word must be allowed in all areas, from police precincts to government offices and from schools to inner cities and state prisons. We need spiritual reform more than social reform. In fact, social reform cannot really happen unless the hearts of individuals who make up that society are changed. Only God can change a cold, unforgiving, bitter heart of stone into a warm, hope-filled heart.

We must stop walking on the eggshells of political correctness and stop seeking collective redemption from the world. *God is our only hope!* We must repent of personal sin and seek Jesus for personal redemption. He changes us from the inside out, and in turn we change the world around us, sharing with others what God has given us—the peace that surpasses all understanding (see Phil. 4:7).

A Sin Issue, Not a Skin Issue

Sadly, we are now at the point where if you don’t agree with

someone you are called a racist, and many pastors and leaders have fallen for the deception, some even almost apologizing for being white. Yes, you heard me correctly. I'm alarmed at the silent shepherds and those pastors fueled by anger. It appears that most are putting *culture* before *Christ*. The social gospel (which is no gospel at all—Paul was clear in his warning in Galatians 1:9) brings rage, division and self-loathing. The true gospel brings peace and unity. Read the article on the sin of silent pastors [here](#).

There is a huge divide in the Christian community over the *Black Lives Matter* movement. No matter what black leaders such as Ben Carson, Voddie Baucham, Larry Elder, Bishop Harry Jackson, Candace Owens and Marcus Rodgers say about the negative effects of BLM, it doesn't seem to matter. The Holy Spirit is not divided, so where is the division coming from?

We honor the phrase "black lives matter" because they do matter. We actually want to take it a step further, though, and say #AllBlackLivesMatter and should be honored, from the prevention of innocent children being killed in the womb to the protection of innocent black people and police officers. We want to calm the flames of racism rather than add to them. But we must look at the foundation of what we are promoting since the ends do not always justify the means. Ryan Scott Bomberger, a black community activist, wrote a powerful article [here](#) regarding the foundation of Black Lives Matter.

All of this begs the question: Can't we care deeply for innocent black lives without agreeing with the BLM's agenda? Yes, of course we can, but that doesn't fit the agenda of those funding and pushing the movement. Their goal is not reconciliation but retaliation. Why not start a movement that focuses on all black lives and centers around reconciliation, restoration and forgiveness versus Marxism, retaliation and rage? We are commanded to love one another and to remember that vengeance belongs to the Lord alone (Lev. 19:18, Rom. 12:19).

The plea of many of us caught in the middle—black and white—is that we should not promote an organization that seems to be promoting a new civil war. These are not my words but those of many of my black friends. One BLM leader has even said, “If this country doesn’t give us what we want, then we will burn down the system,” and another co-founder tweeted about killing “men and white folks.” Racism is on both sides. How can any Christian support that, and how can any pastor endorse it?

At the core, this problem is not a skin issue but a sin issue. Hatred is colorblind—it infects people of every tribe and tongue and nation. The only solution is redemption and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Many law enforcement officers are being radically changed by the gospel, as are those who had participated in sparking civil unrest. This is where our focus must be. America, overall, is being humbled by God. I’m optimistic because these are often the seeds of revival and renewal on a massive scale.

Responding to the Media Circus

As Christians, we are truly caught in the middle. We are not identified by our skin color but by our identity in Christ. My heart breaks for the atrocities that have happened in humanity’s past, but in each of these seasons, good men and women, many of them Christians, rose up to make a difference. *We must focus on the cross, not on cultural identity.*

The media circus will only get worse. In a land of approximately 330 million people, many of them lost, without God and without hope (Eph. 2:12), we will continue to see unspeakable acts of violence as video footage is released on a constant basis. We will see hoaxes portrayed as hate crimes, legitimate hate crimes portrayed as “justified” and right will be called wrong and wrong will be called right, all in an attempt to fuel division and fear. But we cannot allow this to cause a knee-jerk response and act in ways that would cause

the name of Christ to be blasphemed. Nor can we retreat from the battle and walk on eggshells in fear. We need real Christ-centered and Spirit-filled unity.

We must not allow the forces of hell to shake us. We must be different, think differently and walk differently than the rest of the world. We must show the beauty, compassion, grace, justice and love of Christ to those around us—to our neighbors, our friends, our co-workers and the stranger in the grocery line—without regard to the color of their skin.

In short, brothers and sisters, we must be the *true* church.
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Author's Note: The thumbnail picture for this article is our associate pastor, Abram Thomas, and me building a shade area for the children's ministry. This is what unity in Christ looks like: working side by side for a greater cause while putting personal agendas, upbringing and culture aside.