

The Zimmerman Verdict: A Godly Response

The verdict in the Zimmerman trial has come down, and the fallout has begun. Where we go from here will have long-term implications for race relations and the unity of the nation.

In that light, I must caution non-African-Americans. Try to understand the lens through which many African-American people see the Zimmerman verdict. Their feelings about the verdict will be filtered through a long history of injustice. For you to rejoice openly in the verdict will only sound racist and will serve to inflame passions by causing irritation to old wounds. The history is real. The wounds are real.

Don't argue the case. Instead, listen compassionately to the hurt delivered by the lingering taint of racism with which our nation still struggles. Nothing can be done now about the verdict, but we can certainly work to bring reconciliation in the wake of it. In fact, this is our commission from Jesus who is Lord of all—Jew, Greek, white, black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American. We must be ministers of reconciliation together, especially now.

White Americans may find themselves wanting to tell their brothers and sisters of color to simply forgive and move on. This too will be perceived as racist. No one who is not black can understand what this people group has been forced to endure for what is now hundreds of years and how much yet lingers in our own time. You cannot begin to understand until you have taken the time to listen deeply, compassionately and non-defensively to their stories. The black experience in this nation is not the white experience, and it is wrong and even cruel to try to impose a white perspective on a people who have lived in a very different America than do those in the white majority.

If someone is to tell African-American brothers and sisters to forgive and move on, it will have to be another African-American. For the rest of us, the first act of love and the first move toward real reconciliation is the act of listening compassionately. This is the gift of respect and honor without which there can be no reconciliation.

I have prophesied a resurgence of racial and ethnic conflict in the United States in the coming years. Events like the shooting of Trayvon Martin and the trial of George Zimmerman serve to draw out the underlying tensions that come from centuries of injustice and pain that continue into our own time. These things have the potential to catalyze a release of pent-up anger and even violence that can only harm all of us, no matter our racial or ethnic heritage. No matter what the color of our skin, how we choose to respond to these events and to the emotions they draw out will reveal very quickly what kind of Christians we really are.

I choose to understand. I choose to listen. I choose to hear and validate the pain of my brothers and sisters. I choose not to attempt to impose my own view of this trial upon a wounded people, whatever that view might be. The trial is over. Let the healing begin, and let it begin with those who truly understand the Father's heart.

R. Loren Sandford *is the founder and senior pastor of New Song Church and Ministries in Denver, Colo. He is a songwriter, recording artist and worship leader, as well as the author of several books, including Understanding Prophetic People, The Prophetic Church and his latest, Visions of the Coming Days: What to Look for and How to Prepare, which are available with other resources at the church's website.*