

103 One Family Tree

In recent months in the United States, two unarmed black men and one unarmed black teenager (holding what turned out to be a replica firearm) have been killed by white police officers. The circumstances vary in each case, as well as the stories told by the victims' families on the one hand and by the police on the other, but the fact remains that none of the police officers has been charged with any offence. Not surprisingly these verdicts have led to deep anger within black communities in different parts of America, leading in turn to protests, riots and looting.

These events have brought to the surface once more the deep racial divisions that still exist within the United States, divisions which are the legacy of the iniquitous Slave Trade of previous centuries, in which European countries were also heavily involved.

Today we find the practice of those white slave traders rounding up thousands of black people from West Africa (who in some cases were handed over by their own tribal leaders), marching them in chains down to the ports, shipping them across the Atlantic in appalling conditions, and selling them into a life of slavery, utterly abhorrent. Not only that, as we look back on those horrific deeds, do we not find it incomprehensible that grown men from the so-called "Christian West" could get involved in such wickedness with no qualms over what they were doing? Fortunes were made, and great cities were built, on the proceeds, so their consciences seemed not to trouble them.

Mercifully of course some Christian men did cry NO!, and fought for decades to get these horrors stopped, and finally they succeeded. But by then deep, lasting damage had been done, the consequences of which were never going simply to fade away with the passing of the years.

Thankfully great progress has been made in the United States in the whole realm of "civil rights" for all American citizens, whatever their racial background. But the fractures are still there, and need very, very careful handling by those in power on both sides of the divide: wisdom, patience, humility, repentance, restraint, honesty, courage, trust - precious and vital qualities, which can be hard to uphold in today's era of instant news and reaction.

But slavery itself grew out of a centuries-old assumption that the "black man" was somehow inferior to the "white man". Such views were then given impetus by the

exploration of Africa by Europeans, and by the widespread acceptance of Darwin's Theory of Evolution. This theory - and we must never forget that that is all that it is and ever will be - gives an excuse for the belief that some human beings are rather less human than other human beings. What arrogance! - and what defiance of the living God and His holy Word for such a belief ever to arise!

Such assumptions and beliefs have absolutely nothing to do with God's Word. The Lord has told us with great clarity that we are all one race, one family, the creation of the one great and gracious Creator. We are all descended from Adam and Eve, and since the Flood, from either Shem, Ham or Japheth, the sons of Noah. We really are all brothers and sisters!

In the years since the Flood and the Tower of Babel, the earth has been repopulated in accordance with God's command (Genesis 9.1). Not surprisingly particular racial characteristics have developed, through physical separation from other peoples and inter-marriage within the groups, but these are merely branches of the one Family Tree of which we are all still members.

So may we as Christian people, in a violent, hurting world, uphold in thought, word and deed, two basic truths in all issues affecting "race relations": first, that every single human being there has ever been, since Adam himself, has been made in "the image of God"; and second, so precious to God are all those human beings, that His gift of His only Son Jesus Christ has opened the way of redemption - for every single one of us.

As we apply those two God-given truths at the heart of the matter, the deep wounds of slavery and racial discrimination, please God, can be steadily healed.

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