

Racial Reconciliation

Dr. Paul Kim, Pastor Emeritus

National Chaplain, KWVA

The Marsh Post 442 Chaplain, Cambridge, MA

History began with one family. There was only one human race. How then, did racial issues develop? What is the root cause of it and why is it so prevalent in our nation, and even in the church? A TIME magazine article from 2021 reported that although America is more diverse than ever, metropolitan cities continue to be segregated. Detroit, with a Black population of 80%, is the most segregated city in the U.S. The researchers were not optimistic about solutions to racial integration.

What about in the church? Martin Luther King Jr. once noted with penetrating rebuke that 11:00 am on Sunday mornings is one of the most segregated hours in Christian America. My African American pastor friend told me that beyond the issue of skin color, racism is ultimately a sin problem. In Oswald Chambers's *My Utmost for His Highest*, we read: "Sin is a fundamental relationship—it is not wrongdoing, but wrong being—it is deliberate and determined independence from God." Most religions are concerned with morality and doing good but only the Christian faith contends with the fundamental, hereditary nature of sin.

Until I came to America from Korea in 1967, I never had to think much about race. Back then, Korea was a highly homogenized nation, so racial issues were not part of the social agenda. When I enlisted in the U.S. army, during Basic Combat Training, I encountered people from all kinds of backgrounds and so I thought this was how it was in the broader culture. But more and more, I was exposed to America's history of racial struggles, largely stemming from the effects of its racist past, exemplified by the practice of slavery. In the past decade I have visited three African American museums in Cincinnati, Memphis, and Birmingham to learn more about this cruel chapter in American history. It is a painful reality that racial injustice has severely impacted American culture. We know that many families, schools, and communities still suffer from racial inequality.



Basic Combat Training Graduation at Fort Ord, 1967

When I was a trustee of the International Mission Board of the SBC, I visited the Island of Goree, which is off the coast of Dakar in the west African nation of Senegal. It is known for its role in the Atlantic slave trade. There is a place called the House of Slaves, now a museum, that once served as a holding center for slaves. It was heartbreaking to be inside where such horrible human sin occurred. It was just unthinkable how slaves were treated, but it is history that should not be forgotten.

We, as a nation, have a long way to go in terms of genuine racial reconciliation. But we can take heart knowing that God can bring about amazing cultural transformation. Even one person's change of heart can make a great difference. In July 2001, I had the privilege of go summer study tour with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to England. There I visited the church of the Anglican cleric, John Newton (1725-1807). We can be encouraged by his well-known story—of how a former captain of slave ships became a priest, abolitionist, and renowned hymn writer. Using his experiences in the slave trade, he wrote what is widely considered the most popular hymn of all time: Amazing Grace. It was his testimony of how after meeting the Lord, he changed from a slave trader to becoming a slave of Christ.

And the hymn has touched millions of lives and reminds us that there is power in God's amazing grace to change sinners.

We know that racial reconciliation cannot come through governments and worldly institutions. The only hope is through the power and love that comes from our reconciliation with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. May God help us to have the hope and courage to go forward in racial reconciliation, starting with His church! And while there will always be racial issues as long as sinners are here on earth, we continue to pray and work toward that heavenly goal, where there will be no more need of racial reconciliation since there will be no more sin in the kingdom of God. Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus!