

June 2020 Pastoral Letter
Racism, Riots, and Reform
By Rich Lusk

With all the cultural chaos swirling around us, several of you have asked how to best pray for our city and nation. There is neither time nor space to give a full overview of how I believe we should look at our current situation, but here are a few thoughts in the aftermath of George Floyd's tragic death and the protests and riots that have erupted in response:

- There is no question black Americans are hurting. We should hurt with them. We must also ask: Why is the black community in such a difficult place? As with every other people group, it is a complicated mix of [sins that have been committed against them](#) as well as [sins they have committed themselves](#). There is no question our nation has a sad history of racial bigotry, and some effects of that remain down to the present day. [And there is no question that racism still exists today, even though great progress has been made](#). However, even if present day racism were completely eliminated, it is not clear that would solve the biggest problems blacks face. Ending racism would not automatically restore fatherhood and family. Ending racism would not end the tragedy of black on black violence (which kills far more black men than police by several orders of magnitude each year). Ending racism would not automatically bring investment and job growth to predominantly black urban areas. Ending unjustified police brutality against blacks ([which statistics indicate is quite rare](#)) would not bring peace to black America. The fact is, blacks are heavily represented in the government of many major American cities (not to mention that we have had a black President), and still there has been very little improvement in the condition of black people, especially in urban areas. While racism is one factor in the plight of blacks, it is far from the only one. But racism hogs all the attention. If we are going to pray intelligently for race relations, we must certainly ask God to grant repentance from all forms of racism, but we must also pray for the restoration of the black family – and that includes praying for public policies and Christian ministries that can promote, rather than erode, marital and family life. It also means praying that the churches of our nation will be faithful in teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God, the gospel and all its implications. The answer to what ails blacks is the same as the answer to what ails whites, namely, trust in the Lord Jesus, who has the power to forgive us and transform us. No political program or social agenda can do that. Only Jesus.
- Racism is a great sin because it is a failure to love one's neighbor as oneself. Every person is made in the image of God and is therefore worthy of love and respect, and possesses intrinsic dignity and rights. It must be said: "black lives matter." Indeed, all human lives matter. [But the movement Black Lives Matter actually represents an agenda that will further the destruction of the black community. BLM is not the answer and Christians should decisively reject it.](#) BLM promotes the destruction of the nuclear family – [but the breakdown of the family is perhaps the single practical biggest problem facing black Americans right now](#). BLM promotes socialist economic policy – but these are just the kinds of policies that have been hollowing out and impoverishing our cities

for over a generation, hurting blacks as well as whites. BLM is completely onboard with the sexual revolution including the whole LGBTQ+ agenda – but this kind of sexual immorality and confusion is right at the heart of our culture’s dehumanization and self-destruction. BLM was certainly not the only group involved in the riots that desecrated many cities over the last couple weeks – but any group that does not outright condemn the wanton destruction of property and lives is morally bankrupt – and this certainly describes BLM ([not to mention that the looting and rioting has disproportionately hurt blacks](#)). BLM is hypocritical – it focuses on the lives of a tiny handful of black people who are unjustly killed by police, to the exclusion of much bigger tragedies, such as the huge number of black babies who are murdered in their mothers’ wombs. Of course, over the last couple weeks, BLM has come to be associated with defunding police departments. Whatever the exact nature of this proposal is (and no one really seems to know, outside of Minneapolis, where the city council has taken steps to abolish the police force), does anyone really think that doing away with police will actually makes cities safer, more livable, or more just? The fact is that the police are serving as an all too convenient scapegoat; while there are some corrupt police officers (just as there are corrupt pastors, politicians, bankers, salesmen, etc.), the vast majority of America’s 700,000 policemen are decent people who do far more to help than hurt. Yes, there are some reforms to the way law enforcement works that could be helpful but that does not justify the all out war on police that we have seen unfolding. God commands us to honor the civil authorities he places over us, and this includes police. If we are going to pray wisely, we need to ask that God would remove the blindness that leads people to think BLM (and similar movements/agendas) can actually bring justice and healing; instead we need to pray for a restoration of law and order, along with respect for the civil powers God has put over us.

- In my exhortation before last Sunday’s worship service, I sought to make the point that the protests and riots indicate the presence of a rival secular religion. These protests and riots have all the trappings of a liturgy: There is kneeling to confess sin and hands raised as a symbolic gesture; there is a form of secular preaching; there are chants and songs; there are processions and banners; and so forth. [Peter Leithart has furthered this point](#), showing that this rival religion has its own doctrine of original sin; its own eschatology; its own definitions of justice and peace; and so on. But there is something missing from this alternative religion. While we hear a great deal about white guilt (some of it justified, some of it not), we hear nothing about black forgiveness. While this new religion requires confession of sin, it does not pronounce absolution. All of this has at least two effects, neither of them healthy: whites all too easily fall into self-flagellation, thinking if they punish themselves enough, perhaps their sin (or the sins of others who share their skin color) can be covered. And many blacks find themselves unsatisfied with the white man’s confession, and so they go looking for more grievances so they can make yet another round of accusations. It never ends. [Indeed, this new religion, like all religions, is seeking blood atonement – and there was blood was running in many American streets the last couple weeks, as the looters and rioters grew violent.](#) But this is not blood that could ever wash away the stain of sin. The only kind of blood that cleanses us all, white and black, is the blood of Christ. There is no other gospel.

There is no other name under heaven by which men may be saved. As we pray for this cultural crisis, we must pray that the gospel of free and full forgiveness in Christ is proclaimed far and wide, that this gospel will drown out the voices of competing “gospels.” Reconciliation between God and man, between black people and white people, can only be found in the cross of Christ. God’s promise to Abraham to join all the families of the earth together in one family of faith is going to come to pass, and that must be our ultimate hope (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:8). Anything else is a counterfeit. We should pray that God’s grand promises for the salvation of world come to fruition through the ministry of faithful churches.

[My guess is that America in this moment feels something like France did in 1789, or Russia in 1917. It feels like we are on the brink of revolution.](#) That’s not to say the revolution cannot be stopped, or at least greatly slowed. And of course the revolutionaries will never win in the long run. But recent events certainly show us just how much work the church has to do to disciple our nation. We do not simply want black lives to matter – we want black lives to thrive. Indeed, we want all people to thrive. But that can only happen in Christ. We want justice and peace to prevail – but the only justice and peace worth having are justice and peace defined and shaped by God’s Word. We want truth – but truth is found in knowing our Creator and living in accord with his design for human life. We should fervently pray – and diligently work – for these goals. If we care about black lives, we will do the same thing for black people that we do for all people -- point them to Christ. And that's because all of us have the same problem, namely our sin, and that problem can only be solved through Christ's death and resurrection.

Obviously, if you want more information, I'd suggest you follow the links above. I am certainly willing to talk with any of you further about these things. In sum, this is how I believe we should pray:

- Pray the gospel goes forward boldly and unapologetically because Jesus is our only hope.
- Pray people of all skin colors repent of racist thoughts, words, and actions.
- Pray the church is faithful in teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God, including how it comes to bear upon the social issues of our day; pray that shallow and erroneous interpretations of God's Word would be silenced and corrected.
- Pray for civil leaders at every level of government -- that they would honor God and would be honored by citizens; that they would have wisdom; that they would pursue true justice, without partiality, as defined by God's Word.
- Pray for the restoration of marriage and family life in our culture, since we can only flourish if we live according to our creational design, as men and women, reserving sex for the covenant of marriage, and making our homes places where children can be nurtured by both mothers and fathers.
- Pray for protection over the most vulnerable, including the elderly, the poor, and the unborn.
- Pray God grants reformation and renewal to our nation through his church, that civil liberties and economic prosperity for all might be realized.