

NOTES

Conversations on Race – 3

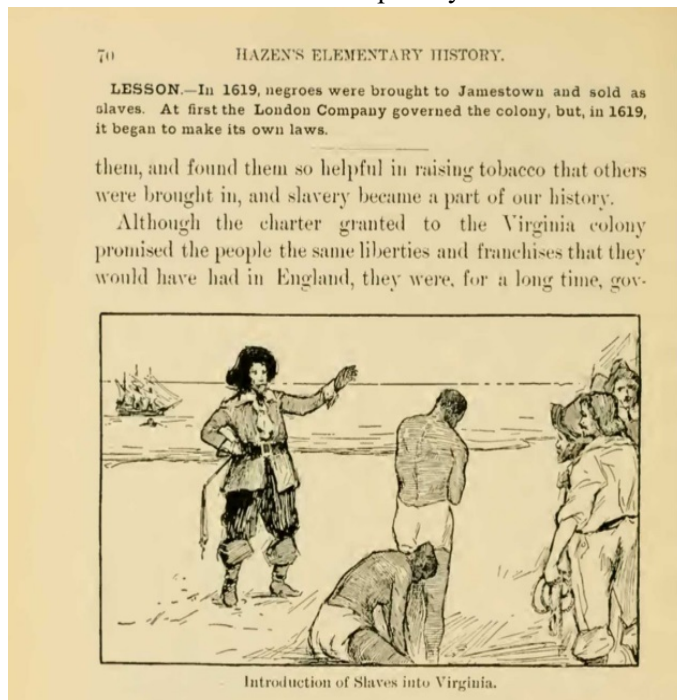
God So Loved the World

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So Far

1. Why now?
2. Race as part of broader issues that can divide societies
3. Race as a unique problem in U.S.
4. (Last Week) “The Biblical Activity of Dragging up History”
 - a. Sharing a Common History unites-- am I in it? Left out? How am I portrayed?



- b. Knowing one's own history may promote resentment, anger
- c. Knowing the History of the “other” more often unites

Tonight – The interpretation of the Bible

. . With regard, in particular, to

- slavery
- structural sin
- justice

Q: How is it . . . that slavery, segregation and racism flourished

- in the very places where Christian faith flourished
- and the Bible was revered ???

The Use & Abuse of the Bible

1. **No Escaping the need to “Interpret”** the Bible – always need to “handle with care”

(2 Timothy 2:15)

2. Remember: **the Bible was used simultaneously** . .

- a. to Defend Slavery
- b. to Defend Abolition
- c. by Slaves to provide strength

3. **Find the Filter/Bigger Picture**

through which to see the rest

e.g.,

- Centrality of Creation = *ALL made in the Image of God (Gen. 1:26)*
- Centrality of Redemption = *ALL loved by and “died for” by Jesus*
 - No room here for white (or any other) supremacy, OR superiority!!

1. **In the face of “Old Testament brutality”** *care for orphans, strangers, widows, poor*

2. **In the face of Israel’s “Ethno-centricity”** *Jesus “cleanses the Temple.”*
Mark 11:17

3. **In the face of Ongoing Slavery** *the early church spoke as equals to and embraced slaves and masters in the one house, at the one table* (see Larry Hurtado). Ephesians 6:5-9

Example: Belhar Confession . . .

. . . South Africa (1980’s)

BELHAR CONFSSION

WE REJECT ANY DOCTRINE

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people
... in such a way that this absolutization *hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church*, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- **We reject** any doctrine which explicitly or implicitly maintains that *descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church*.

3. WE BELIEVE

- that **God has entrusted the church** with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be *the salt of the earth and the light of the world*, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells
(2 Cor. 5:17-21; Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22).

WE BELIEVE that **God's life giving Word and Spirit** has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's life giving Word and Spirit will *enable the church to live in a new obedience* which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world

- **WE BELIEVE** that the **credibility of this message** is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- **WE BELIEVE** that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, **denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine**

So . . How did the church Get it wrong with slavery?

→ Wrong Filter/Center/Big Picture

= Affects

1. Not only view of slavery, treatment of people, etc. . .

BUT ALSO Affects

2. **Ability to allow the Bible to impact their Public Life, Structures of Society as a whole**

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

→ focus on the “spirituality of the church” (*evangelism: getting to heaven*)

→ to the exclusion of the church being “*salt and light*” in the world.

Not so our theological father, John Calvin . . . 1500s in Geneva

changed the systems and structures

Calvin was not interested in abstract theology that was distant from real life, or even confined within the church. He was convinced that Christian faith requires social responsibility and action.

Thus, as a natural outgrowth of his preaching, teaching, and writing, Calvin **labored tirelessly for a just society.**

Under Calvin's leadership, the church in Geneva provided

- refugee relief and re-settlement,
- sought jobs for the unemployed,
- encouraged public education,
- and worked to provide health care for all.

As the leader of the Genevan church, Calvin spoke out vigorously

- against unfair business practices
- and public policies that ignored the needs of the poor.

Nothing that contributed to the welfare of the city and its residents seemed insignificant:

Calvin even called for

- a more economical *cooking system for the poor*

and prodded municipal council to construct a *sanitary sewer system* throughout Geneva

Dr. Joe Small, Great Ends of the Church 1998

So where's the **Social Engagement** or **Social Justice** message in the Bible?

1. **New Testament** – absent or subtle!

-- *Can we find a reason why? Maybe in our . .*

2. Old Testament

-- *Three different Political Scenarios*

Three Biblical Political Scenarios

... We see God's People

1. In transition – as Revolutionary (*escape from Egypt*)
2. Powerless (*in slavery or exile, the early church in the Roman Empire*)
3. In Power (*in the promised land: laws, structures built, prophets called for justice, and called out abuses*)

THE BIBLICAL CALL FOR JUSTICE IN THE PROPHETS

Micah 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Hosea 12:6: But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice

Amos 5:15, 24: Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate . . . let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Isaiah 1:17 Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause

Q: WHY? A: BECAUSE THIS IS WHO GOD IS . .

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Thus says the Lord: let the one who boasts boast in this, that he/she understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.

Isaiah 42:1-4 (about the Messiah x3)

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him;

He will bring forth justice to the nations.

He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law

TODAY . . HOW DO WE

- Pursue Justice?
- Seek Racial Reconciliation?
 - as individual Christians?
 - as the Church?

Some negatives (cautions)

1. Not in a way that negates

our broad calling

-- Balance the

“Six Great Ends of the Church”

1. The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind
2. The shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
3. The maintenance of divine worship
4. The preservation of the truth
5. The promotion of social righteousness
6. The exhibition of the kingdom of heaven to the world

2. Not in a way that negates

- Balancing personal responsibility w/
- God's prior providence and grace

3. Not in a Way

that is partisan politically

Some Positive Actions

1. In Church

- a. Pulpit – Proclaim Principles
- b. Classroom –Explore Principles & multiple “Christian Strategies”

2. In the Workplace --Professionally

3. In Organizations – (Christian or non-Christian)

- Faith-Based Community Organizing
- Christian organizations like
 - Little Lights
 - Prison Fellowship . .

Ideas from Bethlehem Baptist Church (John Piper, Bloodlines, -pp. 26-262)

- Mission Statement
- Task force
- Training
- Music
- Balance on Staff
- Network with Black Churches