



## How do we respond to racism, hatred and bigotry? – Part 2

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I'm so grateful for our brothers who are helping us understand this moment and find clarity in how to respond to racism, hatred and bigotry as followers of Jesus Christ. I've been blessed by their insights and challenged to examine my own heart and repent where my life has failed to align with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I know that what I've asked from these brothers was not necessarily an easy task. I'm grateful for their faithfulness to Jesus in this moment to speak honest words that point us to Jesus and His glorious Gospel.

Last week you heard from Pastor Arthur J. Battle and Pastor Toddrick Gordon. Art Battle is the founding pastor of Gethsemane Christian Discipleship Church (<http://gethsemanecdc.com/>) in Toledo, OH. Toddrick Gordon is the Community Outreach Pastor at Urban Light Community Church (<https://www.urbanlightmuncie.com/>) in Muncie, IN.

Today we will hear from Pastor Antoine Lassiter, Lead Pastor at Think Kingdom Church (<http://www.thinkingdomchurch.org/>) in Concord, NC.

Again, I'm praying that we have ears that hear and hearts inclined toward real repentance, action and change.

Christ's Peace,  
**Lance**

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*I've attempted to write this article several times. Each time I attempt to do so, I simply erase the accumulated text and start over. It is difficult to express how I feel concerning the Charlottesville incident. Nonetheless here are some thoughts:*

The images of Charlottesville were constant reminders of yet another divide that this country finds itself in. I am not surprised or overly concerned by the world's response – because truly this is the result of sin and the wages of it. Sin is the harvest we reap outside of the will of God. The wages of sin is death; it may not come immediately, but it comes. No amount of legislation, marches, protests, or laws can change the consequences of sin. Its effects and repercussions are imminent. But again, I am not surprised by the events of Charlottesville. Rather, I am surprised by the divisive response of the church.

There was a time (or maybe this is me romanticizing history to a degree) when I believed that defining sin was simple and plain. Admittedly, the church has, at times, stood on the wrong side of issues; but history is sometimes a great teacher, and this is the time we should be able to get it right. Despite the manipulation of media, political pundits, and the tapestry of cynicism spewed on social media platforms, I look to the leaders of churches to stand for righteousness, to speak truth in love, and to move the King's agenda forward. I have been disappointed, specifically in these three areas:



Pastor Antoine and Latonia Lassiter

### **Opinions and culture are louder than the Gospel itself.**

We are quick to categorically define abortion and homosexuality as sin, but it appears recently that defining racism or its various mutations has become more difficult. Images of Charlottesville were plastered throughout social media platforms. I witnessed opinionated pastors become eerily silent. This became a disturbing trend as if racism was the “third rail” of our faith. It becomes disheartening when my peers spread their political affiliations more than they spread the Gospel. Instead of echoing the sentiments of Christ, we echo the voices of Washington. We find ways to challenge “what we see” as opposed to being charged with what we heard via the scriptures. At any given moment, our culture groans and complains about its ills – images of slain motorists, generalizations of police, marches of hate (or subtle forms of it) draws our attentions to our divided camps. Trenches are built, walls erected, as we bunker down, not fighting or contending for the faith but the expressions of our opinions, politics, or grievances. Charlottesville cannot be viewed with isolationist lenses but must be viewed within the context of scripture and the Cross.

Culture is creating its own leaders who operate outside the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. They cannot adequately address the challenges that this nation faces. But as leaders of God's Holy Church, we can. Despite the vitriol displayed and spewed from the mouths of some of our white brothers (white supremacist, Neo-Nazi, militia and other hate groups), it has become apparent that there are so many layers of Charlottesville seen solely from the lens of the Church that make it difficult for some clergy to speak out against the sin of racism. What has caused such a delayed response or the need not to address it in our congregations? This lies at the heart of my discontent. The Gospel is our example. Jesus is our leader. Sin and all its manifestations must be addressed. God has given us a platform to which we must stand on the hope of His Word, the strength of His name, and the power of His resurrection.

### **Silence feeds racism.**

I literally thanked each white pastor who condemned hate in any form but especially the racial undertones exposed by Charlottesville protestors. To me, it was very important that white pastors spoke in clear terms about racism, prejudice, and stereotypes. Political correctness has caused some of us to feel forced to cower and yet we are still called to stand for right and stand up against wrong. We prefer to chastise the culture with claims of righteousness embodied by statutes, but cannot address the hidden sins of professing Christians. It is our duty to respond to the call and re-introduce to some of our congregants a redeeming Savior. That the subtlety of racism can be found in our hearts, is arguably one of the most polarizing examples of the “Divided Church of America.” The cascade of silence stunned me. It has literally caused some of us to shun speaking directly and clearly about sin, its trappings, and the need to eradicate it through the power of Jesus Christ.

I don't assume that just because pastors did not post on social media that they did not address their congregations. Still, staying silent on social media harms the greater body of Christ. In the aftermath of

Charlottesville, I was searching for white brothers and sisters who were standing up when I felt my knees knocked out from under me.

### **Subtle forms of racism manifest frequently within the church**

Diversity can become a diversion from racial reconciliation. I sincerely believe that it is important to recognize that having a diverse church does not mean you are on a fast track to racial reconciliation. However, being colorblind is not the answer because it simply ignores the beauty of God's creation. The subtlety of racism can manifest itself quite frequently in our churches. Having minorities play a role in the function of a church (on the worship team, greeters, etc.) without true leadership positions is one indicator of a greater issue. Some pastors also make the assumption that a minority pastor can reach and attract minorities. This assumption plays into generalities and stereotypes under the guise of wanting to "reach our community". This doesn't make you a Neo-Nazi but it can be an indicator of a greater failure to recognize that any group is not homogenous. Simply put, all black people don't think or act the same. Strategically placing minorities in position to simply attract minorities isn't the answer – but it is often utilized. This tokenism rarely produces adequate fruit.

Simply put, minorities are much more than the collection of the dominant culture's ideas about us. We must recognize truly Imago Dei — the image of God that we all represent as not only moral truth but a theological truth as well. We must admit that some of our experiences are based on inerrant historical biases that did not leave at conversion. Prejudices and biases exist in many forms nestling quietly in the pews of many churches as leaders refuse to awaken the congregation to it. Community exposes us to our biases that may be rooted in racial undertones only if our community is larger than variations of our own color. We must actively seek out fellow believers beyond the Sunday gatherings. It is not enough to lift hands in sanctuaries and to use diversity as a means to market to the community but to have crucial conversations which are often unpleasant and uncomfortable. To merely suggest that we want our church to reflect how heaven will be without the work of reconciliation is disingenuous at best, deceptive at worst.

It is my hope that Charlottesville is a catalyst for leaders to create a dialogue, and that it wakes leaders up to the need to address the glaring problem seldom talked about in church. As Christians, we understand that the removal of statues does not solve racism. However, the inability for defenders of the same statues to not see the offensive nature to minorities is equally troubling. This does not mean we should simply tear them down, but when the defense of monuments is well articulated above and in place of the Gospel, the Church needs to step back and see its mission has drifted.

Simply because church leaders could never see themselves as the extreme embodiments of racism, like torch-bearing Neo-Nazis, does not mean they can dismiss their own tendencies toward prejudices and the subtleties of racism that are alive and well within church walls.

### **Antoine Lassiter, Lead Pastor**

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