Three Uncomfortable Truths

The news is maddening. A black man was recently unjustly killed in Minnesota by police and riots ensued, spreading across the nation. Public leaders speak inane or inflammatory words that spread more hurt. Even church leaders to a large degree have missed the mark on God’s perspective to the Church and the world. Here are three things that people must know to solve these racial and justice questions that everyone seems to be lamenting.

1. Racism will Never be Eliminated until Christ Rules.

Every election cycle we hear the political blather that a candidate and their party will end racism. I’ve heard this regularly since the 1960’s. Have the politicians made good on their promises? No. In 2011 when Barak Obama was voted in the first African American President, many hoped this signaled the end of racism in America. Did it? No. Many groups like the NAACP, Black Urban League, Rainbow Coalition, National Action Network, Southern Christian Leadership Council, and other well-meaning groups have worked toward ending racism for decades. Have they? No. In fact, some say it may be getting worse. Why is racism so hard to end?

 Jeremiah 17:9 REV

 The heart is deceitful above all things, and is incurable; who can know it?

When God made man in the beginning, man’s heart was beautiful and strong. After the original sin, corruption crept into the original perfection and soon man began to reflect this verse. The first person born, Cain, murdered the second one, Abel. How awful! By the time of Noah…

 Gen. 6:5 REV

 Yahweh saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

God provides this historical editorial about 1500 years after Cain. Think of the phrase “every intention of the thoughts of his [man’s] heart was only evil continually”. It was so bad God had to “turn off the computer and reboot the whole system” of the earth with Noah’s family and the flood. About 500 years later God called out Abraham and his family to love Him in the midst of resurgent craziness. His progeny went to Egypt to and were enslaved. About 400 years later God gave Moses the Law to help Israel stay alive until the Messiah could come and redeem mankind. Did the law improve man’s heart?

 Romans 3:20 REV

 because by the works of the law no flesh will be declared righteous in his sight, for through the law comes only the full knowledge of sin.

The Mosaic law not only didn’t improve man’s heart, it revealed how wicked it was and desperately needed a redeemer. All efforts to change without spiritual help from God was for naught. The part of man inherited from Adam – our body and soul – was made to be a sinner.

 Romans 5:19 REV

 For just as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous.

We were made to be sinners in the first birth. Envy, selfishness, strife, and other ugly traits are observed when we watch little children play together. It’s how we “come from the factory”. Adam’s sin effected man’s DNA so that we are not born the first time with God’s spirit as Adam started. To get God’s spirit, we must be born again. Then man has a chance at improving his heart. Until then, man will mess up - it only is a matter of time, place, and degree. That’s why we need a savior. We are all factory defects, leaking unrighteousness in one way or another to varying degrees.

Now some are saying. “Steve, you’re much too negative. Man is not that bad. If we can put a man on the moon and splice genes, we can fix him.” Really? Does someone really think they can change fallen human nature? What did Jesus say about that?

 Mark 14:7a

 For ye have the poor with you always,

Will poverty ever be eliminated? According to the politicians, yes, but not according to Jesus. For how long? “Always”. But Steve, “I don’t like that and don’t want hear that!?” Really? What is this, fantasy Island? Bedtime story world where everyone lives “happily ever after”? Since 1964 the federal “War on Poverty” program has spent over 22 trillion dollars by 2014 (the 50th anniversary). The percentage of “poor” people in the general population is the same today as it was when “the war” began. We have lost this “war”. Why? Because poverty is part of man’s fallen nature as is also greed, which contributes to the desire to keep others in poverty so that the wealthy can accumulate more.

“Steve, you are so negative and focusing on man’s dark side!” Turn on the TV. What do you see? It’s not a “Hallmark movie”. It’s a Hellmark movie… and it’s reality. Man’s heart is sick and incurable. That means that we can’t fix it. “But, Steve, there’s psychology, and drugs, and education, and religion, and…”. You’re putting a dress on a pig with these ‘remedies’. Look at the rioters. Think some of them went to school? Went to church? Have been counseled? Had psychotropic drugs? Probably some if not much of them. What’s the solution? We’ll get to that in section 3.

What is the cause of racism? Firstly, it’s been going on since time immemorial. The Israelites and the Egyptians. The Greeks and the Persians. The Romans and the Jews. The real cause of racism is insecurity. Because each person knows they fall short of God’s standards, they look for others to which they can compare themselves favorably in order to feel better about themselves. Unsaved man lives in a constant insecure state before themselves and God regarding their self-worth. If a person accepts Christ that means they believe God accepts Christ’s worthiness instead of their own. God approves Christ’s works instead of their own and gives them what Christ achieved, eternal life and sonship with Him as a new creation. They have a new standard in their life – Christ. The Christian learns to compare themself only to Christ, not others. They “grade” themselves according to Christ’s sacrifice and God’s love. They know they don’t deserve anything by their own goodness and works. It’s all a gift of grace from God because of what Christ’s works earned.

The unsaved grade themselves, not by the standard of Christ, but on a “curve”. They spend their time judging others so as to compare themself favorably to them and self-delude themself with a false sense of value. They compare and look down on others different from themselves in gender, race, achievement, wealth, and physical differences so as to feel better about themselves. Then the self-deluded join with others and a kind of tribalism emerges. This is not an isolated pattern, but only fallen human nature at work. Racism, sexism, ageism, xenophobia, and socialism are different sides of the same coin. They are all attempts to denigrate others to artificially elevate themselves in their own eyes.

“Steve, are you saying that racism is OK and that we should learn to accept it?” No, I’m not. Racism is vile, but I’m also saying that hoping to end racism by education and legislation is as hopeless as trying to end alcoholism through prohibition. Man’s sin nature will continue to leak out no matter how many band aids are applied. The dress on the pig never changes the pig.

I despise racism. For me it’s not a book subject. Having grown up in Louisiana in the 1950’s and 60’s, I saw it too many times. Public bathrooms with “white only” or “black only” signs posted. “White” clean drinking fountains and dirty, dingy “Black” drinking fountains. Segregated signs on restaurants, calling middle aged black men “boy”. I even have the deed from the house my grandfather built in 1920 which says that it can never be sold to someone of African descent! Talk about racism! How despicable!

Some think “White people can only be racist.” Really? After Katrina, I took my parents to see all our family homes in New Orleans to see if any survived. The house my grandfather built – the one with the racist deed – did survive. When we parked in front of it and got out the car to see the house, a black man came up to my 70+ year old parents and angrily demanded to know what we were doing in “his” neighborhood. I asked him what the problem was. He told me “You don’t belong here!” implying that we were white and that this is a black neighborhood. I pointed to my grandparents’ house and to my mom saying, “Her dad built that house in 1920 and she grew up in this neighborhood.” “Well it ain’t hers no more!” he snorted defiantly. Guess what that was? Yep, you got it…racism. The same kind demonstrated by New Orleans mayor Ray Nagin after Katrina when he called New Orleans a “Chocolate city”. The same kind as candidate Obama revealed when he described his own grandmother as a “typical white woman”. Racism is no more endemic to a specific race than alcoholism, poverty, or adultery. Racism is a human problem. It’s a person getting consensus from others in a similar situation to put down another group in order to feel better about themselves.

Until a man is redeemed and renews his mind in Christ, he will always put others down so he can feel better about himself. The only question will be what category they choose to segregate and attack. It’s not going away. Of course, we should speak against it, but also be realistic about man’s incurable heart.

1. Perfect Justice will Never Occur in this Life.

The demonstrators chant “No justice – No peace!”, meaning “We will not calm down and stop agitating until there is justice for George Floyd’s unjust murder”. Really? How’s that going to happen? What if the policeman who caused his death is arrested and brought to court on a murder charge, found guilty and sentenced to death? Would that be justice? What about the other police who stood by and did nothing? What if they were all lynched? Would this be ‘justice’? No, true justice is raising George Floyd from the dead. That would be just because he didn’t deserve to die. So, undoing that injustice would be just. Are the demonstrators planning to do that? No. And the rioters just seem to want to rationalize bad behavior because of the injustice to Mr. Floyd.



 Romans 12:17-19 REV

 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Think ahead of time how to do what is honorable in the sight of everyone.

 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people.

 Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance belongs to me, I will repay, says the Lord.

Romans informs us of a few things. God will judge all men one day at His righteous judgement. He will issue rewards and consequences, not man. Apart from God, man does not have the ability to judge other people righteously. If someone hurts you, do not take it upon yourself to issue consequences despite how you may feel. We should take forethought and act honorably, living in peace with all people. These are our guidelines unless others want to still attack us in which case, we ask governmental authorities to give them a “time out”, sometimes in a “gated community”, i.e., prison.

On TV I see many people hurting innocent people and business owners by protesting against someone who hurt and killed an innocent man. This is repaying evil with evil. There are human laws governing the criminality of the killing of George Floyd. The perpetrators will be arrested and tried in a court of law according to due process. Will this procedure guarantee perfect justice? No, only a small measure of it. Perfect justice is reversing what was unjust, his murder. So, in this life we can only approximate justice, at best. That’s why God says, “do what is honorable in the sight of everyone” and “live in peace with all people”. We are not to avenge ourselves but allow God to do it. When? When He does it. It could be sooner or later at the judgement.

 Romans 2:12, 16

 For as many as have sinned apart from law will also perish apart from law, and as many as have sinned under the law will be judged by the law,

 in the day when God, through Jesus Christ, will judge what people have kept secret—just as my good news declares.

God will judge each person according to the secrets of their heart in the day of judgement. God is the only one who can judge with perfect knowledge in the future. Until then we are instructed to carry out the human law honorably and not take vengeance ourselves.

Let me say a few things about “racial justice” and “social justice”, the proponents of which are making their voices loud. I will use myself as an example to make the main point in this section about “justice”.

How am I as a white man to achieve justice with my fellow black citizens, whose ancestors were enslaved in America by white slaveowners? Do I have white privilege? Am I responsible for what white slaveowners did hundreds of years ago because we share the same skin tone? One part of my family was Cajun, who never had slaves, only crawfish. Another part is Italian that came to America in the 1890’s. Another part came from Spain in the 1880’s. Another part came from France in the 1870’s when slavery had been outlawed since 1864. So, should I be responsible for the horrific evil of slavery when my ancestors were mostly thousands of miles away?

Wait, a minute! I’m sorry to have shared what I just did. Those were my adopted parents, not my biological ones, whom I’ve never met. Seriously. You want to talk about white privilege? I guess that doesn’t include me being dumped at an orphanage. It also doesn’t include being unjustly fired from the only job I ever really wanted. Or my wife getting cancer when our kids were in grade school. Or our daughter also having the cancer gene. Or my son getting thrown out of a vehicle at 60 mph and getting a traumatic brain injury needing years of rehab. Or my profession that I had spent 20 years mastering withering when I was 53 years old and having to start all over again from scratch. White privilege?!

Now I’m going to ask some questions to make you think. How do I get justice for my biological parents abandoning me at an orphanage? (Sometimes there a disconnect in my life that I know usually indicates psychological childhood trauma. I’ve asked God many times what happened. He has been silent about the abuse I think I suffered as a young child. It may be nasty stuff. How do I get justice for that?) How about for unjust firing? How about the trauma of cancer? How about seeing my son in the ICU and he didn’t know his own name?

Here’s the point. We are all going to suffer hurt and injustice in this life. ALL of us. It’s not a racial or a gender thing – it’s a human thing.

 John 16:33a

 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation:

In the world people will have tribulations – disease, financial, racial, social, familial, etc. Jesus never promised justice… until God’s judgement in the future. He promised help, but not immediate justice. In the future God will raise us all again and justice will be measured out, not because we deserve or don’t deserve it, but because Christ earned it.

So, a white cop treats a black man disrespectfully… So black men threatened to kill me in south Chicago once because I was in the wrong neighborhood with the wrong skin… So rich people hike the cost of lifesaving drugs so that they can get a newer Ferrari… So, a father walks away from his family leaving a spiritual, financial, and emotional hole that may never be repaired… Where is the justice? The Bible says it’s coming. It also says to not play God and be like a movie action “hero” and kill all the bad guys you blame for the injustice. Judgement is God’s job, not ours.

We are all going to get screwed in this life. Every one of us. None are exempt. The guy with the silver spoon that perhaps you’ve been envious about is probably choking on it when you’re not looking. We all get hurt in so many ways it’s incalculable. That’s why justice is only approximate at best in this life. Locking up or executing the murderer doesn’t bring the victim back. Confronting an abuser only brings a measure of healing, not a just return of innocence.

Anyone truly expecting perfect justice in this world is either ignorant, fooling themselves or looking for a rationale for wrong behavior by avenging themselves. After all, if avenging yourselves was OK, then Jesus would have done it and the crucifixion would have ended much differently. How did Jesus handle his epic personal injustice?

 Luke 23:34a

 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do

1. Forgiveness is the Answer.

Here is the perfect innocent victim. He never sinned, against God or man. He lived his life as a servant to others. He healed the sick, delivered the possessed, and raised the dead – all for free - and then taught others how to do it. He lived in a fishbowl of scrutiny, mobbed daily. He was off the charts brilliant, charismatic, and connected. After all, his Father made and basically owned everything. After being unjustly arrested by soldiers, he commented “Do you think that I am not able to call on my Father, and even now he will send me more than 12 legions of angels?” By the way, a “legion” was about 6000 at that time, so that’s 72,000 angels! And Jesus said he could get “more”! Yet he allowed himself to be led away, seemingly powerless, in order to suffer and die for our sins. Words fail to capture such love.

Now for some contrasts. Have you read in the ‘Epistle of Retaliations’ where Jesus formed mass protests against the crooked religious leaders and Roman imperialism after his crucifixion? Did he rail against “Empire privilege” using “Jews Lives Matter” to attack Rome? No, he never did that? Guess Jesus was just an ancient stupid guy, not attuned to the modern ways of advanced “social justice”.

To think that you can do better than Jesus is equal part insane and blasphemous. To imagine that your way is better than God’s way is… basically the same as Satan proposed to Eve. Jesus said he always did those things that pleased God in John 8:29, therefore forgiving unjust attacks pleases God. And conversely, not forgiving unjust attacks does not please God.

When are we supposed to forgive others? Do we forgive them after they ask for forgiveness? After they ask with genuine sorrow, with tears on their knees? After they offer reparations for their offence? After we feel that the scales of justice have been leveled? When did Jesus forgive his tormentors and executioners? After they asked for forgiveness? Hardly. In the midst of his torture he forgave. Did he have to? Absolutely not. He could have walked off that cross and gathered angels and started “Pre-judgement”. Amid ridicule, agony and bleeding his life away - he forgave them. Not after they asked for it, but before they even thought about it. What does God ask of us Christians?

 Eph 4:32 REV

 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God has forgiven you in Christ.

When did God forgive us in Christ Jesus? When we deserved it? After we asked for it? No, He forgave us in Christ – in what Christ did and accomplished. He paid for our sins and forgiveness about 2000 years ago. We weren’t even a twinkle in our daddy’s eye yet. When we accept Christ, we accepted that forgiveness too, already paid for centuries ago. So how do we forgive others? Just like the verse says, “just as God forgave you”. Undeserved, before we are asked, without reparations, or reservations, during ridicule and pain, “just as God forgave you”. That doesn’t mean we must trust our attackers and open ourselves up to injury again, but it does mean we let all thoughts of revenge go in forgiveness “just as God has forgiven you in Christ”.

Regrettably, there are too many voices putting barriers to forgiveness between aggrieved parties and fostering strife because of old wounds. I recently heard a foreign religious “leader” tell us on a Zoom call that America is spiritually stagnant and not growing because we need to ask native Americans (or first nations) for forgiveness for stealing their land. I’m not kidding. Am I supposed to go apologize to the descendants of people who were displaced by early American settlers because I share a similar skin color and a common ancestral continent? Really? What about my great, great, great uncle Remy who got bit by a gator that was spooked by a black man crossing a bayou? Should the descendants of that black man apologize to me? Or their spirituality is out the window, too? No wonder the Christian church is not standing tall in this tempest with idiotic theology like this!

But wait, there’s more! This misguided leader who was putting down American Christians was… a German! I wonder if Germans have anything to apologize for? They only started two world wars last century causing the deaths of tens of millions. And murdering 6 million Jews! Good luck with God on that one at the judgement. I won’t be standing anywhere near them at that time… you know, collateral damage! And this German wants me to find an Indian to apologize to because “we” took their land? Perhaps I will after he finds some Celt descendants to apologize to because Germanic tribes displaced them about 700BC. OK, let’s stop this stupid line of thought. How insane is this whole idiotic logic? By the way, this religious ‘leader’ ended his talk telling us what many European Christians thought of American Christians, “Send us your money and shut up!” I, for one, will do neither.

Think about it. Does God look at us as “American”, “First Nation”, or “German” Christians? Or is this how secular man views groups of victims and/or offenders? What’s God’s perspective?

 Gal. 3:28

 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.

From God’s perspective there is no racial, gender, social, or financial differences in Christianity. Have you read about America or Germany in the book of Revelation? Why not? Maybe because they will be irrelevant (or maybe even non-existent!). Read about race in heaven? How about gender or wealth?

 Mark 12:25

 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.

Race, gender, and wealth are worldly concerns. What are they worth when a person is dying? Nothing. What are they worth in eternity? Nothing. Why do we care about these issues now? Because Satan is inspiring human voices to make a big deal about these things to manipulate us to steal, kill and destroy.

Shockingly large parts of secular and religious leadership ascribe to this “grievance” ideology. They think we need to sit down and have a “conversation” or a “dialogue”. This usually consists of them complaining about getting hurt and that the other party is responsible. As the race dividing “Rev.” Al Sharpton said at George Floyd’s funeral nine times, “(You white people) Get your knee off our necks!”. Is grievance and blame assigning promoting forgiveness or bitterness? The answer is obvious.

 Heb 12: 15 REV

 Watch over others, so that no one is falling away from the grace of God; so that no root of bitterness sprouts up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

This verse clearly describes the times we live in and gives us understanding of the forces at work. God instructs leaders in the church to keep grace central to the saints. This means we hold prominent what Christ did and gave us – the spirit, a new identity and citizenship, forgiveness, sonship, and many other grace realities. If we fall away from grace, we fall into what we do, or don’t do – what we earn or don’t earn - as prominent. We fall into the “works” mentality. What Americans do, what the Germans did, what the settlers did to the Indians, what the white slaveowners did to the black slaves, etc. What man earns, what man deserves, what man has suffered and is owed, what man can do now because of his past injustice, etc. Where is God’s grace in this? Nowhere. So, what happens?

A “root of bitterness sprouts up”. Psychologist will tell you that unresolved pain is like a coiled spring that will rise up and color your life – and not with pretty colors. It will poison a marriage, friendships, a career, mental health, and emotional stability. In short, it will “cause trouble”. Not pretend trouble, but possible life debilitating disaster. Sometimes for entire families and generations. Sometimes for entire neighborhoods, cities or even nations – “by it many become defiled”. As we watch the TV news we are seeing the black and white words of this verse in living color. It’s an open door to the evil spirit realm. How are violent, riotous, murderous, and other evil spirits introduced to our lives? One huge way is unresolved pain and bitterness.

So, what’s the answer? It’s sure not giving into acting out of our own or other’s pain. I’ve heard living in unresolved bitterness described as “drinking poison everyday and expecting the one who hurt you to die”. Living with bitterness is guaranteed to make you sick – in thought, word, and deed. There is only one godly alternative – forgiveness. It’s the way Jesus chose – when he has every reason to answer the evil he experienced with retribution – he chose to forgive because that is God’s will. How do we do that? Let me tell you how I learned this lesson convincingly.

I was alone on a trail once with God and complaining to Him how much my son was bothering me with his bad behavior. It was before he really turned to God, so there were some truly awful habits in which he was mired. I was exasperated and pitching a fit. About that time memories seeped into my head of stupid things I had done as a young man. Ouch! Some of it was worse than what my son was doing! I was ashamed at myself for being duped by evil spirits and my flesh into such behavior that was calamitous to myself and others. God then spoke to me, “Did that stop Me from loving you and help you get your life right?” “No,” I replied thankfully. “And neither will it stop me with your son. Stop complaining and get praying!” exhorted the Great Forgiver. He was – as always – right.

 Luke 7:47b REV

 the one who is forgiven little, loves little.

I was loving my son little because I had forgotten how much I had been forgiven. As God reminded how much He had forgiven me, I loved and forgave much. This is the key to forgiving others – realizing and remembering how much God has forgiven you. Each of us has no standing on our own before God because of our history when we look at it honestly. We deserve nothing good. All we have and hope to receive comes from God’s grace and Christ’s gift to us. That’s why we can forgive anyone, anything - because we deserve nothing.

There once was a black third grade dropout lady whose husband left her with two boys. They lived in Detroit where she worked 2-3 jobs to make ends meet, receiving food stamps. She could barely read yet encouraged her boys to read and achieve whatever they wanted. The younger boy worked hard and got a scholarship to Yale, then gained entrance to medical school. Through struggle and achievement, by the time he was 33 he was the chief of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins. By now you probably know that this man is our current US secretary of Housing, Dr. Ben Carson. His mother had every opportunity to be bitter – born black in Georgia in 1928, married at 13 years old to a 28-year-old Baptist minister who secretly had another family on the side! Abandoned by the bigamist with two boys and all she had was a second-grade education… in urban Detroit. Yet she never ultimately rejected her faith or let the devasting hurts fester and poison her children. She kept mostly thankful and hopeful. And produced one the greatest Americans ever – Dr. Ben Carson.

Those who live in bitterness always look back – at slavery – at losing ancestral lands – at betrayal by supposedly trusted loved ones – at the cruel vagaries of life. Those who live in forgiveness forget the past, see graceful opportunities in the present and accomplish heart desires with God for the future.

All of us are going to get unjustly attacked in this life. There should be no question about that. The only question is are we going to forgive the attacker and move beyond the pain to live - or allow ourselves to be pain’s prisoner. It is a decision each person makes. I decided long ago to forgive those who hurt me and focus on the grace of God and limitless possibilities of His promises. Read the Bible and look around. All winners do this. Losers allow themselves to be mired in the past, simmering with anger. As they look back, it distracts their eyes from the possibilities of the present and God’s help for the future.

The only true answer to racism, betrayal, and pain is the forgiveness Christ demonstrated on the cross. It is the key that unlocks the prison of our own pain and opens the next door to God’s life of grace and blessing for each of us. Which do you choose? Choose what God has already given you so that you can gift someone else with it. Choose forgiveness.