

I have a few observations regarding the recent MBC class on the Gospel, the Church, Justice, and Race. The stated guideline for both the class and the resulting document was that our only source would be the Bible. This held true for the first 3 sessions.

However, the last 2 sessions strayed from this, as the discussion turned to the practical applications of how race is experienced in our country and in our church. Rather than focusing on the clear passages in Paul's letters (such as Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians) addressing unity in the church, the MBC staff chose to highlight personal experiences. Rather than discuss the attitudes of the heart that we are told by God, via Paul, to either put on or put off, as we interact with one another, the MBC staff chose to lecture the listening audience. Personal experiences do have their place in these discussions, but they cannot serve as a replacement for Scripture, especially clearly written Scripture. I was puzzled that these passages were not highlighted as a means to deal with any sort of disunity in the church, as they were written for this very purpose. Instead, as session 4 began to morph into the MBC staff lecturing the white people who were listening, I became a bit suspicious. All the examples given were aimed at white people and white people only. I hope this was not the intent of our MBC pastors, but that is exactly how it came across. To single out one group of people, when the purpose was to come up with a Biblical document on dealing with racism in general, is both an example of racism and is self-defeating. Am I to think that our MBC pastors assume that I am a racist, without knowing me personally, and that I am incapable of responding to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, if they used Scripture? Or that I am incapable of empathy towards other people who are different than myself, unless they lecture me about it? I have a high regard for our pastors and I think their hearts are in the right place, but those last two sessions were troubling.

My second comment is regarding the use of Micah 6:8 as the key verse for this document. I love Micah 6:8, it's a great verse, but like all Old Testament passages, it is ultimately written to lead us to Christ. I was puzzled that Jesus' own words in Matthew 22:37-40 were not used as the basis for the actions God desires of us. To be fair, this passage is referred to later in the document. I am aware that Micah 6:8 was chosen because it uses the word "justice", as that fits nicely with the title of these sessions. Yet, why are we using what is convenient to quote, rather than what points us to the Lord Himself? Everything we do should point us back to Jesus.

I would hope that the overall impression left by these sessions would be the highlighting of a unifying message of our oneness in Christ, due to the cross, with unity achieved, as each individual member yields to the Holy Spirit, using the clear teaching of Scripture on how we are to interact with other people. Sadly, that is not the impression I was left with.

I appreciate that an attempt was made to address the issues. Slavery was tolerated in the first place due to lies that were promoted in society and then accepted, as these lies were repeated often enough. This human tendency to listen to and then accept the current thinking of secular society on social issues should be a warning to the church in our day. Believers need to be diligent to search the Scriptures regarding the social issues being promoted in our time. Let us not repeat the tragic mistakes made by those who came before us and let secular ideas creep into the church. Promoting racial discord, abortion, redefining marriage, and gender identity issues all come to mind. I do not want to discourage our pastors, but to encourage them to stay the course and to focus on clearly written Scripture. The congregation is depending on this.

Karen Manfredi
Member of MBC