

“PCA Racial Reconciliation, Pt. 1 – Generational/Corporate Repentance?”

The Bible and Culture - NLPC Summer 2018

- Race Issues in the PCA

- The PCA was founded as an integrated denomination:

Not only did the Advisory Convention of the Continuing Presbyterian Church, meeting in August 1973, declare that our church would “welcome fellow believers in Christ regardless of race” (Minutes of the Advisory Convention of the Continuing Presbyterian Church, Asheville, North Carolina, August 7-9, 1973, p. 27). In addition, at the first General Assembly, O. Palmer Robertson gave an address that provided the necessary theological framework for moving forward on this issue.

- Still, the following resolution was affirmed at a recent PCA General Assembly:

Therefore be it resolved, that the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America does recognize, confess, condemn and repent of corporate and historical sins, including those committed during the Civil Rights era, and continuing racial sins of ourselves and our fathers such as the segregation of worshippers by race; the exclusion of persons from Church membership on the basis of race; the exclusion of churches, or elders, from membership in the Presbyteries on the basis of race; the teaching that the Bible sanctions racial segregation and discourages inter-racial marriage; the participation in and defense of white supremacist organizations; and the failure to live out the gospel imperative that “love does no wrong to a neighbor” (Romans 13:10)

- ▶ In this resolution, the PCA repents of the sins of past generations of Presbyterians (sins prior to the PCA’s formation).
- ▶ In this resolution, the PCA repents of the present (but largely unknown) racism of its current members.
- ▶ Foundational to that statement of repentance is a common understanding of two principles:
 - ❖ #1 - That subsequent generations of people are responsible for the sins of their ancestors.
 - They must confess and repent of them (even if not personally guilty)
 - They must redress the injustices of past generations...

- ❖ #2 - That individuals are responsible for the sins of their larger “group”...
 - Individuals must confess and repent of their group’s sins. (even if not personally guilty)
 - Individuals must redress the injustices of their group’s sins.
 - ❖ These ideas are not just part of the PCA’s resolution, they are commonly held beliefs in wider American culture.
- Are we responsible for our ancestors’ sins, according to the Bible?
- Many say “yes”, and the reason is found here:

Exodus 20:4–6 - ⁴ “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. ⁵ “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (also see Ex. 34:6-7; Deut. 5:8-10)
 - But is that really what the text says?
 - ▶ “Those who hate me” implies the sin is continuing over the 3rd and 4th generations.
 - ▶ I.E. - the descendants continue to hate the Lord by worshiping graven images.
 - ▶ Thus the warning of this passage is that if people personally continue in their ancestors’ idolatry...
 - ❖ They will not only be judged for *their* sin...
 - ❖ But they will face 3-4 generation’s worth of judgement as well.
 - ▶ The idea of descendants being held liable for their ancestors’ sins that they did not personally commit is just not here.
 - This conclusion is supported by what we find in Ezekiel 18:

Ezekiel 18:5, 9-10, 13-14, 17 - “But if a man is righteous and practices justice and righteousness...⁹ if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully—he is righteous and will surely live [Not face temporal judgment for

sin],” declares the Lord God. ¹⁰ “Then he may have a violent son who sheds blood and who does any of these things to a brother...¹³ will he live? He will not live! He has committed all these abominations, he will surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head. ¹⁴ Now behold, he has a son who has observed all his father’s sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise...¹⁷ ...he will not die for his father’s iniquity, he will surely live.”

- ▶ If a person does not commit the sins of their ancestors, they are not held responsible for the sins of those who came before.
- ▶ There is no need to confess and repent of sins not committed by the individual.
- ▶ No generational redress appears required either.
- Now what about the various prayers in the OT where we see one generation of OT people confessing the sins of another?
 - ▶ In all of them, there is the admission that those sins have been continued in by the current generation.
 - ▶ They are repenting for not repenting of the sins of their fathers that they continued.
- Application:
 - ▶ Don’t let people tell you that you are responsible in any way for the sins of your ancestors, including racial sins.
 - ▶ Can you imagine if this were true?
- What about your responsibility for the current sins of one’s “group”?
 - Is a corporate repentance required? Ongoing sorrow and penance?
 - Are you considered responsible for the sins of those in your group, tribes, and associations?
 - The evidence of the scriptures is as follows:
 - ▶ In the NT, individual churches are *not* held responsible for the sins of other churches (though all are part of the body of Christ).
 - ▶ The epistles of the NT call individuals w/in churches to repent of their *individual* sins, not the whole church, unless it’s a whole-church sin.

- ▶ Corporate responsibility for the sins of one's "group" does not appear to be a Biblical notion.
- Can you imagine if corporate responsibility for sin was real?
- None of the above removes the foundation for the Biblical notion of Federal Headship:
 - ▶ Where the sins/righteousness of the Federal Head are imputed to all they represent.
 - ▶ Yet according to scripture, there are only two Federal Heads: Adam and Jesus.