

**Pastors Share Redemptive Responses on Racial Reconciliation**

On June 11, several Midlands pastors recorded a virtual [dialogue](https://www.columbiametro.org/racial-redemption-reconciliation/) on racial reconciliation that was immediately uploaded to the CMBA website. Spurred by recent events including the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests across the nation around systemic racism and injustice, the African American and Caucasian pastors shared openly about their experiences, convictions and ideas for moving forward as a unified body of believers. The group agreed the discussion would be a starting point for ongoing education and true change.

“We are pleased to have with us a group of Baptist ministers who can speak into this issue with heartfelt passion. It was 401 years ago when the original sin of slavery first expressed itself in North America. In the year 2020 we still have no clear vision of the end of this sinful journey. We still struggle with it every day, every season, and every generation of people are struggling with it. It unfortunately reveals itself in unChristlike ways, such as through the murder of George Floyd,” says Executive Director George Bullard, who shared that his personal journey addressing racism includes a personal encounter with Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1964.

George and Andre Rogers, pastor of Concord Fellowship Baptist Church and Our One Priority Mobilizer with CMBA, served as moderators. The panel pastors included: Ant Frederick, of Midtown Fellowship; Andre Melvin, of Temple Zion Baptist; Wes Church, of Columbia First Baptist; Freddy Johnson, of North Point Community Church; Brian Thomas, of NorthStar Christian Center; John Roberts, of Fort Clark Baptist; and, Jamie Rogers, a former church planter and current director of Baptist Collegiate Ministries in the Columbia area.

The dialogue covered thoughts on the Black Lives Matter movement, protests, law enforcement reform, proper evangelical Christian response to racial redemption and what churches could do to help achieve this. Panel guests shared their perspectives and, at times, asked questions of each other. Some commented on things they learned as a result.

“My biggest takeaway was that this did not happen overnight and it will not disappear overnight, but it will take intentional, honest conversations between black and white pastors and churches that build relationships that build trust which will lead to permanent change,” says Freddy Johnson.

For his part, John Roberts sees that believers can open the door to more lasting change when they come together and discuss church segregation and racial inequalities in America.

“These discussions are important because, as the Church, we are on earth to spread the gospel and truth within. Since the fall of man sin, evil and hate has entered the world. It is through the Church, the Restrainer and the ministry of reconciliation that sinful man can be saved. In other words, the Church must equip its members on how to deal with these issues. It is important that we provide clarity on racial reconciliation and how we can spearhead the change,” John says.

“I believe dialogues like this are a great example of the kinds of conversations that our world needs to hear and have in today’s polarized environment. As a follower of Jesus, it’s important for me to be a bridge builder which requires me to ask why people see things differently than I do and then do what I can to love my neighbor,” Jamie Rogers says, adding that he plans to engage students on these issues moving forward as well.

A poignant moment in the discussion centered around the role fear plays in prejudice and hate. At around the 35-minute mark in the video, Jamie Rogers asks the panel how to best educate others about the reality of systemic racism. Ant Frederick responds by explaining that some racial perceptions - including that black people, and black men specifically, are dangerous – are passed down generationally and that fear must be a part of the discussion around dismantling prejudice.

“I think it's a shallow way of trying to deal with racism by only painting it in the picture of ‘do you hate or dislike somebody who is a different race than you?’ We have to think about [asking] ‘have you been trained wrongly to fear people?’ Because if that is the case, then it can cause just as much damage and just as many problems. I want to encourage all of us to be able to think through any way that we're training our people and discipling our people around racial problems to think about it in that lane as well,” Ant says.

Andre Rogers thanked the panel for their transparency, saying “you all are offering critical insight to a systemic problem. People are angry. I believe black people are angry. I believe white people are angry. I believe there are other races that are angry. We have churches and faith groups that are angry. But the Bible reminds us to be angry and to sin not.”

The dialogue marked the first in what may be additional discussions surrounding the importance of CMBA and Midlands pastors partnering to combat racial inequalities. In response to George Bullard’s invitation on a Call to Action for predominately African American and Caucasian churches uniting on this front, some on the panel said a lack of trust and a history of not speaking out sooner could be short-term barriers. It will also require Caucasian churches to actively rebuild and restore relationships and communities of color that have suffered damage.

“In order for us to pursue reconciliation, we need to first address the issue that caused division in the first place. The division between the ‘black church’ and the ‘white church’ began because our white brothers and sisters before us did not respond in a biblical way to oppression centuries ago. Therefore, trust between the black church and the white church never developed and is still largely absent today. This, from my perspective, is the primary reason we have the racial divide that we currently have in the American church. If I am correct, then the only way to remove the wedge between the black church and the white church is for all of us to work together, hand in hand, to live out the call of the dozens of scriptures in the Bible about oppression. Not following the call of these scriptures is how we got here. Repenting from that and following these scriptures is how we will begin to pursue reconciliation,” Ant Frederick says.

Moving forward, the individual panel guests are looking for God to continue working through His people for a true heart change that leads to church and community change. Brian Thomas shares that his desire is that the Church would excel worldwide in leading in this fight. John Roberts adds his desire to see church leaders educate themselves on racial inequalities and learn to use their voices to create change. Addressing believers’ responsibilities to speak against social inequality during the dialogue, John read aloud from 2 Corinthians 5 which reveals God’s plan for reconciliation.

“We're all Christians, we're all one. Sometimes we don't stand together because we could be coming from two perspectives. Because Christ has reconciled us into Him, we are to reconcile the world to Christ. And that is our ministry - to reconcile all to Him,” John says.

“So what can we do now? What do we need to do as brothers and sisters? The call to action is simply this: we need to rebuild and restore communities of color,” Andre Rogers says adding, “the Kingdom of God is important, and our ministry of reconciliation is important that we reconcile people to the Lord Jesus Christ using the affluence and the influence of which God has given us. This is a tall task and the conversation has just begun. Many more conversations will have to take place. But even in the midst of our current conversation, thank God there's action being taken place on both sides. We're not just praying, we're putting this into action as well.”

Visit [www.columbiametro.org](http://www.columbiametro.org) for more resources to address racial reconciliation and to view the panel dialogue which, as of this publication, has reached more than 4,000 viewers.