



Ethnic Bias:

by John Dawson

#141

Four major elements of dealing with conflict in a Christian way:

- Confession:** *Stating the truth; acknowledgment of the unjust or hurtful actions of myself or my people group toward other persons or categories of persons.*
- Repentance:** *Turning from unloving to loving actions.*
- Reconciliation:** *Expressing and receiving forgiveness and pursuing intimate fellowship with previous enemies.*
- Restitution:** *Attempting to restore that which has been damaged or destroyed and seeking justice wherever we have power to act or to influence those in authority to act.*

HEALING

This article has been excerpted from the book, *Healing America's Wounds*, © 1993 by John Dawson.

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Ethnic Bias:

Can We All Get Along?

I know the things that happened to the Indians in our country were really terrible, but that was so long ago and there's nothing I can do to change history. I can't take responsibility for what happened in my nation before I was born. Anyway, time heals all wounds.

...Doesn't it?

No.

It doesn't.

If a deep wound is left open and uncleansed, it only gets worse with the passage of time. I don't need to look too far to see evidence of this truth. I live in a black community in Los Angeles, and I have seen my city in flames. All around me are visible hurts and hatreds that are firmly rooted in the past. Our national sins are also an offense to God's



embarrassment. They did not come into God's presence to whitewash sin but to agree with His view of it. They faced with stark honesty the wickedness of the culture around them and the sins of their forefathers. This shows us that prayer is not an escape from reality. Our talks with God must be rooted in the truth – the eternal truth of His holy standards and the awful truth about our society as God sees it. In Biblical times, praying believers experienced the broken heart of God through the inner presence of the Holy Spirit. They also identified with the sin of the people, because they themselves had personally contributed to God's pain. You, too, can identify with the sins of your nation in personal and corporate repentance.

When Nehemiah prayed for the restoration of Jerusalem, he did not pray for the city as if he were not part of it. He said, "Both my father's house and I have sinned" (Neh. 1:6-7, NKJV). Nehemiah was a righteous man, and you may be a righteous person

who is not involved in any direct way with the worst evils present in this nation, but there is no temptation that is not common to humanity (see 1 Cor. 10:13). We can all identify with the roots of any given sin as we stand between our righteous King and our sinful generation, asking for God's mercy upon America. Nehemiah and the families with him

assembled themselves before the Lord with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. Though they were just a remnant, they completely identified

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sovereignty; as long as our guilt is unresolved, His just judgment must remain. Because God is loving and does not desire to turn away from any nation, He has established a means of both cleansing and healing us through Jesus' death on the cross. However, the power of God's plan is fully released only when human hearts join with Jesus in His ongoing labor of prayer and participate in His ministry of reconciliation.

The great prayer warriors of the Bible all approached God with a sense of shame and

with their nation, their city, and its history. "Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers" (Neh. 9:2, NKJV).

This small group of Jews faced the discouraging task of rebuilding the nation and its ruined capitol city architecturally, but their task was also social and spiritual. The gaps in Jerusalem's walls had become the places through which the enemy entered. They symbolized the places of unresolved guilt that

needed cleansing and healing. Repentance, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restitution were among the tools they used to heal and restore the land. When a people have broken their covenants with God and violated their relationships with one another, the path to reconciliation must begin with the act of honest confession, and this is where the Jews began. As it was in the days of Nehemiah, so it is today. A repentant church, confessing the sins of the nation before God, is America's only hope.

Today we live in an atmosphere of satanic oppression, and when we consider the strongholds of the enemy, we see that they often correspond with the places of wounding and unresolved guilt in our land. The praying church is to function in a priestly role in America, bringing cleansing and healing to the places of conflict and broken relationship. When we look at what divides America, we see certain arenas of pain which erupt again and again in self-righteous anger, as each side denounces the other. Unfortunately we, as Christians, sometimes add to the problem by declaring truth in a way that turns people off. In order to avoid this, we need to show humility while upholding truth. Public moralizing without identifying with the human condition will only be seen as self-righteous arrogance, an attitude which contributes to further separation and deepens the wounds within the land. Honest confession should be the foundation of all our peace-making efforts.

This world is hopelessly snared in irreconcilable differences. Rodney King's question is indeed the question of the decade: "Can we all get along?" The answer is no. Without Jesus it's impossible. All

successful relationships are trinitarian in nature. You, your husband, and Jesus; then it will work. If there are just two of you, prepare for pain. You, your friend, and Jesus. Two nations plus Jesus. Two genders plus Jesus. "Apart from Me you can do nothing," Jesus said. Least of all love. This brings us back to the unique role of God's people in bringing reconciliation. We can bring healing because Jesus has freed us to be honest. We were reconciled to God through honest confession, and we reconcile people to people in the same way.

The greatest wounds in human history, the greatest injustices, have not happened through individual crimes, but rather through the institutions, systems, philosophies, cultures, religions, and governments of mankind. Because of this, we are tempted to excuse ourselves from all individual responsibility.

Unless individuals identify themselves with corporate entities, such as their nation of citizenship or the subculture of their ancestors, the act of honest confession can never take place. Without this confession, we will be left in a world of injury and offense in which no corporate sin is ever acknowledged, reconciliation never begins, and old hatreds deepen and are handed down to the next generation.

The followers of Jesus must step into this deadlock as agents of

healing. Within our ranks are representatives of every category of humanity. Trembling in our heavenly Father's presence, we see clearly the sins of humankind and have no inclination to cover them up. Thus, we are called to live out the Biblical practice of prayer with identification,* a neglected truth that releases revival and brings healing to the nations.

At present the world is filthy in its unresolved guilt and is desperate for cleansing. I have been surprised to see even secular politicians attempting reconciliation through open confession. Gorbachev asked forgiveness, as a Russian, for the massacre of captive Polish officers during World War II. Polish leader Lech Walesa in turn asked forgiveness of the Jews. In a historic speech before Israel's Parliament, he apologized for Polish complicity with the Nazi slaughter of Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. The present Japanese government has formally apologized to the Koreans for Japan's harsh colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula from 1910-1945. And the trend will continue. However, acknowledgment is unleashing pent-up anger rather than bringing true healing.

America is a small picture of the larger world. Our cities are now the greatest gatherings of ethnic and cultural diversity the world has ever seen. We have inherited the wounds of the world, the clash of ancient rivalries – and we have our own unfinished business, particularly with Native and African Americans.

Against this backdrop, an exciting new move of God's Spirit has begun to emerge. Believers are gathering to pray in city-wide prayer meetings. I have personally attended and spoken at united prayer gatherings in over 70 American cities in the last three years and have observed the healing grace of God as believers have gathered to repent and confess sin in places such as a slave-auction site or the location of an Indian massacre.

*The term identification is used in this article to signify the act of consciously including one's self within an identifiable category of human beings.

Intercessors are discovering that their most powerful tools are found within their own identity. You, too, can take the opportunity of confession, with identification, when you find it. Look at the circle of influence that God has given you. For instance, through your job. If you have joined the U.S. Army, been elected to state office, joined the police department, or become identified with any other vocation, you are an inheritor of its legacy and have become partly responsible for any unfinished business with God or offended persons.

It would be nice to see ourselves as just Americans without a hyphen, and maybe that day will come. But as long as wounds remain, we as believers must use every means within our power to cleanse and heal the land.

I was recently asked, "Does this mean that I have to ask every black person I meet for forgiveness just because I'm white?" Of course not. Do what love and wisdom dictate in any given circumstance. Realize that these are principles that should fit naturally into a believer's everyday life.

As you follow Jesus, God will call others to work beside you from a diversity of backgrounds. Think again about the people whom God has already put in your life;

they're not just associates. God is up to something. Who's hanging out at the edges of your life right now? I know of many white believers who long for a black friend; I know immigrant families who would throw themselves into fellowship with Americans if shown the least hospitality. Yes, there's awkwardness – yes, it takes more work than just running with your own crowd – but the rewards are great. Let's go for it!

A list of America's wounds includes the following:

- Race to Race (*Native American vs European American*)
- Class to Class (*Homeless Person vs Holders of Home Equity*)
- Culture to Culture (*Immigrant vs Native-Born*)
- Gender to Gender (*Working Woman vs Male Hierarchy*)
- Vocation to Vocation (*LA Police Department vs Civil Rights Advocates*)
- Institution to Institution (*Auto Industry Management vs Organized Labor*)
- Region to Region (*Westside vs South Central LA*)
- Governed to Government (*College-Age Youth vs Vietnam Era Government*)
- Religion to Religion (*Muslim vs Christian*)
- Denomination to Denomination (*Protestant vs Catholic*)
- Enterprise to Enterprise (*Monopoly vs Small Business*)
- Ideology to Ideology (*Leftist vs Rightist Political Parties*)
- Nationality to Nationality (*Americans vs Cubans*)
- Generation to Generation (*60s Youth vs Parents*)
- Family to Family (*Neighbor vs Neighbor*)

Discovering your influence as a reconciler:

In order to explore your sphere of identity as a reconciler, fill in the details alongside the list below:

My gender is: _____

My generation is: _____

My native language is: _____

Subcultures I identify with are: _____

My class (*socioeconomic status*) would be seen by others as: _____

My religious history has been: _____

My religious affiliation now is: _____

My family name is: _____

List some of the movements, ideologies, and institutions that have touched your family line as far back as you know: _____

My location (*region - city - suburb - neighborhood*) is: _____

My vocation is: _____

To the people of my extended family I am: _____

(*daughter - sister - wife - mother*) _____

Referring to the places of wounds listed earlier, look at what you have written and consider the opportunities for possible reconciliation created by your unique identity.
