

Response to Anti-Asian Sentiment

Dear Redeemer,

Many of you are aware of the shooting in Atlanta where the lives of 8 people were tragically taken away, 6 who were Asian women. At this time, while the motivation and intent behind the shooting is unclear, the impact is deeply felt. One such impact for many has been the deep fear, worry, pain and anger over anti-Asian American sentiment that has manifested itself in various ways over the past year. In addition, such a tragedy highlights yet again the pain and brokenness of racial sin that has infected all of humanity.

As the news and social media erupt once again with a myriad of thoughts and opinions, I want to share some initial thoughts to our church family that I hope will help us process and respond as followers of Jesus.

This past Sunday, I talked about the importance of having **Jesus as the grid** in which we view everything. I highlighted 3 gospel perspectives that we as a church need to keep in mind, to help us process everything in life, including this tragedy and the charged but important topic of race in our day:

- Doctrinalists (Head): *How do we Biblically understand what's going on?*
- Pietists (Heart): *How do we Biblically engage with our hearts with what's going on?*
- Culturalists (Hands): *How do we Biblically respond in our actions with what's going on?*

I want to approach this first from the heart, then head, and then hands.

How do we Biblically engage with our hearts what's going on?

On a personal level, my heart is all over the place. Incidents against Asian Americans remind me of some painful memories growing up of being made fun of for looking different, and there is a tendency in me to stuff it in and feel angry at the same time. I am worried for what my kids think about such news of attacks against Asian Americans, whether they stuff their feelings in or respond to hatred with hatred.

I am grieved and saddened over the brokenness and evil over racial sin, and I know you are too.

The Bible gives us permission to be honest – to admit and express our fear, anger, confusion and doubt. Jesus grieved over the effects of sin when his friend Lazarus died. Jesus was angry at the hypocrisy and materialism taking place in his Father's house, and He overturned the moneychanger's tables in the Temple court. We too are angry and hurt. And we can and should acknowledge this as followers of Jesus. We can and should lament privately and corporately. As Christians, we do not hide and ignore painful events, but we need to process such events before God and as a people of God.

However, the Bible does not permit our feelings to take over and be our guide. Doing so can lead to mistrust, vengeance, and cynicism – all which are manifestations of idolatry. Rather, the Bible seems to emphasize time and time again the principle of love – love that bears one another’s burdens, weeps and supports others. Let’s do that, especially within our church family, with gospel sensitivity towards those who are hurting. Love also protects. In the gospel, let’s say to one another, “I am here for you. I am standing with you. You are not alone!”

How do we Biblically understand what’s going on?

Time does not permit me to unpack the manifold ways the Bible speaks of our relationship with our neighbors: image bearers of God; loving our neighbor; how the idolatry to a particular ethnicity leads to hatred or indifference towards people who are a different ethnicity; how the Scriptures call followers of Jesus to be strong and courageous, yet weep and mourn with those who are hurting; to remember that because God cares about justice especially towards the “other”, therefore all Christians must too.

As a pastor, my encouragement for us would be to seek understanding by thinking Scripturally far, far, more than thinking about what the news and social media and pundits are saying. For some (actually, it probably is for many), wisdom entails not engaging on social media at all. It can be toxic and dangerous, and lead to schism, pride, and division. Consider: how much time is given in your life by reading and wrestling and being shaped by the Scriptures, versus reading and listening to and being shaped by various news reports, articles, memes, and podcasts?

For everyone, the grid of Jesus must shape what we listen to and how we process what people are saying. There may be truths in what people say, but without a Biblical lens, we can take those truths and feed our anger and perspective, even weaponizing Scripture to uphold an issue that is near and dear to us, but has become an idol itself. One way we can tell if this is happening – when truths become reductionistic and it leads to actions that trigger either fight or flight in us.

How do we Biblically respond in our actions with what’s going on?

There is a great need for wisdom among Christians today. Wisdom for responding appropriately. Passionately. Compassionately. Sacrificially. Faithfully. Thoughtfully. Courageously. While there is no blueprint for how to respond to this tragedy (as well as past and future tragedies), I want to share some practical thoughts to my church family.

God has wired us with unique personalities and temperaments. Some are activators, while others are feelers, while still others are process oriented. Some lead with “head”, others with “heart”, and others with “hands.” There is a wonderful beauty to how the Holy Spirit works in each of us by way of our strengths. And yet, those very things that are strengths can also be our underbelly when we forget the gospel: responding too quickly with words without realizing the impact it is making on others, making it more hurtful than helpful; focusing so deeply on being theologically correct but failing to respond with empathy and action; taking to social media as our “action step” and posting something, thinking that’s what it means to “respond” faithfully.

Prayerfully, and with gospel community and accountability, we need one another to live out Biblical wisdom. And because of sin, we will have blind spots, make mistakes, and frustrate others. And this is where the gospel of truth, goodness, beauty, forgiveness and mercy must become the aroma of Christ in our church.

I know much more can be said – more insight and wisdom and guidance, and I recognize my limitations, that I myself need more wisdom in what I say and write. I hope these thoughts can be helpful in some way as you and I seek to follow Jesus in a world that is broken, and yet one in which Jesus has come to redeem and restore.

That we may give our heads, hearts, and hands to Jesus,

Pastor Paul