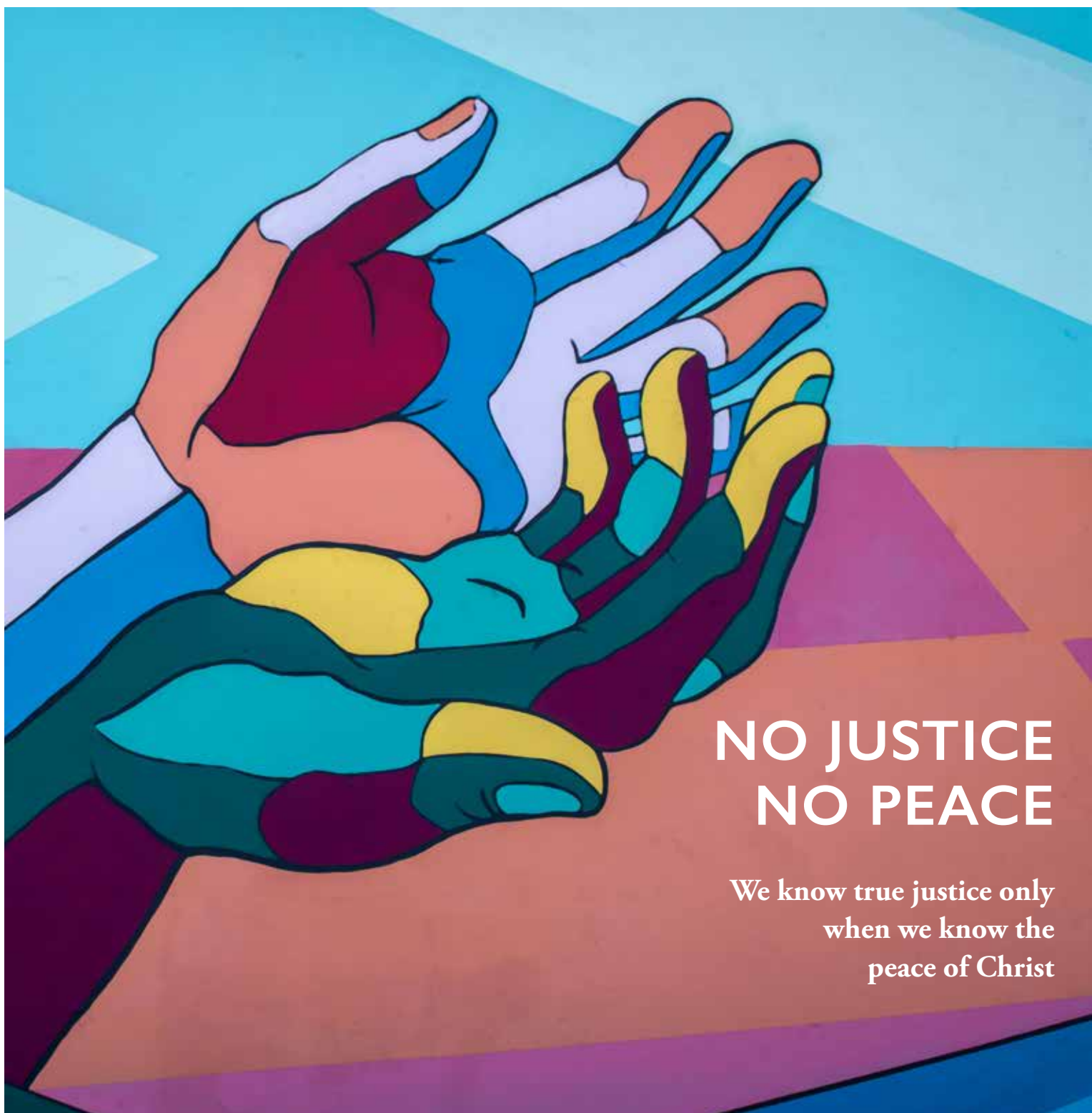


Belong



**NO JUSTICE
NO PEACE**

We know true justice only
when we know the
peace of Christ



Photo: Kotangens, istockphoto.com

NO JUSTICE NO PEACE



BY CHARLES TAYLOR
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We are at a time of crisis in the United States – people are still suffering over the loss of loved ones during the coronavirus epidemic. Our hearts, prayers, and sadness go out to those who have lost loved ones, those who are still in hospitals isolated and alone and those fighting the virus from home. On the heels of this great pandemic we are faced with another crisis that has been smoldering for years in our country – like kindling on a fire have been the seeds of hatred – institutional racism, structural systemic inequality, and police brutality have once again erupted and spilled into the streets and all of our lives. “No Justice, No Peace” is being shouted from the rooftops, for there can be no peace in this world or any world where there is injustice. It might feel peaceful for those in control, but for those who are being mistreated, marginalized, and killed, there is no peace.

As believers in the Way and followers of Christ, to know true justice is to know we have been made right with God through Jesus Christ – forgiven, accepted, and transformed. To know true peace, is to have peace that transforms our lives. This peace dictates that all humans are created in the image of God and every human is to be loved and

“RACISM IS AN AFFRONT TO THE VALUE OF INDIVIDUALS CREATED IN GOD’S IMAGE AND TO THE DIVINELY DESIGNED DIVERSITY OF REDEEMED HUMANITY”.

valued – never using skin color or anything else as a determining factor of how someone is treated. Christ died for all humanity – all with the same intrinsic value and worth.

Christ followers empathize with those who are hurting, have lost loved ones, and feel the evil sting of racial injustice. Any person of color has felt this pain, many of us have been profiled, and many of us have even lost family members at the hands of racial violence and injustice. Empathizing begins with listening to others – hearing the deep thoughts and feelings of the other without our pre-conceived opinions and evaluations.

As we look at the recent and past events of our country – horrific injustices, murders, and a whole range of inappropriate responses – we see a great need for monumental lasting change not only in our society but also in the transformation of hearts. Racism has no place anywhere. It's not black against white, or race against race – it's humanity against the tyranny of racism and injustice. It's love against hate, its unity against domineering division.

Recent events surrounding the wrongful deaths of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, Breonna Taylor in Kentucky, and George Floyd in Minnesota (and many countless more unnamed, but lamented) are tragic and illustrate severe racial injustices and systemic inequalities in the United States. I am angered and saddened over the recurring trauma experienced by African Americans. (I relate to Ephesians 4:26, which reminds us it is okay to be angry, just don't sin in your anger.) Racism and any violent abuse of power must be condemned; there has to be a call for justice for victims and their families. As humans, we should combat attitudes and systems that perpetuate racism. I am grateful for those law enforcement officers who honorably serve and protect our communities and urge our members to uphold them in prayer.

Racism is an affront to the value of individuals created in God's image and to the divinely designed diversity of redeemed humanity. This denial of personhood and belonging runs contrary to the peace and unity that God intended in the beginning and that the Bible depicts as our destiny.

Racism appears in beliefs or practices that distinguish or elevate one race over others. When

accompanied and sustained by imbalances of power, prejudice moves beyond individual relationships to institutional practices. This racial injustice is the systemic perpetuation of racism. Its existence has unfairly benefitted some and burdened others simply due to the color of their skin and the cultural associations based upon perceptions of race.

No race or ethnicity is greater or more valuable than another. We believe that the good news of Jesus Christ has the power to break down racial and ethnic barriers (Ephesians 2:14–18). It has the power to love and forgive and the power to be all that God created us to be as a nation!

SPEAKING UP

Why should we speak up? Why must the church speak up?

1) We speak up because we have love and empathy for those in pain and suffering from injustice.

Paul reminds us to rejoice with those who are rejoicing, and to weep with those who are weeping (Romans 12:15). This is a time for empathy and compassion.

We understand pain, we understand suffering, we understand grief, but we cannot claim to understand the grief, pain and suffering someone else is going through. So the first thing to do is acknowledge the pain, listen to the grief, and then join them in their suffering. Joining them means hearing them, standing up for what is wrong, and speaking against injustice. We speak up because we are affected by brothers and sisters facing pain, and grief, and suffering as the result of injustice and mistreatment. Speaking up does not mean joining others in sinful reactions. Neither does speaking up mean offering empty platitudes. Many of us have experienced going through a deep personal trial and a Christian friend feels compelled to quote Romans 8:28 and remind us that God said all things will work together for good. Those in pain don't need to be reminded of the promises as much as they need to feel your understanding, your love and your empathy. Being present is often more powerful than any words expressed.

2) We speak up because speaking up is a mandate of Jesus Christ to the church.

We are burdened by the same injustices Jesus dealt with as he stood in the synagogue and proclaimed, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners – [hatred, racism, greed, fear, anger, revenge and unforgiveness are all prisons] – and recovery of sight for the blind – [two types of blindness – where one just can’t see and where one refuses to see] – to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

This was Jesus proclaiming his mission for himself and the church. As the Father sent me, so I send you. Go and speak up!

3) We speak up because black lives matter – because all lives matter!

Black lives matter. What does this really mean – black lives matter? It means yes, all lives matter, but until black lives matter, all lives don’t matter because black lives are a part of all lives, and black lives have not mattered in many ways.

Genesis tells us all humanity was created in the image of God. Jesus lived, died and rose for all humanity. The same value placed on one life is the same value on all life.

I heard an example regarding the understanding of black lives matter: When an individual’s response to black lives matter is “all lives matter”, it’s like going to a funeral where someone has lost a child, and they are speaking about how much they loved their child and how painful the loss is and how much that child’s life mattered to them. Then someone stands up and says, hey my child’s life matters, too. Yes, your child’s life matters, but right now we are trying to help this mother process and heal from her loss. Yes, all lives matter, but unless black lives matter, how can one say all lives matter, when part of the “all” doesn’t matter to some?

We have to know that all lives matter to God. Our view of God can never match how infinitely big and eternal God is, but our view of God has to be huge! We have to believe that nothing human society says or does or writes can change what God has said about you and me! Redeemed, infinite worth, valued, called by name, made in his own image, intelligent, beautiful, chosen, forgiven, blessed!



Photo: Jon Tyson, unsplash.com

“WE HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT NOTHING HUMAN SOCIETY SAYS OR DOES OR WRITES CAN CHANGE WHAT GOD HAS SAID ABOUT YOU AND ME!”.

It is incongruent that human beings be treated unfairly, with disdain, disrespected or disregarded, because that is the opposite of how God created us to be treated. God created us to be in relationship with him for eternity. He determined our worth; he determined our value. No other human can determine that, only God can.

4) We speak up because we see the big picture.

One would be blind not to see and praise God for how things have changed through the years. Young people are motivated and mobilized to make things better. We see people from all races, colors, creeds, and cultures joined arm in arm marching and protesting and demonstrating peacefully – humans

against racism. As humanity, we join in one voice seeking justice, equality, peace, and hope. And we know that God is the answer! His kingdom is coming and not even the gates of hell can prevail against it!

Jesus said, I have come to give life and life more abundantly; the devil has come to kill, to steal, and to destroy.

We have to see the big picture. The battle might look like it's against flesh and blood, but the real battle, the invisible one, is not against flesh and blood, it is against principalities, evil in high places, demonic forces that thrive in hateful racism, injustice and promote eye-for-an-eye retaliation.

Jesus, however, came in the spirit of reconciliation and calls us to be reconcilers. He came to give us life in abundance – all of us. He came to show there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female – all are equally loved by him.

He came to bring us his justice.

“WE KNOW TRUE JUSTICE ONLY WHEN WE KNOW THE PEACE OF CHRIST”.

The crowds shout “No Justice, No Peace.” As believers we see things differently. When we know his justice, we will know peace. If we know Jesus, we know peace. In other words, we know true justice only when we know the peace of Christ.

He came and restored us to relationship with the Father. He brought two groups of people together – Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). He brought us together through his death on the cross. The cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. Christ came and preached peace to those who were outsiders and peace to those who were insiders. He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father.

Know justice, know peace. Know Jesus, know peace.

Charles Taylor is the pastor of Grace Communion Intenrational congregation in Miramar, Florida, USA.

“The harsh reality is race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability status and related categories all continue to determine the life chances and wellbeing of people in Britain in ways that are unacceptable and in many cases unlawful”.

*– Tendayi Achiume,
UN Special Rapporteur*

“The problem is that society is being lied to. Racism is based on a lie. God created one race, one blood. That’s the human race. The very idea of the gospel is that we would be one. The world would know that we are Christians because of our oneness, and because of our love”.

– John M. Perkins



Photo: Jon Tyson, unsplash.com

APOLOGY



BY GREG WILLIAMS
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Due to the heightened racial tension in the US a question has come up “Is GCI considering additional plans/actions for multi-racial outreach and inclusion?” It is without a doubt a matter that deserves proper attention, and in fact, it is not an issue that has been ignored. Please allow me to explain.

Historically, the roots of Grace Communion International come from the Worldwide Church of God. Racial bias in the WCG was primarily based on Herbert Armstrong’s misguided doctrine of British-Israelism that kept non-Israelite peoples (Gentiles—which included all people of color) as second class and therefore inferior.

This heretical and false teaching created division and mistreatment of people of color. Noticeable limitations were placed on Black members and leaders and many suffered from racial slurs and prejudice that were simply wrong.

Under the leadership of Joseph Tkach Sr. and his son Joseph Tkach Jr. there was major doctrinal reform leading to a greater understanding of the New Testament teaching that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but we are all one in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28).

The Tkaches commissioned and sanctioned Pastor Curtis May and Greg Albrecht to oversee the Office of Reconciliation Ministries.

**“ALL HUMANS,
COLLECTIVELY
AND
INDIVIDUALLY,
DESERVE LOVE,
HONOR, AND
RESPECT”**

**– GCI STATEMENT
OF BELIEFS**

These men, along with other key pastors, worked tirelessly traveling the country and holding weekend conferences that did much good in acknowledging past wrongs and providing healing for a more positive future.

More recently Regional Director Jeff Broadnax, along with several pastors, interns and members, helped organize gatherings called “Together in Christ.” The idea was birthed out of conversations with our community of GCI interns. Though space for participants was somewhat limited, these weekends allowed for honest discussion and were conducted from the platform that Jesus is the unifying factor for all broken relationships and lives. True human togetherness and unity can be found only in surrendered relationship to Jesus.

“Together in Christ” was intentionally hosted by local GCI churches because this is the space where we should be able to come together with our hurts and differences and find forgiveness and restoration in the presence and power of Jesus. It is my hope that our GCI churches are maturing in Christ and are healthy enough to weather any social challenges or obstacles that come our way, and we can continue to hold “Together in Christ” events to address difficult social matters.

If you are a person of color and never had the opportunity to participate in any of these GCI sponsored events, my prayer is you will have an opportunity in the future. For those of you who have never heard a public apology for any racial slurs or mistreatments you have suffered within our church, let me say on behalf of our denomination: Please accept our heartfelt apology for the individual and systemic discriminatory and racist actions, teachings and culture we openly or ignorantly embraced and allowed. Please forgive us. May we never repeat the sins of the past, and through the power of the Spirit may we value all people as beloved children of God treating everybody with genuine love and respect.”

Together in Christ we can and will go forward!

Dr Greg Williams is the President of Grace Communion International

From the NMT

As a National Ministry Team we would like to acknowledge publicly that this issue is not a US only issue and that in the UK and Ireland our members from ethnic minorities have also experienced racial slurs, prejudice and divisive practice that were simply wrong. We therefore add our voices to Greg Williams in offering a public apology for any racial slurs or mistreatments you have suffered within our church, and say on behalf of the denomination in the UK and Ireland: “Please accept our heartfelt apology for the individual and systemic discriminatory and racist actions, teachings and culture we openly or ignorantly embraced and allowed. Please forgive us. May we never repeat the sins of the past, and through the power of the Spirit may we value all people as beloved children of God treating everybody with genuine love and respect.”

As the body of Christ, we all have been chosen by God and included in his Kingdom - a Kingdom in which there is not “Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” (Col 3:11 ESV). A Kingdom that is not divided by the colour of our skin, the language we speak, or where we come from. Let us all continually strive to ensure that the Church is a place of safety, of love and of inclusion to all, and that whatever we do, in all our words and actions, we give glory to our great Triune God.

*Your brothers in Christ,
Peter Mill, Barry Robinson and Gavin
Henderson
(nmt@gracecom.church)*

ENGAGE IN THE SPIRIT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

How did the New Testament church respond to difficult times, and are there lessons for us today?



BY JAMES HENDERSON

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Some days I think it'll never end!

I'm referring to the coronavirus crisis. The economic and social consequences of the virus outbreak are being felt throughout Europe. It reminds me in some ways of the fragility of the New Testament church when the Gospel was just beginning to spread out from Jerusalem. Believers lived in hard times, sometimes under oppressive regimes and typically in societies that cared little about the message of Christ and where there was much injustice and prejudice.

How did the New Testament church respond to their situation, and are there lessons for us today in what happened? This is a major topic of discussion in Christian circles, and many books and articles have been written about it, and in this short article we can barely touch the surface of the question. What comes to mind immediately is the active life of the new church as mentioned in Acts 2. It highlights a focus on Christ and his teachings, the practice of communion, the importance of fellowship and practical acts of care for one another. These responses were good for them and they seem to fit well for us today.

Other important ideas stand out as we continue to read the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul. For Paul what mattered was the Gospel of Christ, and that it should be witnessed to in all circumstances, even in difficult situations. The believer's own personal life should be led in a way that is worthy of



Photo: istockphoto.com

the Gospel (Philippians 1:27), and we should pray so that we recognise opportunities for advancing the Gospel. Prayers should be made for those in government authority, and also, of course, for the church and for those who are sick and suffering. Bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving and let your soul be flooded with the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Some have wondered whether this might be a time to call for national and congregational times of fasting. On rare occasions the President of our Church has called for a time of voluntary prayer and fasting, and our members were able to engage in it with due regard to their health and particular circumstances, but should this idea be duplicated at regional, national or congregational levels?

Although there are records of national fasting (e.g. the story of Esther), of regular monthly (Zechariah 7:5) and sometimes weekly fasts (Luke 18:12), and of liturgical fasting (e.g. the Levitical Day of Atonement) in the Old Testament, the New Testament is comparatively quiet on the subject of collective fasting. New Testament churches such as

the Corinthians, Galatians, etc were full of internal problems and external challenges and yet there is no indication that Paul called for a congregational fast to address the issues. Neither is it recorded that John, Peter, James, Jude or other New Testament writers or leaders did so. The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 did not involve a church-wide day of fasting. As we study the New Testament and note how the early church operated, there is no clear precedent for calling congregational or national days of fasting. Fasting was practiced in relation to choosing key spiritual leaders and was also a free-will option for believers who might want to spend a period of self-examination before difficult personal commitments and decisions.

Times have, of course, moved on since the New Testament, but, still, we should minister more in the spirit of the New Testament than of the Old Testament when fasting was regarded as a sign of piety and as a means to get God to listen when he appeared to be silent. Jesus choose to fast before Satan tried to entice him away from the Father, but he did not command his disciples to fast. He explained that he was with them. The Lord is still with his followers through the indwelling of his Holy Spirit. Jesus is “the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). We do not need to fast to maintain or achieve God’s abiding presence within us.

BECOMING A TRUSTEE

Have you considered whether you’d like to become a Trustee for the Church?

Responsible charities and companies often have governance boards that that help them operate legally and within accountability. The UK Board of Trustees provides this for our church here.

From time to time we need new Trustees because existing trustees may be coming to the end of his or her appointed term of service, or because we wish to broaden the current Board’s skillset. A Trustee’s term of office is three years. Each trustee may serve for no more than three terms of office, nine years in total, before retiring for at least one year. This

Today’s world is so different in many ways from that of the New Testament, especially in regard to health and safety issues, and in regard to duty of care. If anyone chooses to fast, do not do so against medical advice. If someone has a serious health consideration, he or she should discuss it with a doctor first. Fasting is a matter of optionality and not of command, and no one should be coerced into it in any way.

Whatever our approach to fasting on a personal level, let’s remember to pray for the Gospel outreach and to engage in the spirit of the New Testament church. Let’s embrace the opportunities presented to us and witness to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

“A fast is not a hunger strike. Fasting submits to God’s commands. A hunger strike makes God [or tries to!] submit to our demands.”

– Edwin Louis Cole



Photo: istockphoto.com

requires that new trustees are added to the Board on a regular basis.

The Board would welcome new applications, and, for more information on the process of application ,and of what it means to be a Trustee, please go to https://gracecom.church/about_us/board_of_trustees.php.

THE WALL OF HOSTILITY

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,”
Ephesians 2:14 (NIV)



BY DOUG BASS
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In Jerusalem in 1871 a block of limestone (pictured right) was discovered with the following notice engraved on it: ‘No stranger is to enter within the balustrade around the temple and enclosure: whoever is caught will be responsible to himself for his death, which will ensue.’

This balustrade was the ‘wall of hostility’ Paul was referring to in the above verse. It was between four and five feet high, and no Gentile (non-Jew) was allowed to cross it on pain of death. It was low enough that they could look over it and see God’s sanctuary from a distance, but they couldn’t approach it. Only Jews could do that. Paul says that in Jesus this wall has been metaphorically demolished. As someone with one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent, I’m delighted.

Straddling any wall is an uncomfortable position. As it is I am half Jewish and half Gentile, but all Christian, and that’s what counts! In Christ we are all one, no matter what our race, culture, gender or colour. No one is superior to any other person on any count. The world has that lesson still to learn. Jesus’ perfect life, and death on the cross fulfilled the Law that had separated Jew and Gentile. He died for the sins of the whole world, not just the sins of the Jews (1 John 2:2). Since that time both Jews and non-Jews can approach the sanctuary, indeed not just approach, but enter into the true sanctuary through and with Jesus Christ.

What a shame that people, even whole nations, see others as inferior. Racism is a curse of humanity. If only people could realise that to be named a son

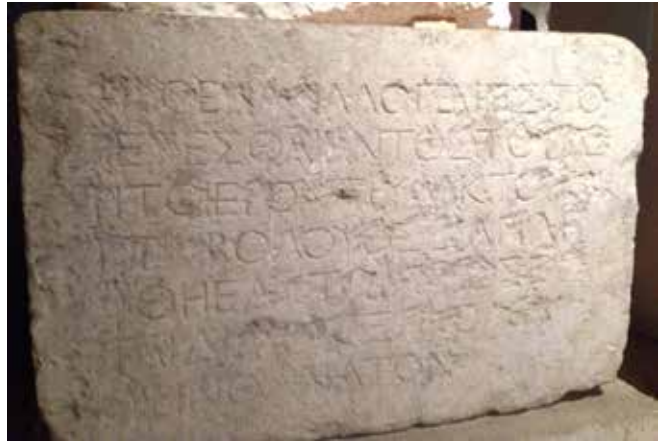


Photo: wikicommons

or daughter of the Most High God is the greatest privilege any living being could have. Not only that, but Christ is the heir to all things and we are joint-heirs with Him (Romans 8:17). Should be enough for everyone then! Why seek to ‘lord’ it over others? Thankfully our loving God is reaching out to both Jew and Gentile with this knowledge and a call to believe. Let’s join Him in His work of mercy and salvation.

Prayer: “Father, we so look forward to the day when people everywhere will comprehend the reconciliation that Jesus accomplished on the Cross. Surely in that Great Day bigotry will die. Amen”

This article is from our Day by Day archive. For more daily bible studies like this, please subscribe at: www.daybyday.org.uk.

AUTUMN CELEBRATIONS UPDATE

PAIGNTON 2020

BY DAVID GIBBS

Following Government guidelines with the relaxing of conditions and the opening of holiday venues, we have been in close contact with Beverley Holidays about the viability of our Paignton Celebration going ahead in October 2020. While Beverley Holidays are open for normal caravan bookings, they have not yet been able to confirm if their hall will be available for us to use, and what restrictions/requirements will be in place.

We are currently working with Beverley Park to see if we can find a way forward, but in the meantime, we would request that no new reservations are made. For those who have already paid their deposit please do not make any additional payments until the situation is clarified.

We will post an additional announcement once the picture is a little clearer. Please contact me if you have any questions at david.gibbs@gracecom.church. Thank you for your understanding, patience and prayers.

GALWAY 2020

BY JOE CASEY AND PETE MILL

Regretfully we have had to cancel the Galway Celebration for 2020 due to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 situation. In Galway, the Salthill Hotel has reopened but the number of people feeling confident that they would attend is really too small to make the event viable, especially with the additional requirements due to COVID-19. The Galway celebration is one of the highlights of our year and we will dearly miss the time we normally spend with you all and hope that we will have the chance to make up for it in 2021!

If you have any comments or questions about this please email Pete at peter.mill@gracecom.church or Joe at limerick@gracecom.church.



Photo: visitsouthdevon.co.uk

BRIDLINGTON 2020

BY BARRY ROBINSON

In Bridlington, although the Expanse hotel has reopened, its social distancing measures include only allowing people to enter the hotel through the main entrance and exit through the room where we would hold services. To maintain social distancing in the meeting room they could only permit up to 30 people and so are unable to accommodate a group of our size. Many of our members who had planned to come have also informed us that they are no longer able to come due as they are particularly at risk should they contract COVID-19.

It is therefore with much sadness that we have had to cancel Bridlington this year. We have confirmed with the hotel that those who have booked to stay at the Expanse hotel will be able to get a refund of their deposit. Please mention that you are with the 'October church conference' when requesting a refund.

We realise that this is disappointing news for those planning to attend either Galway or Bridlington, however, we are looking into what online alternatives we can offer, and more information will be given nearer the time.

If you have any comments or questions about this please email me at barry.robinson@gracecom.church.

A.D. 2020

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matt. 11:28-30



BY JEFF BROADNAX
info@gracecom.church

A.D. 2020. Any description would have to include the words pandemic, unrest, social distancing, recession, upheaval, and disconnection. The first half of this year has left many physically weary, financially burdened, and carrying the heavy emotional and spiritual weights of grief and loss.

But Anno Domini (A.D.) 2020 means, “in the year of our Lord” 2020. So, let’s look at the year through his eyes. When we do, we notice brothers and sisters in Christ learning to share the gospel in new ways. We see people “loving your neighbor” daily and personally rather than generically. We see brothers and sisters crossing human lines of separation and seeking unity over division. A much better view, huh?

When we struggle, Jesus calls us to himself and promises to yoke with us, making our burdens easier and lighter. He promises rest for our soul. He only asks that we come to him and join in what he is doing.



Photo: Erikona, istockphoto.com

This day, this week, this month, and this year belong to Jesus. Will you join him?

Prayer: “Lord, we lay our everyday burdens at your feet and thank you for inviting us to learn of you and be embraced by you. Please grant us rest for our souls and empower us to offer that same rest to those who need it today. Amen.”

Jeff Broadnax is the Regional Director for Grace Communion International in Northeastern USA



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