

***"Be Reconciled to One Another:
A Covenant of Intentionality"***

by

James Thomas and Charles Walker

The following pages are part of a larger seminar that Charles and I have led over recent years in Louisiana and Glorieta for students and directors alike. We have been amazed at the responses we have received over the materials and presentations on racism. Both of us believe there is still a great need for racial healing in our land. While the following dialogue is but a small portion of our seminar, it is truly the most meaningful to us. Charles and I both hope these words will be beneficial to you in your walk.

Charles Walker: I am a child of the Cold War. I remember laying in my bed at night listening to the B-52 bombers taking off at various times throughout the night from the Air Force base not far from my home. I remember the rhetoric that told us what the Russians would do to us if they ever invaded our country. I remember the motto from that day -- "Better Dead Than Red."

I am also a child of the South. I grew up with all the racial stereotypes about "Colored People" that were a part of our culture of that day and time. I heard all the words about how colored people were not as intelligent as whites nor as industrious. I grew up in that day and time. I grew up in a day and time when there were water fountains marked for "Whites" and "Colored." During those days, a white person would never drink from a water fountain marked "Colored Only" and a colored person would dare not drink

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from a fountain marked "White Only." I grew up in a day and time when there were restrooms for "White" men and "White" women at the local gas station, but if there was a restroom for "Colored," it was generally unisex, it was around the back of the station and it was not fit for human use. I vividly remember the day my boyhood curiosity prompted me to walk behind the station to see where "Colored" people used the bathroom. That horrible image remains etched in my mind to this day. I realized that there were very different standards for "White" people and "Colored" people. I grew up in a day where the Church was torn between whether we would allow "Colored " people into our Church. I grew up in a time when we were certainly kept segregated, in our own communities and schools. I am a child of the South.

I am a child of the South. But God changed my mind one summer and interestingly enough through BSU Summer Missions. For ten weeks that summer, I spent my life with 19 other students one of whom was a student from Langston University. It was the first time in my life that I had spent an extensive amount of time with a person of another race. I discovered that summer that the stereotypes I had learned as a child, some of which I had learned in church, were simply not true. That summer God changed my mind and I recognized that a lot of what I had believed was not true. Not only did I realize that a lot of what I had been taught wasn't true, I also realized that a lot of what I had been taught wasn't right. While serving as a BSU Summer Missionary, my mind was transformed. Today, I come making my confession to you that I was taught a lie about a lot of different things about "Colored" people. Some of

which I learned in church, school, family and society in general.

James Thomas: I too am a child of the South. It is ironic that you and I lived in the same city. However we lived in two different worlds. I remember something called Jim Crowism. I was about 5 or six years old. My father was 53 when I was born. We were going to the hospital one day after a very special occasion. I remember vividly being dressed in the same garb as my father. My father had on this incredible Stetson hat. I had on a Stetson hat. He had on this long trench coat, I had on a long trench coat. The vest, his tie, his suit, the shoes being shined. My father was an extraordinarily dignified spirit and I remember wearing his spirit that day too. I was fully man! Still a child, yet fully man in the presence of my father. His dignity showered me that day with that comfortable expensive clothing. While passing by that hospital office that day I looked over on the door and I saw "Colored." I was a child but I remember being so indignant! I remember that vividly. That was the first time I ever experienced it. As I look back on it now, my parents sheltered me from so much.

I saw it once again on another occasion, when my father, the "deity" of my life at that time, took me to work one day. He was very laid back on his job and yet enjoyed great respect there. There was a very creative atmosphere with people working together. There was no hostility. When it came time for lunch, I saw my father -- the Prince of my life -- go in through the back door. My father and all of his glory and gray hair. He never spoke to me about what was going on, but somehow I knew it was because of the color of his skin.

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So I think that if I did not adapt a hatred for "Whites," there was something there I didn't trust, there was something there I knew wasn't right and it was something about them that I knew didn't honor me with dignity. This was as a child. When the Lord Jesus Christ came into my life at the age of 21, I too recognized that all men can love each other through Jesus Christ. In our culture and I believe in your culture too, there is a hymn that says "And He rolled all my burdens away." Through a regenerative process, God rolled the burden of racial prejudice and hostility away that I carried. Because of Jesus Christ today, I can look you in the eyes and say that I have been changed and I am willing to move on to the next level in love because of Jesus Christ.

Our relationship can cause and sometimes does cause severe criticism and we may be ostracized for it. At the risk of being called an "Uncle Tom," I will say to you, Charles, because you are in my life, I am a better man. Though the bulk of your heritage may be Eurocentric and mine Afrocentric, I am a better man because of you. What angers me about that is the whole issue of white flight. Had not the white churches with all of their resources, with all of their educated theologians, with all of their strategies for ministry, had they not left our communities, they could have very well been an impact upon me and so many other people of color. Which raises the issue: "What about your own black churches and your own theologians?" I think from God's perspective, sometimes color supersedes this little thing that we're into. I am impacted today, I could have been impacted earlier. This whole issue of segregation and racism in this country and in the church must be addressed. If

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there are only one or two of us, we need to keep fighting because I have been impacted by a man of a different color. I believe Jesus Christ is calling us -- Jesus said he wanted his church to be one, Jesus deal with the whole issue of one blood -- and I do not think that we can sweep this blood issue up under the rug and move on -- I think now is the time for us to begin to move in that direction.

Charles Walker: James, I am sorry that you and your mother and father had to suffer such indignity when you were growing up. I am sorry that you grew up in a world where in the midst of all your prim and proper dress and your high feelings of dignity, that you had to walk through a door that read "Colored" and recognize that there was something different about you that threaten that sense of dignity your father had instilled in you. I am sorry that you grew up in a world where you saw the "Prince" of your life degraded as he walked into the back door of the cafe to get something for the two of you to eat. I am sorry that you and your mother and father had to drink from "Colored Only" water fountains. I am sorry that you and your parents had to use such deplorable restroom facilities and that your ears had to hear demeaning language. I am sorry that our society did not treat you with the same dignity and respect that your father sought to teach you about yourself. I am sorry that matters of equality and justice were ignored with regard to your race. I am sorry that you and your family were judged by the melanin content of your skin and not the goodness of your heart.

James, while we are not called to change the past, we can shape the future. Under the conviction of God's Holy Spirit that these racial attitudes and injustices in our past were wrong, I

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you have given, I take fully. First of all because I need to hear your apologies. Secondly, I need to feel your apologies. Thirdly, I need to see your apologies in action in pursuit of justice for all. I accept them fully! A part of me is ignited again with dignity by what you have said. The great colossal step for Ruben, my son; Christina, my daughter and Alva, my wife which may not be easily understood is the recognition that in spite of the historical difficulties and atrocities in this country, as a black man in this country, I need you and I love you. I promise to pass on to my son and my daughter and my beloved wife to respect you, to respect your historical contributions and to believe in you and I covenant not to teach them to walk into the stereotypes that we have been so faithfully groomed to believe. I accept your words of apologies, I accept your life; I accept you as being a relevant part of my total personhood. I speak for my son who we are teaching to be free and whole. I would like to apologize for my people, for myself for not being forgiving. Christ says that if I do not forgive you, the Ultimate Creator will not forgive me. I must walk in that forgiveness and I relish it and I promise you I will teach my children to walk in that forgiveness and to move on to greater heights.

James and I believe there is room for others in our "Covenant of Intentionality." Join us please, as we seek to put the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into action. Grace and Peace to You!