



June 26, 2020

Atlanta Metro Baptist Association Statement on Racial Justice and Unity

INTRODUCTION

If there was ever a time that we as the people of God in the United States needed to acknowledge the long-term historical presence of racism, admit that racial injustice exists today, and announce the need to end systemic racism, it surely is now. As people of faith, we hold dearly to the cross of Christ that provides our hope for the future. We focus on our relationship with Christ and our relationship with all humanity. We believe God is calling the world to stand with our African American brothers and sisters who have been oppressed, marginalized, and murdered simply because of the color of their skin. We are troubled at the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and countless others. To this end, we vow to use our voices, votes, pulpits, and influence to promote reconciliation, righteousness and justice.

We, as Atlanta Metro Baptist Association, wholeheartedly stand by our commitment and concerted efforts for righteousness and justice. As an established association of approximately 100 churches who transcend size, location, and race, we partner together to positively change and improve the Metro Atlanta Region. Atlanta is a great city that has witnessed the power of God in times past and we believe it will be a better city because Atlanta Metro Baptist Association will not be silent or complicit in unrighteousness or injustice. Although each Atlanta Metro Baptist church is autonomous and uniquely different, we are similar in that we want to engage our communities with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We acknowledge that the only power capable of making a lasting difference in Metro Atlanta and our world is the power of Jesus Christ. Jesus died so that others may live. We live in Christ, so that others may not die. "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40 ESV). While physical death is inescapable, eternal life is available in Christ. This truth of eternal life in Jesus is what provides our ever-present hope and is our unifying cry.

COMMITMENT

God, through the prophet Micah, asks "...what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8 ESV)? In order to satisfy the Lord's requirements in this scripture, we believe God calls us to be spiritually conscious and socially engaged. In other words, we are concerned about the eternity of one's soul and concerned about the conditions of a person's lived experiences. To this end, we will challenge

Atlanta Metro Baptist congregations to continue to biblically pursue the salvation of all humanity through Jesus Christ and to work to alleviate and rectify injustices in our nation.

As a body of churches, we will motivate our churches and pastors to speak out against any form of injustice or oppression. We take our cue from Jesus, who declares “[t]he Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of our Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19 ESV). Our God wants us to stand with the oppressed, we believe, spiritually and physically.

We ask our political leaders to take seriously the discussion to evaluate and restructure our public policies on policing, incarceration, equitable access to bails and bonds, and equitable sentencing for crimes. Our cities face a crisis of systemic racism that must be alleviated for all races and ethnicities.

We additionally, ask our political leaders to consider how we may provide more opportunities for all races and ethnicities in our economy through employment and positive business policies. Our nation and cities require a welcoming environment for refugees and immigrants to seek to build a new life amongst us without prejudice.

PATH FORWARD

We are reminded once again that evil lurks in our world. Murder, abuse of power, and injustice strike with brutality and devastation. Our African American brothers and sisters have felt the long-standing injustices that began with oppression and now continue through systemic and overt racism. We must do our part to stand as a family that feels the pain of another when the other hurts.

In the days ahead, we stand for the cause of justice with the Word of God in our hearts and with God on our side. Our aim is to live out Jesus’ command to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:39 ESV) in real, practical, and transforming ways. We remember the words of Jesus to those who had ministered to others selflessly: “...the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Matthew 25:40 ESV).

We will continue to move forward by loving our neighbors, listening to one another, and leading out of our devotion to Christ and for the betterment of our region and churches.

LOVE

We commit to equality and unity under our one loving Creator. We commit to treating one another with respect and dignity as one created in the image of God, an image-bearer of God. We commit to love in our deeds and in truth. We commit to lift one another up and to bear another’s burdens.

The pure heart of God drives us toward love. “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8 ESV). We remain confident that to know God is to not only love Him but to love those He has created. God’s love shows no distinction or favoritism. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that **whoever** believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 ESV, bold font added).

The pure heart of God drives brothers toward unity. The Psalmist celebrates “...how good and pleasant it is when brothers (and sisters) dwell in unity” (Psalm 133:1 ESV “and sisters” added)! The Apostle Paul, in the biblical letter to the Ephesian church, reminds us that we are to live our lives “...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2–3 ESV). Being sheltered in the love of the most high God, through Jesus Christ, and bearing with one another in love, we want to maintain unity. The love of God brings us together.

With this unity and love for one another, motivated by the love of God from within, we stand together as a family.

LISTEN

We commit to engage in honest and humble conversations with our neighbors to gain understanding. Racism diminishes in the heart of one who lovingly listens to others in the context of relationship. Racism reflects a heart condition. The heart and mind that remain open to listening develop an understanding that will guide toward positive and godly responses. “... [L]et every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19--20, ESV). We commit to this listening posture.

LEAD

We commit to seeking the flourishing of our city and the surrounding region by leading from a heart of love, birthed in Christ. Growing in God’s wisdom, from His Word, and developing softened hearts of love that turn away wrath and racism, we will gain the traction necessary to lead to a more unified Metro Atlanta region reflecting the life-changing power of Christ in us.

Here we stand, loving, listening and leading toward a brighter future that honors God and protects the dignity of all who are created by our God.

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