

Racism and the current unrest associated with it are only some of the evil which comes from the heart of people. Solid biblical principles are needed to understand and to respond to all of these in a God-pleasing manner. You need to think and act according to God's written Word, see the root problem as sin, and recognize the differing functions of divine restraint of evil and divine rescue from evil.

1. Divine RESTRAINT of evil

- a. *Conscience* is the inner ability to discern good and evil. It is based upon the knowledge of right and wrong, which even those without God's law demonstrate that they have (Rom 2:14–15). But it can be “weak”, “seared”, or even “evil” (1 Cor 8:7; 1 Tim 4:2; Hebr 10:22). Lies, deceitful philosophies, false doctrine, etc. attack the conscience (Col 2:8; 1 Tim 4:1–3) and so believers must strive to have a good, clear, and blameless conscience, by a renewing of the mind through the Word of God (Rom 12:1–2). BUT, the conscience can at best only restrain evil, it cannot rescue people from evil.
- b. *Marriage and family* was created very good (Gen 1:26–28; 2:18–25; cf. Matt 19:3–6); it provides restraint from sexual immorality (1 Cor 7:2), contributes to restraint in society through well-behaved children (Mal 2:15; Eph 6:4; Deut 6:7; cf. 1 Sam 3:13). But marriages and families are composed only of sinners (cf. Matt 19:8). So from within, but also externally, marriage and family is under attack. Know what the Bible says about marriage and family and guard them. BUT remember that a changed heart is essential for ultimate rescue from evil.
- c. *Work* was given by God as something good and able to be enjoyed (Gen 2:15; Eccl 2:24a). Work that provides can restrain from theft (Prov 30:8–9; Eph 4:28), but involves hard toil (Gen 3:17–19) and without God is a “vexation” and emptiness (Eccl 2:23–25). Work is attacked in different ways, such as calling it “demeaning”, separating income from labor, or seeking one's identity in it. Value work as a way to serve the Lord (Col 3:23–24). BUT remember that work cannot rescue from sin.
- d. *Boundaries*, or national and linguistic divisions, were established by God to restrain sin. (See Gen 11:1–9; cf. Deut 32:8). This may be Paul's reference which he then explains as a divine help for people to find Him (Acts 17:26–27). Naturally, such divisions have negative effects, but the restraint of sin appears to be a greater priority to God. Uniting humanity is rarely seen as negative, but a return to pre-Babel conditions removes a restraint of sin. Nevertheless such boundaries can at best only restrain sin and not rescue a person from it.
- e. *Government* has been instituted by God to wield the “sword” and avenge wrongdoers (Rom 13:1–4), as such it is clearly a restraint on evil. Governments and those in them can be evil (cf. Luke 3:14), even trying to suppress Christianity, but are still a divine tool to restrain evil. Defiance against the government and police are an attack on a divine restraint of evil, part of the spiritual battle. Christians are to submit to government, even going the “extra mile” (Matt 5:41), but not if it means directly disobeying God. Especially pray for leaders (1 Tim 2:1–2). BUT governments, regardless of political party, can at best only restrain evil and not rescue from the penalty, power or presence of sin.
- f. *Church* and believers within the church are to function as salt and light (Matt 5:13–16; Phil 2:15). The most important quality of salt was its ability to preserve, a quality which pictures the restraining quality which believers should have in the world. They do so by speaking and living the truth (cf. 1 Tim 3:15). Believers though are still sinners and the church can have false brethren (1 John 2:19). But allowing racism within the church denies Christ's work of unifying us (Eph 2:14–16). Beware of false shepherds and teachers (Acts 20:29–30; 2 Peter 2), instead desire sound doctrine (2 Tim 4:3; Phil 2:16), pray for one another (Eph 6:18–20), and meet together for mutual encouragement (Hebr 10:24–25). BUT though restraining as salt is good, being light and proclaiming the gospel is better, because God rescues from sin through the gospel.

2. Divine RESCUE from evil

- a. The penalty of sin, which is death, has been paid by Jesus Christ. He has redeemed believers who were under the curse of the law and enabled them to become the righteousness of God (Gal 3:13; 2 Cor 5:21). Both the oppressor and the oppressed need this most for eternal rescue.
- b. The dominion of sin has been removed in Christ and hard hearts exchanged for soft hearts (cf. Eze 11:19); hearts are filled with God's love (Rom 5:5), desire to obey (Rom 6:17; Eph 6:8), and are indwelt by Christ (Eph 3:17). This is needed for any substantial change in behavior, to bear good fruit (Matt 7:20).
- c. God has equipped the believer in Christ to respond to the presence of sin, to stand in a spiritual battle dressed in spiritual armor (Eph 6:10–20), with spiritual weapons of warfare (2 Cor 6:7; 10:4–5). This is how the believer stands and fights today.

It is necessary to have the righteousness of Christ to enter the kingdom of heaven. It can only be received by faith when you recognize your own spiritual bankruptcy and the provision of forgiveness made for you in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the gospel believers need to proclaim. It is good to be salt and to strive to restrain evil through the means God has set up. It is better to also be light which proclaims rescue from evil.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Where have you observed race-based prejudice and what restraints could or should have functioned?
- Should we be frustrated at failed efforts to restrain racism (or other evil)? Why/why not?
- How should you counsel a person who has been the target of racial prejudice? What should you be sure to include?