Beyond Ferguson: Biblical Racial Reconciliation

Part 2 of 2: Ethnic Identity Under Christ's Authority
with Tony Evans and Darrell L. Bock
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Let me flip the tables for a second. Okay, we’ve started off talking about, you know, kind of what Anglos need to understand about what it is in the African-American experience and we've kind of come to how the Gospel is – takes us in a direction that at least gives us the potential for thinking about reconciliation. Now I want to step back out of that for a second and go to this space. What do African-Americans need to sort through? Cause it takes two to, takes two to dance.

To tango, yeah.

So what is it that, what would you say as a pastor, you know shepherding the African-American community. What would you say to the African-American community in terms of how they look at these kinds of issues?

First of all I would say to them that your blackness and all that means to you is never to trump your relationship with Christ, to the cross or to the scripture. Because we are so culturally sensitive, oftentimes culture will trump the Bible. And once you do that we're in a no-man's land.

Yeah you – its tribalism.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So we will never solve anything okay, so we've got to now bring our culture and our race under the authority of Jesus Christ and that means under the authority of scripture. So I slam that home all the time. We had a guy in our church for example who was upset because of the number of Whites who were now joining our congregation.

And he says, "Look, you know how they are and if they keep coming in here like that we going to be in trouble." I told him, "Well you better keep winning more Blacks to Christ then so we outnumber them." And he said, then he said, "Well I'm leaving." And I said, "Bye." Because I can't let you dictate to the kingdom of God.

Now maybe you had some bad experiences. Maybe you had some negative experiences. Okay, we'll work with you but while we work with you, you can't dictate to the kingdom. And so what we have a lot of time are race-baiters who want to dictate to the kingdom and we cannot allow that. I make that clear in our church. That will not be allowed here.
So I think a mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew so I think to get rid of this fog in the pew we got to change this mist in the pulpit so that the pulpit is strong but that the Bible will rule. Now, secondly of all, you have got to be open to not stereotype as well. You can't just say, "Don't you stereotype me while I stereotype you."

**Dr. Bock**

Yeah right.

**Dr. Evans**

I've got to deal with you as an individual and I've got to now recognize that there may be some things in your background. There may be some things in your history that have collared you. And I had, for example I had a guy who said to me, he called me boy. He called me boy.

Now all of us that that erupt, to call me, I'm as old as you are you know and you're going to call me boy. Okay, so now my defenses go up okay 'cause I've now stereotyped him as a racist. I've stereotyped him you know in every way possible because he called me boy because that was a slave terminology where the slave owner who was 50 years younger would call an old Black man, older Black man boy. Okay so I'm hearing that.

Okay but then in the same conversation while I'm feeling all this erupting inside me, a younger guy, an older guy came in and he called him boy too and he was White. That automatically calmed me down on the inside because I saw he was being consistent. He wasn't just doing that to me but my natural reaction was that. So give an opportunity for clarity. Now maybe you're right, maybe they are still racist and maybe they are still carrying that old way of thinking, but maybe that's how they are or maybe that's all they know. And why don't I give you the benefit of the doubt until you prove otherwise and not allow my history to automatically color and code you.

**Dr. Bock**

Because the danger is you're going to fall into the cycle of what, of the way that relationship would play itself out and you don't get anywhere with that cycle.
Dr. Evans

Absolutely. We're just recycling what we're doing. And so I'm saying give the content of character the same opportunity you want to be given. There's another issue here and that is the issue of biblical forgiveness, biblical forgiveness. Because as long as I hold you hostage to yesterday we'll never connect today and we won't move forward to tomorrow. So I've got to release you from a debt that I may still feel you owe me okay because forgiveness is release of a debt.

I may feel because of what your granddaddy did, because of what your daddy did and because of how I suspect how you are given that, I may hold you hostage to that. And I've got to say, “I release you,” because until I release you I hold me hostage too, to unforgiveness, which means we can't make progress. So there's forgiveness, there's looking at character and then there is now rebuilding of relationship because reality is there's a new generation out here. There's a generation, a younger generation who don't hold any of this. Then there's the older generation who hold some of this because of history and I've got to now be able to engage you and we improve like iron sharpening iron, one another in this process.

Dr. Bock

Now everything that your talking to me is assuming, I think, and this is important, is assuming that there's enough relationship between the two of us on the two sides of the racial divide that we're actually engaging with one another and interacting with one another, getting to know one another, coming to try and understand one another. There's an extension of the self beyond the self to the other person that's going on here that is almost like a prerequisite for everything that's happening.

Dr. Evans

Absolutely, absolutely. How then do we get this thing started?

Dr. Bock

Right.

Dr. Evans

And I think that's where the church and church leadership comes in because we can create and craft natural opportunities. I mean you can do that as an individual with people you work with and taking the extra step. You can do that with your kids like you did with your kids letting them go to public school. But if you set the temperature, if you move the thermostat from the pulpit and say as a church we want to take the initiative to engage cross-racially and cross-culturally and you can do that in a lot of ways depending on where you're living, where you're located. Everybody doesn't have to run to the suburbs just because the community is changing.
We can begin to engage. We can begin to hire staff that can relate to people who are in our community. We can begin to have events with churches serving together like we talk about the adopted schools working together. So we're creating the environment where it could happen naturally. Doesn't have to be forced, it can be very natural. And so when we go to a community and we get all the communities together, we get 50 churches together we've got some communities where every school has been adopted by the churches in that community and they loving on each other because they're serving somebody else. And that's why the serving somebody else becomes critical because now it's not just me and you, it's us for them. And when it's us for them, reconciliation is not happening while we're improving the life of someone else.

**Dr. Bock**

Okay, so we've got this discussion that we've got going on. I want to go back and recover one part of the conversation. But we've got this discussion about what should be happening kind of across the racial divide with each other and how we build these relationships. The other aspect of the question is what does the Black community need to get about itself in order to help build those bridges?

**Dr. Evans**

Okay, the first thing we've gotta get back to is the biblical standard that God holds us to, not the White guy, not even other Black but God holds us to. And the biggest problem in Black America today is the breakdown of the family. You can, the breakdown of the family is unraveling us as a community. When 70 percent plus of your children are being born out of wedlock and the fathers are not there to tend to them, you've got chaos in the community. That's crime, that's unemployment and most of these kids are going to be raised in poverty. So and that's something we control. That's something we control.

The White man is not making you do that. He's not forcing you into that position. That's a convenient out. In slavery when we did not have laws on our side, the community on our side, the government on our side, the broader community on our side, our families were a lot stronger. We were a lot more unified and we made a lot more progress. We're going through regression right now and a lot of that is because of decision-making we are responsible for.
So don't give me this that you know, when the Cowboys play – you know I was traveling with the Cowboys for a long time. My son Jonathan's taking over for me now but when the Cowboys play there are 11 other people trying to keep them from making progress. And they can't change that. They will never be able to change for 3 hours, 11 other people trying to do them in. Their job is to get in a huddle and come up with a plan that overrides it. And so since some things may not change, may not change in your lifetime or you know the defense keeps shifting and you don't know what's coming next, your job is to come up with a plan that overrides that. And our God is a great coach and he's got a great playbook. He's got a great plan and we have in the past overcome it and now we need not to regress. We have regressed as a people and much of that is our fault.

Dr. Bock

Now you got two issues it seems to me simultaneously. You got to figure out how do I minister to this shattered community that I live in the midst of.

Dr. Evans

Absolutely.

Dr. Bock

And where I don't have healthy, many healthy family structures, so someone's got to come in alongside and provide that support.

Dr. Evans

Absolutely.

Dr. Bock

And then the second part is how do you get the next generation to make a different set of decisions so that you don't end up 20 years from now in the same place you're at now?

Dr. Evans

Well the wonderful thing to go back to slavery and even Jim Crowe, when you look at Selma, since the movie was out recently, you know. A couple of things happen because there were three marches, not just one march. When you look at Selma, it was led by the preacher, Martin Luther King, and preachers and the church. The church came together and they were hurt the first time. I mean the Billy clubs and the whole thing, they were hurt trying to do what was right because the law was against them. But then something happened. The TV cameras came on. When the TV cameras came on Whites began to join them.

Dr. Bock

Yeah because they saw the injustice.
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**Dr. Evans** They saw the injustice and engaged it. Now things changed because now when they marched, for Billy clubs to come out and now for Whites to be brutalized, that's a whole different ballgame. So if you can take the lead and know you're going to take some hits when you first come out, particularly if you're coming out by yourself. But if you can get some other brothers and sisters in Christ who are committed to the same God, the same Bible, the same worldview, the same kingdom, you are, to join you even though it's your fight and the laws are against you, you change the power of the other side. And so that's why reconciliation is so important that even when it's Black led because you change the equation of the fight. And so I am encouraging Black churches to not become segregationists on our end but let's engage good intentioned folks from the other side of the railroad tracks to join us in our leadership and our fight to bring equity and hope and help to our community.

**Dr. Bock** And your church communities I take it are tasked with the really, how can I say this, challenging responsibility of becoming family to a lot of people who don't have family.

**Dr. Evans** Well that is what God said. He says, "I'm gonna be a father to the fatherless and a mother to the motherless." Now that's not some floating Spirit in never never land, that's working through his people to provide surrogate families. You know so what the church must now provide are surrogate families for those who don't have them. We’ve got to have men. We've gotta train men and challenge men and one of the things we're finding in our church is when men are challenged to biblical manhood they tend to step up to the plate. It's when they're not challenged that they go to something that does challenge them, gangs. Okay?

The gangs are family. They're wrong kind of family but they're challenges and men gravitate to the challenge. And so the church, we've got to remove the femininity out of church when it comes to reaching men. Every now and then when my wife's doing something, she asks me to hold her purse. Now I'll hold it but it doesn't feel right. It just doesn't feel right. And a lot of times church doesn't feel right to men because it doesn't have its masculinity tied to it.
And so we've got to attract men by calling men to manhood. And when you call men to manhood and they can stick out their chest and feel like okay, this is for me, you know then it rises to a whole other level and that's what we're seeking to even equip minority churches to do.

Dr. Bock  
You know I'm reminded of what I consider to be one of the shining examples of this kind of an activity in our city. And you're very, very familiar with this, the planning of west Dallas community church.

Dr. Evans  
Absolutely, sure.

Dr. Bock  
Which was I think probably one of the best examples I've seen in the almost 40 years I've lived in Dallas of the community coming together, going to literally one of the poorest spots in the city saying we're going to try and change this place and it was interesting the order they did things. They built a church, they build a gym and then they built the school. And that order is significant in, my basketball days are coming back to me. I was on the court representing the team from Trinity Fellowship and oftentimes played you guys in, your church in basketball.

Dr. Evans  
Oh who won?

Dr. Bock  
We were – it was tough for us.

But you know what was interesting when you did that year after year after year, which is what happened. I mean I think I played 12, 14 years total before my legs said not doing this anymore. But you got to know the guys on the other team. You in some cases were ministering to a guy. There was a short, stocky African-American guy who was at West Dallas. He played for the West Dallas team who inevitably when we played I was lined up against them. He could block me out of a rebound with – get away fly.
You know, but he was such a great guy. And we would chat afterwards and engage with each other and that camaraderie, that shared engagement, I mean people think sports is trivial but sometimes sports can accomplish a lot. Built a team spirit that went into that community where people were coming out from both sides. And of course the great part of that story is they planted the school. Some of the kids went on to college. They were the first in their families to go to college. They built families. Some have come back to teach in the school so they can give back to the area that they've come out of.

**Dr. Evans** It's a great model. You know we've supported the West Dallas as well and we, it's a great model of seeing the church being the hub you know of the community and now education has grown out of that, social services has grown out of that. There's been some housing associated with that. So when the church is the church the community benefits. It's like God telling his people in Jeremiah 29:7, "Seek the welfare of the city in which you have been placed." You are in an evil city, Babylon, but you're my people there and the city should be better off because you're there even though it's an evil city.

**Dr. Bock** Yeah and I'm reminded about ten years into this project, you know and this was taking place in the midst of when Dallas, the Dallas school board, the DISD school board was going through terrible tensions, still under court order, et cetera. And the Dallas Morning News, not exactly a church organ, not exactly a church newspaper wrote an editorial entitled "Angels In Our Midst". And they were asking the question, why is it that a group of churches can accomplish something with so much success that our school board seems absolutely unable to achieve? It was an interesting editorial.

**Dr. Evans** Absolutely. You know our church has adopted 55 public schools. So while one church is in 55 public schools providing mentoring, tutoring and family support services and we can't even keep up with the school requests calling us for more schools.

**Dr. Bock** Yeah, we do the same thing at Trinity.
So it's something that can be done but churches have got to have a vision for missions that goes beyond – we've done a lot of that overseas. You know we started churches and we built orphanages and we got all that stuff over there. But the social situation and racial climate in America has kept us from doing that on a mass scale when we, the church could change the environment of the culture.

You know that's actually an example of a kind of subtle institutional racism in some senses because we will be comfortable in the moment, in a lickety-split we'll go, we'll go miles for mission but when we only have to go a mile for mission, were slow.

That's right. That's right. And we've allowed the social histories, the social and historical situation in America to drive a wedge and keep the church ineffective and we're watching the decline of a culture because of it.

And the hard part of it is that the dynamics are both internal to the community itself and then there's a larger dynamics of a culture at large and they're both in play.

That's right and I think we are now situated because of the breadth of the collapse that we're experiencing culturally now to be that city on a hill, to be that light through the good works. Mathew 5:16, we are well positioned now because everybody's desperate and everybody's nervous and everybody's afraid. Here we got all these churches on all these corners with all these preachers and all these members and all these programs and all these buildings and we still have all this mess. There's a dead monkey on the line somewhere. You know it is time for now the church to wake up, shake up and take the – move to the front lines.

So we're coming up towards the end of our time here so I kinda want to pull things together and kind of wrap up. So we've gone through the message, you know and now it's time to think through the application part of this. So what would you say, I'm going to segregate this because I don't know how else to do it.

Well you're using the right word in this conversation.
**Dr. Bock**

Yeah so, so what would you say to leaders of particularly Anglo churches about what they can do to contribute to this and I'll let you address leaders in African-American churches.

**Dr. Evans**

Okay. To the Anglo leaders I would say to be now intentional about reconciliation across racial lines, to connect with, and we're here to help you through the urban alternative if you want but to connect with a minority pastor in a minority church on equitable terms because he's your equal as a pastor or as leaders, and to say, "What can we do together to improve the lives of people that you are administering to."

**Dr. Bock**

And how would you start that? I mean would you start that with like, I mean obviously one way to start it would be for the head pastors to meet and just get to know one another and that kind of thing but once you get past that stage would you do some pulpit exchange so people get to know one another?

**Dr. Evans**

Well what we promote is a solemn assembly concept to come together, to worship together and pray together and invoke God for unity together. So you can do that between churches or you can do that through a whole host of churches. Okay? So you do that and the pastors agree to it so they meet first. They agree to it so now their churches and leadership and congregation are meeting. So that will take care of that. Then you come up with whatever that project is.

Our big thing is adopt a school and I need to explain why. Because in that school you have kids. Those kids have parents; that's family. Church, school and family make up community. And you never run out because you have new kids and new families coming all the time. So that's why that but doesn't have to be that. The other thing is that nobody disagrees with education, kids and families. So you got something that the community can accept. It doesn't polarize anybody. So you come up with something that allows you to minister together but ministering over something that is a priority to this minority pastor’s need because he always has to facilitate himself to you so you're now facilitating yourself to him and recognizing his leadership in the process.
So becoming a servant to that community is actually the way, is actually the way in, which may mean that when you do your joint worship – the challenge might be when you do your joint worship, you go and worship in their building.

Absolutely, or at least let him agree where you worship. His building may be too small but long as he's agreeing with it then everybody's comfortable and it's not just you saying come over here. So sometimes that means a neutral site if the building is too small.

Because it's really important for – I would think from the Anglo side, it's really important for the Anglo side to come into the Black world and see.

That's right, and experience it. Absolutely right. And of course if your mission, if the project you come up with is in that world, now you're engaging the world, you're not just visiting it you're engaging it. And then when there are issues that show up in your community because you're already together, you're not just coming together to react. You’ve already been together in ministry, now you can speak to it.

And you have relationships in which were built hopefully on a matter of trust so that you can speak directly and honestly about what's needed, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Absolutely. To the Black pastors I will say take advantage of the offer, okay? Don't resist it, don't reject it, vet it like you would vet anything of its legitimacy but take advantage of the offer. If this pastor's reaching out to you and not if you already know somebody, reach out to him and say look, in light of what's happening, everybody's sensitive to it. In light of what's happening in the culture, why don't we put our Christianity first and let our culture now be subservient to it and find out what we can do together to make this a better place for everybody to live because everybody's nervous.
And I think that new in this new generation there are a lot of pastors who want that. There are a lot of churches that are now becoming somewhat integrated so you will find now an open hand and an open heart. Take advantage of that. Don’t dismiss it. At the same time, train your people to be accepting of it, okay based on what Jesus wants not based on how they feel. And that's why you are the leader.

**Dr. Bock**

It's going to be awkward for everybody.

**Dr. Evans**

It's going be awkward for everybody but needs to be awkward for somebody so that we can do something that benefits all.

**Dr. Bock**

Yeah. Now let me tell you a lesson that I think I've learned. I've served on, I serve on the board of Wheaten College and I've gotten to know, we have a few African-Americans on the board. One of them is a pastor but the other one is actually an executive in a bank, a very sharp young guy who I have gotten to know. And the thing that I think he's taught me while I've been on the board has been that there is an attitude that Anglos can have in the midst of this kind of ministry that actually can work against what's going on even when you're well intentioned. And that is what I would call a patronizing attitude, an attitude where you walk in and you say, "I'm here to help you. I'm here to rescue you. You know and even unaware you can put the African-American person kind of under you and they get all, they feel those.

**Dr. Evans**

Oh absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. Well first of all that being communicated so that the person know and is sensitive to that. Secondly of all, you recognizing you're coming in as a servant. You recognize – missions has run into this problem early on when they would go over because they're the great White hope, and you know, you're the tribes. And so we've come to do this so we don't only bring the Gospel, we bring the soil and everything else. I mean we just say we're here to dominate. So if you come in as a servant and you're coming in recognizing they are living every day, every week and every year in this need and recognize they are bringing something to the table because you don't live there, okay, you visit there. So recognizing their leadership is the biggest thing you could do.
They may actually understand more about the – in fact they will understand more about their dynamics than anything you ever be able pick up.

Normally that's true. It's like when I was talking to a guy and he is a White pastor and he meant well. He said, "Boy I wish we could go back to the '50s and '60s when life was good." No, life was good for you in the '50s and '60s. I don't wanna go back to the '50s and '60s where I couldn't go to certain restaurants and drink out of certain water foundations and I couldn't come to Dallas Seminary, no. I don't want to go back there. Okay so it's two different – and if you come in with the right attitude, then you will learn some things as to why the reactions and feelings are different.

Well Tony, this has been very, very helpful. I'm sure it's just the start of a conversation. I know it's a conversation we're going to come back to regularly on the table because I actually think that one of the most powerful means that the church has to communicate the impact of the Gospel is to demonstrate good first-class reconciliation.

Absolutely.

And to do it in a way in which it's clear that Christ has changed all of us; what we've come in with and that we're going out different people than the way we came in. And in the midst of that interaction, in the midst of that mutual growth that takes place as a result, in the midst of developing that mutual understanding, et cetera, you have the opportunity to do and accomplish things that the old cycle just replicates and prevents from happening.

Absolutely. And we're here to help that anywhere in this country. That's what our natural ministry does and so we're here to serve that goal because I do agree with that goal.

Tell us a little bit about Urban Alternative.
**Dr. Evans**

Urban Alternative is our national ministry, our radio, our television. We take what we have developed at the church and we make it available across the nation through the Urban Alternative. And the main thing we're doing now is promoting this, what we call kingdom agenda strategy for community transformation. And that is the three-point plan: the solemn assembly, the adopting of schools and the speaking with one voice. So we have a team that travels around the country and helps community set that up in their church, between their churches or for the whole community.

**Dr. Bock**

So coming back to Ferguson for a second, so where Ferguson stands is basically you've got pastors who've kind of initially signed on and brought in and they're in the process of thinking about how to execute the plan?

**Dr. Evans**

Yes. We have a team that will be going there. I think we've already set a date to provide the training for them to begin implementation after they heard me give the vision. So that's what I do, I give the vision then our team provides the training and we’re doing that across the country.

**Dr. Bock**

So this initial talk that you give that's the biblical talk, which passages are you working off of to get – to lay out the vision for this?

**Dr. Evans**

The number one passage is Mathew 16. The first use of the word church is in Mathew 16 by Jesus Christ and he says, and I have a little spin that most people aren't used to, and that is the rock. See I don't believe when Jesus said "I'm going to build my church on the rock," that he's referring to himself. He asked the question, "Who do you say that I am?" And the you when he asked his disciples is plural. Y'all if you're a Texan, “Who do y'all say I am?” Okay?

**Dr. Bock**

Yeah we need the southern lingo every now and then.
Dr. Evans: That's right. So I'm saying while Peter spoke up, "Thou art the Christ," he did not forget that the question was to the group. And the Greek word petra for rock was used of a collection of stones that had been knitted together to form a rocky ledge or cliff. That's how it's used in classical Greek. So I'm saying when Jesus said, "Peter you're the stone. You're gonna be my leader but I'm gonna build my church on the coming together of individual stones to make something bigger than any one stone, Peter, you could ever be on his own." And Peter says in I Peter 2:1, "Ye all living stones come together to form one spiritual house."

Dr. Bock: The temple, yeah.

Dr. Evans: So I'm saying that what Jesus wants to build he can only build in a reconciled way. So reconciliation builds the church and the church then is handed the keys of the kingdom and the keys of the kingdom gain you authority on earth. And so I take that and show how ministry is supposed to go with that definition of the church.

Dr. Bock: That's great. That's great. Yeah well again, thank you for coming in and talking with us about this. I'm sure I'm going to invite you back.

Dr. Evans: Well thank you.

Dr. Bock: Because you're a good brother and a good friend. It's great to have conversation with you and this has been – this has been fun to do this. You know we do this privately on a regular basis.

Dr. Evans: Yeah we do.

Dr. Bock: And so to actually do this in public is kind of a nice thing and so I really do appreciate your willingness to come.

Dr. Evans: Thank you. Thank you my friend.

Dr. Bock: And we thank you for being a part of The Table. This is The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture and we look forward to seeing you again soon.