

# FORMING A MORE PERFECT UNION

## MICAH 6:6-8

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

Two-hundred and forty-five years ago, on July 4 1776, thirteen American colonies declared independence from Great Britain, and embarked on a quest for freedom.

Eleven years later, in 1787, after gaining their independence, our founders conceived of a new form of government set out in the Constitution of the United States of America. Our Constitution is one of the truly great human documents in all history. Along with writings like the Magna Carta, the Mayflower Compact, and the Declaration of Independence it initiated the modern concepts of democracy, and a people's right to self-rule.

*But our Constitution was not a perfect document...*

Article 1, Section 2 establishes the Legislative Branch, particularly the House of Representatives. And it reads in part, "Representatives... shall be apportioned among the States which may be included within this Union, according to their

respective Numbers...” And here’s how the number of people are to be counted... “which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons... three fifths of all **other Persons**.”

In other words, in the Constitution of the United States **slaves** or **black people** were considered “**other Persons**” and were counted as “**3/5ths**” of a person.

This was and is a gross injustice embedded into one of our nation’s founding documents. Thomas Jefferson began the Declaration of Independence, “**We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...**” Yet Jefferson himself owned slaves. Apparently, to him and many Americans at that time, some men were erroneously considered property, *less than men*.

Our Constitution’s Article 1, Section 2, “**The Three Fifths Clause**” is an ugly stain on our nation’s history.

Yet understand the idea of America has always been a work in progress. This is why to take down statues of our founders because they were flawed in their thinking, or compromised in some way, is to ignore what has always made America great. *We’re a nation that’s learning!*

And this is why in our quest for freedom the greatness of our Constitution is its **adaptability**. It’s preamble wisely states its goal, “**We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union...**”

Notice this interesting choice of words, “***in Order to form a more perfect Union.***” Today, when we think of a thing as “**perfect**” we assume it can’t get *more perfect*.

Our word “perfect” means “as good as it can get.”

But that’s not how people in 1787 used the term. Think of the phrase, “to per-fect’.” Something perfect was something that was **being per-fec’-ted**. And over the course of history that thing could become “more perfect.”

That was exactly what was needed when it came to the formation of our country. The Constitution was made to be amended. As needs invariably arose with the shifting of time, the Constitution was designed to be amended to meet those needs and improve our Union.

Thus, “**The Three Fifths Clause**” was made irrelevant with later legislation. Following the Civil War, in the days of Reconstruction, the US Constitution was amended.

The 13th Amendment abolished the institution of slavery... The 14th granted citizenship to former slaves and gave to all citizens equal protection under the law... And the 15th gave former slaves the right to vote...

Our Constitution, *and the quest for freedom called “America,”* was adapted and improved. A more perfect Union was formed, *but work still needed to be done...*

Despite the death of 620,000 Civil War soldiers, and three new amendments to our Constitution, injustices against black Americans didn’t end. For the next one-hundred years local and state governments enacted Jim Crow laws and developed the institution of segregation.

Under the promise of “**separate but equal**” blacks were prohibited from the same quality of education, transportation, health care, housing, and entertainment.

All of life was segregated. There were black and white barber shops, water fountains, restaurants, parks, public toilets, even a white cemetery and a black cemetery.

And interracial marriage was strictly prohibited. In Mississippi you could be fined \$500 and get six months in jail for writing in favor of what was called “[race mixing.](#)”

Yet again, this experiment called *America* rose to the challenge of freedom. In 1954 the Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling in the case of *Brown versus the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in which blacks gained the right to attend the same public schools as whites.

This gave steam to the Civil Rights Movement, which culminated on July 2, 1964 when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, finally outlawing discrimination based on race, and ending segregation in schools, in employment, and in public accommodation.

In our day, critics accuse America and the American ideal as being racist and irredeemable. *I disagree.*

Though not perfect, and often painfully slow to get it right, America has been and continues to be the world’s breeding ground for freedom. Apart from *the values articulated in our Declaration of Independence*, and *the flexibility of our Constitution* racial equality would still be a pipe dream, rather than the legal reality it is today.

In his famous “[I Have A Dream](#)” speech Dr. King likened racial justice to cashing a check. He said, “[When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and](#)

the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "*unalienable Rights*" of "*Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*"

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned... But we refuse to believe the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice." Dr. King believed that America's values would triumph over its prejudices. He was right in 1964; and he's still right today. Our history is checkered with failure and success, racism and equality, oppression and emancipation - but progress has and is being made.

Four generations after the Civil War ended slavery, Americans elected a black man as President. That alone is an undeniable symbol of progress. "*We the people of the United States, are form(ing) a more perfect Union...*"

But does there remain work to be done? *Absolutely.*

"*We the people of the United States*" are **still** forming "*a more perfect Union.*" Today, in the wake of the torture and death of George Floyd peaceful protests are being heard despite violent anarchists trying to drown out meaningful dialogue. Systemic racism is being exposed. Well-meaning white people are becoming more aware of their own unintentional racism.

Pockets of prejudice in law enforcement are being identified and corrected.

*Where else on Earth could these kinds of changes happen so quickly except in America?* My point is that the United States of America is not the problem, rather its ideals are an indispensable part of the solution.

But the war with racial discrimination is a long-running battle, and it falls upon every generation to do its part.

Despite our progress, racism is an evil that hangs on. *Why do these human injustices occur again and again?*

Our persisting problem isn't America, or our Constitution, what hinders racial equality lies much closer to home than Washington DC. Every person needs to examine their own heart. It seems to me **the problem isn't as much a skin problem as a sin problem.**

Racism is born of pride and assumed superiority. And it's **not** the sole possession of white American bigots!

Today, African nations and tribes attack each other and commit mass genocide. The Chinese hate the Japanese. In the Middle East, Arabs despise Jews, and Jews despise Arabs. In Ireland, Protestants and Catholics fight. In Muslim countries, Shiites and Sunnis are at each other's throat. India reeks with class warfare.

Racism and hatred runs rampant all around the world.

**The answer lies in what can happen in the heart!**

One of the most encouraging sites I've seen are the Christian ministries that are holding services on the street corner in Minneapolis where George Floyd was arrested. You won't hear

much about it in the media, but lives are being changed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Legislation** can mandate racial equality, but through **transformation** God's Spirit changes a person's heart.

In the aftermath of George Floyd's killing, the nation was up-in-arms. Over a month later it's still up-in-arms.

I know of no one who wasn't horrified by the video of that white police officer's knee on the neck of George Floyd, as he cried out, *"I can't breathe. I can't breathe."*

You and I saw that, *and we wanted to do something*. Folks are still angry and want to know what they can do.

I find an answer to racial injustice and inequality here in Micah 6... What is it that **"the Lord requires of you and I?"** Listen again as I read our text, Micah 6:6-8...

**"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"** The Hebrew Law given through Moses, emphasized animal sacrifices.

Sacrifice was giving to a cause. It was the giving of my time, and money, and effort for the sake of a cause.

And that's what people all over the world have been done in response to the racial injustices we've seen. Great sacrifices have been made in protest.

But sacrifice was **not** what God required of the Prophet. More important to God was his own obedience.

Earlier God said to Samuel (15:22), “**to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.**” Often it’s easier to give God what I want to give Him - sacrifice what’s convenient for me - than it is to do what God wants done. All God desires of us is simple obedience.

I’ve known people who would rather quit their job, uproot their family, and move to a foreign country as a missionary - *make great sacrifices* - than to break with their tradition, or to love a neighbor of a different color.

It’s not sacrifice that impresses God, but obedience.

Again Micah asks, **how can I please God?** *With a thousand sacrifices? With ten-thousand rivers of oil?*

No, Micah answers, “**He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?**”

Here’s how Micah should respond and show His gratitude to God: **do justly, love mercy, walk humbly!**

And these are three simple things that each of us can do to make right racial injustice, and put an end to the divisions that plague our nation. If we want to form a more perfect union... **do justly, love mercy, walk humbly.**

First, we should **do justly.** In our interactions with the people around us. In our treatment of others - *even folks not like us; strangers as well as neighbors* - we should seek to show fairness and justice.

Understand, Christians believe in **the Imago Dei.**



The term means that regardless of skin color, and ethnic origin all humans are made in God's image and likeness. The idea of the supremacy of one race over another is foreign to Scripture. **All men are created equal** - and deserve fair and unbiased opportunities.

In addition, Christians believe Jesus died for all men. We all know John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that **whoever** believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That means every human you've ever met, or will ever meet, is a person Jesus died to save. These truths alone reveal the enormous value of each person.

Understand how dear this issue of justice is to God.

In Deuteronomy 32 His spokesman, Moses, sung to the nation, "For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He."

Just read the Hebrew prophets. They all called for justice. Isaiah 1:17 shouts, "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor..." *Seek justice!*

Amos cried out in 5:24, "But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream." Equity and fairness for all people is the longing of our God.

Remember how Jesus challenged the religious leaders of His day. In Matthew 23:23 the Lord scolded them, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the

weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” They were so diligent to count out every grain of spice to make sure they gave a tenth - no more than required, and no less.

As if their petty spices were that significant to God!

Yet all the while, they neglected the issues God had championed since the beginning of time - as Jesus called them, *“the weightier matters” - bestowing mercy, trust in God, and the fair-treatment of people. They had majored on the minors and minored on the majors.*

Phil Taylor was a church kid who grew up in the 1960s. He attended an all-white church in the Deep South. *I can identify.* Phil writes of his experience, *“I don’t know how we missed it. While King marched on Selma and an entire race cried out for justice, I heard sermons against rock and roll, the Beatles, mini-skirts, and long hair - but I never heard them mention racism, injustice, intolerance, hatred, and bigotry. Those are the things God hates.”* A movement for racial justice in America passed Phil like a ship in the night, while he and his church pals were focused on trivial pursuits.

It’s sad that churches have a penchant *for missing the forest for the trees.* We fail to see the obvious. As Jesus said *“you strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.”*

*God, please open our eyes and help us “do justly.”*

It’s sad that in the wake of the protests surrounding George Floyd’s death bad actors, and anarchists, and political radicals took advantage of the tragedy to foster their

unrelated agendas. “Justice” certainly applies to the victims of police brutality, but it equally applies to business owners who’ve been looted, and innocent citizens who were physically assaulted in the unrest.

We demand justice for George Floyd, but there also needs to be justice for retired St. Louis police captain, David Dorn, gunned down while protecting his friend’s pawnshop. His senseless death also requires justice.

One of the problems with inequity is it creates anger, and frustration, and the desire for retaliation. If I’m not being treated fairly; then neither should anyone else. In the struggle for *justice*, we can be guilty of *injustice*.

In his “I Have A Dream” speech Dr. King fired up the crowd with shouts for urgency, ***freedom now*** was *his cry* - but then he said this, “There is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence... We must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.” In short, don’t let your quest for justice, be someone else’s injustice.

This is why God’s commandment to “do justly” comes unattached to any personal or political agendas.

With every person I face, in every situation I encounter, God's desire for me is to do what's right. I'm to seek out fairness for people and equity in situations.

*Can I treat people based solely on their own merits? Can I navigate circumstances unbiasedly and fairly?*

If I take this calling seriously it'll effect me *in all my ways* and *for all my days*. When I make up the weekly work schedule I'll be fair to *all* my employees. I won't play favorites. I won't put my own preferences or prejudices ahead of an employee's performance. I'll do what I promise. I'll show no partiality in my evaluations.

Even more so, to act justly toward people is to avoid snap judgments and harmful stereotypes. Several years ago a study was done where equal resumes were sent to potential employers. The only difference were the names attached to each of the resumes.

Resumes belonging to white-sounding names like "Greg" and "Emily" got more attention from employers than resumes with black-sounding names like "Jamal" and "Lakisha." *Equal resumes, only different names.*

On the surface, all the employers wanted were good employees. *There was no intended racism*, yet clearly unjust and bias-laden assumptions were made.

This is the kind of battle that has to be won in people's hearts - but it's a victory that only occurs when people make a commitment to **"do justly."** Every human being can fall victim to an unconscious bias, that we won't break out of apart from a deliberate effort.

I think the time has come for some of us to take a stand. *“Doing justly”* is what we say as well as what we do. Why are some white people willing to let a racist comment at the company party or at the family reunion go unchallenged? Why are we afraid to *“do justly?”*

What Benjamin Franklin said two-hundred years ago is still true, *“Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”*

Micah says we please God when we *do justly*, **AND** when we *“love mercy.”* Don't wait until people deserve love to give love. Some people withhold their love until its earned - and they never end up loving.

It's best to be gracious. This too is part of *the Imago Dei - that we can love as God loves*. When it comes to love, God took the initiative. I John 4:19 teaches us, *“We love Him because He first loved us.”* And now God wants us to take the initiative with other people. To *love mercy* is to mirror the image of God to other people.

It's been said, *“Justice is getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. And mercy is not getting what you do deserve.”* Rather than *harbor a grudge*, mercy is the willingness to *issue a pardon*.

Mercy is forgiveness. It's the willingness to treat you better than you've treated me - *to treat you as God has treated me!* We're never more like Jesus than when we choose to respond to a slight against us *with mercy*.

Earlier this year, Kim Kardashian West visited the White House to appeal to President Trump on behalf of a convict named Christopher Young. Chris is serving a life sentence for a non-violent drug charge. It was his third offense. And because of the federal three strike law the judge's hands were tied. Young's sentence was determined automatically by mandatory minimums.

But along with Kim, the White House had another visitor that day. Kevin Sharp was the judge who tried Chris Young, and he came to lobby for Chris' release.

Judge Sharp is now an advocate for prison reform.

He wants to see mandatory minimums abolished. **They leave no room for judges to show mercy.**

But realize our heavenly Judge abounds in mercy!

God's only mandatory sentence is reserved for those who reject His Son. Everyone who confesses their sin, and asks for God's pardon is sure to receive mercy.

Ephesians 2:4 tells us that "God.. is rich in mercy." We should be thankful that God is rich in what we need most - "mercy!" He's "the God of the second chance!"

I've heard it said, "God's throne is not made of marble, but mercy!" This is why He calls it "the mercy seat." Sinners bow at God's feet only to find mercy!

And this provides an incredible contrast, for today we live in **a cancel culture**. Whenever a person makes a comment on social media that flies in the face of *the woke* opinions of the

day - especially if it's perceived as racist or hate speech - they get canceled or nullified.

Despite the person's apology or explanation the offender gets boycotted. There's a mass attempt to strip away their platform and influence - even their job and livelihood are sometimes threatened. It's a public shaming. And it's the brutal opposite of *"loving mercy."*

A big part of helping to build God's kingdom is to create a culture that's forgiving and accepting. One that allows a sinner to start over - **a mercy culture.**

Racial justice is important, but it's achieved by changing minds and hearts, and when those people's minds are changed, they need to be extended mercy.

And according to Micah one more command is required of us, we should *"walk humbly with our God."*

Humility is understanding and acknowledging my limitations. It's admitting that life is not all about me. *I'm not all that.* It's me keeping a low profile, and it's me placing a high priority on the other people in my life.

Holocaust survivor, turned Christian leader, Corrie Ten Boom was once asked if it were difficult for her to remain humble. She replied, *"When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments on the road, and singing praises, do you think for one moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that was for him? If I can be a donkey on which Jesus Christ rides, I'll happily give Him all the praise and all the honor." I love that...*

Humility is remembering that Jesus is in the saddle, *not me*. And that I'm on a journey to bring Him glory.

It was the year 1959, at the height of segregation, when a northern journalist, John Griffin, decided to discover what life was like for a Southern black man.

At first Griffin thought of touring the South as an observer, but he knew that would limit his perspective.

Instead, he decided to literally change his skin color - to actually become black. Griffin took oral medications, used sun lamp treatments, dyed the pigment of his skin with various types of stains; then traveled through the Jim Crow South and tasted first hand the horrors of racial prejudice, and the plight of African-Americans.

John Griffin published his findings in a best-selling book entitled "[Black Like Me](#)." It wasn't enough for Griffin to hear or read about the black person's travails, he wanted to experience them up-close and personal.

*And this is what humility does.* It puts people on the same level - on equal footing. It enables black people and white people to come together to learn from each other, and exchange ideas. They begin to talk candidly.

Shortly after the current protests started a former NFL football player, Emmanuel Acho, produced a few videos he calls, "[Uncomfortable Conversations With A Black Man](#)." In his videos he addresses white people.

Acho tries to bridge the gap between a white person's perspective and a black person's reality in America. I don't



know much about Emmanuel Acho, so I'm not endorsing him, but so far, he's been helpful.

I bring up his videos just to say these are the kinds of conversations all white Christians need to be having with their black brothers and sisters. If I read the Bible correctly the church is called to exhibit racial unity.

We are one in Christ, and a primary goal of the church is to demonstrate the ability of the Gospel to cause diverse people to live in harmony. In achieving that goal, understanding and humility go along way.

There are issues involving race to which white folks are blind. You may've had a hard life, but if you're white I doubt your life was made more difficult because of your skin color. That's not true for most black people.

Black folks aren't making excuses, and most that I know don't need any help, but it matters that we care. It matters that all Christians really care for one another.

Frankly, to **do justly**, and to **love mercy**, may not be enough if we don't go further and **walk humbly** with each other and God. Caring and communication is key.

Our county, Gwinnett, is now **a majority minority** community. No one racial group makes up a majority. We're all minorities, and we have to live together.

**This is where the church should be the leader.**

If you're in Christ we have a commonality greater than our differences. With love and understanding we can work out our conflicts and learn to live as one.

Here's my question to each of us this morning, will we use our platform, however broad it might be, to *"do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God?"*

Maya Moore's answer to that question is "Yes!"

Moore is one of the best women's basketball players to ever play. From Collins Hill High School, to the University of Connecticut, to the WNBA, Maya never had two seasons in a row where she failed to win a championship. She was an MVP and perennial All-Star.

Maya is also an evangelical Christian and for the last two years she's suspended her basketball career and devoted herself to help a falsely accused prisoner, named Jonathan Irons, appeal his fifty year sentence.

Despite all Maya's success and accolades she's a humble young lady, who has concerned herself with justice in the world and mercy toward a convict.

Just this past week - *after serving twenty-two years for a crime he didn't commit* - Irons was released from a prison in Missouri. He's now a free man, thanks in large part to Maya Moore and the attention she raised.

And Irons is grateful. He's says he's ready to forgive the man who accused him and sent him to prison.

Whenever Maya Moore signs her autograph she adds a Bible verse. It's Colossians 3:23, *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men..."*

She says her mission in life is *"to know Jesus and to make Him known."* And I love the T-shirt she was wearing during

her interviewed last week. It's quotes Micah 6:8, "*Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly...*"

In the same way that Maya Moore is living out her Christian faith, our Lord Jesus is calling us to *work for justice in an unjust world, be an ambassador of mercy, and focus the lens of our life outward not inward.*

I'll close with a line from a poem by civil rights activist Langston Hughes, "Oh, Let America be America again, the land that never has been yet, and yet must be - the land where every man is free." America is not yet a fulfillment, it's still a promise. Yet here's how we can fulfill that promise, and help make our nation "a more perfect union" - *do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly* with God.