

False Roads to Justice and Peace

Self-righteous Virtue-signaling in American Politics

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By Mike Scruggs

There is a strange misapprehension of morality and righteousness among our political and media classes that is spreading injustice, division, and hypocrisy like wildfire. Although its practitioners often purport themselves to be on high moral ground, the level of their distortions and the intensity of hatred in their continual accusatory rhetoric speaks otherwise. Its devotees are often armed with mesmerizing verbal fluency accompanied by ignorance and little regard for facts or a heart for truth. The spreading malady is not confined to one political party or to one race. The Church has not guarded well against its entry into its clergy or flock.

A major manifestation of this destructive self-righteous mindset has been the elevation of real or imagined racial grievances beyond the commandment to love God and our neighbor. Christians in particular should be aware that compassion is not a warrant for unforgiving attitudes.

The latest incidence of this ungodly and insane mindset is that appearing in “blackface” in some college nonsense that occurred more than 30 years ago was a heinous sin that cannot be forgiven.

I am not a supporter of the politics or campaign tactics of Governor Ralph Northam of Virginia, but the attack on him for having participated in a long-past “blackface” event speaks sadly about the warped reasoning of his media and political assailants

Part of the underlying problem is our historical ignorance of the nature of slavery and its variants. I am certainly glad that slavery is gone from the United States and most of the rest of the world, but our distorted knowledge of it has created an unwholesome opportunity for self-righteous virtue-signaling that has little moral warrant and no Scriptural authority.

The Church has actually been part of the problem, because so many of its churches and leaders have failed to commend and defend the authority of Scripture and have allowed a moral dominance of other social and political ideologies.

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Al Jolson frequently used blackface as in this 1927 *Jazz Singer* photo. He introduced many black musical themes and styles to the American public as well as many black musicians. Two of his most famous songs are “Mammy” and “Swanee.”

Although it is obvious from the general context of Scripture that freedom is generally more desirable than slavery, God allowed the Hebrews to suffer slavery under Egyptian Pharaohs for

False Roads to Justice and Peace

generations. This and other human suffering are often a mystery to us, but in all He does, his purpose is always and infallibly good. In the words of Joseph to his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, in Genesis 50: 20: **As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.** Following this, Israel increased greatly in Egypt. But generations later according to Exodus 1:8: **“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.** This new Pharaoh and his successors oppressed the Hebrew people, until God appointed Moses to help lead them out of Egypt.

Not all slavery in the Bible, however, was oppressive. It may surprise many that Scripture does not condemn slavery as an institution. It regulates the conduct of both master and slave in their respect, kindness, and ethical obligations to one another. However, in God’s perspective, there is no difference in status between slave and master.

Slavery, however, even in its most benevolent forms, is unlikely to maximize human potential, and power over people is always fraught with the possibility of human abuse, as it is in any human activity.

Abraham owned slaves and considered them part of his household as evidenced by Genesis 14: 14 concerning the rescue of his nephew, Lot, from invaders. “When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. The number of them strongly suggests that most were bondservants (slaves). That some of them were slaves is confirmed by God’s command in Genesis 17:13 to circumcise “both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money.” Note that both were considered members of his household. We also know from Genesis 16 that Abraham’s wife Sarah had an Egyptian slave, Hagar, who bore Abraham a son, Ishmael before Isaac was born. Sarah was harsh with her, and she fled, but was commanded by “the Angel of the Lord” to return and submit to Sarah.

Leviticus 25: 39-45 ESV regulates Israelite slavery, contrasting the treatment of Israelites and purchased slaves. Some of this would be hard to fit in the 21st Century, and it is now largely gone anyway. However, we must constantly be on guard not to judge past circumstances and history by our present circumstances, and especially some of our current ideologies. God knows our way; we do not know His.

“If your brother [Israelite] becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you; you shall not make him a slave: he shall be with you as a hired servant and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God. As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you. You may also buy from among strangers who sojourn with you and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land, and they may be your

False Roads to Justice and Peace

property: You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever. You may make slaves of them, but over your brothers, the people of Israel, you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly”
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Several New Testament passages emphasize the mutual responsibility for respect, fairness, and goodwill to one another.

Ephesians 6: 5-9 (ESV)

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by way of eye-service, as people pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven and that there is no partiality to him.”

Colossians 3:22-25 is very similar to Ephesians 6:5-9 above. Paul elaborates on the responsibilities of Masters in: Colossians 4: 1: **“Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”**

In I Timothy 6: 1-5 (ESV) Paul sends some sound and humbling advice to those who stir up resentments, spew out constant accusations and slander, and are puffed up with their own virtue-signaling self-righteousness.

“Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil, suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.” [Some texts include a following sentence in verse 5: “From such withdraw yourself.” This is retained in the New King James Version]

If any of this is difficult, it ought also to be humbling. Only God is all-wise and pure in his righteousness. In fact, we have no claim to wisdom except through God and no claim to righteousness except through Christ. It is not wrong to struggle for justice, but there are wrong ways to do it that destroy both peace and justice. So let’s ease up on the virtue-signaling. If this is hard Scripture for you, here is a good quote from the late R.C. Sproul:

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"When God ordains anything to come to pass, His purpose in doing so is altogether and absolutely good."

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The false roads to justice and peace would certainly include the current hysterical binge of political correctness about race, slavery, and history. The unforgiving spirit of it all gives away its true origin. A better rule is to forgive others as God has forgiven you.