

2021 Report of the Social Concerns Committee of the Charis Fellowship

But He (Jesus) replied to them (Pharisees and Sadducees) "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? - Matthew 16:2-3

If there ever was a year that people, both those who believe in Jesus as their Savior and those who think that belief in the existence of God is irrational, were looking for answers to the “signs of the times,” this would be the year. Those of us who have the privilege and blessing of serving on the Social Concerns Committee recognize this and pray that the resolutions put forth in this report provide some guidance within our fellowship as we attempt to be on mission and biblically navigate these times.

The Manual of Procedure states the primary task of the Social Concerns Committee is to “prepare resolutions to present to the annual business meeting” of the Fellowship and so submit these resolutions for your review and use. We value constructive and biblical feedback regarding the resolutions and welcome requests to address additional issues.

- We are looking to add new members and recognize the increasing need for the committee to be utilized in a greater manner within the fellowship as the “day draws near” (Hebrews 10:25).
- We are proposing a conversation/cohort within the Fellowship to address Critical Race Theory. We want the input of our Fellowship prior to submitting a Resolution for adoption. This will also be an experiment for our Committee to have more input from around our Fellowship in crafting Resolutions.

Please pray for us as we strive to be a relevant and credible resource and attempt to articulate biblical truth on often volatile topics. We desire to speak clearly, concisely, and always in love (Ephesians 4:15). Please know we covet your prayers and want to represent both the Charis Fellowship and our Lord Jesus in an honorable manner.

As always, we invite members of our Fellowship to contact us at any time to discuss issues or resolutions. Allow us the privilege of reminding and encouraging you that God is sovereign and faithful and we look to Him as we minister together to a lost world and seek to understand the signs of the times.

For the Social Concerns Committee,

Mark Abel, Chair. Committee Members: Mark Combs, Mike Jentes, Kathryn MacMillan, Rich Schnieders, John Teevan.

Resolutions Submitted for Approval at the 2021 Business Session of
the Charis Fellowship.

Human Life—Its Dignity and Duties

- Whereas God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and all it contains (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 24:1); and
- Whereas God created humanity as his highest creation, making humanity alone in his image and after his likeness (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8); and
- Whereas God created man as male and female, both as bearers of his image (Genesis 1:27); and
- Whereas the woman was made from the man, she alone being equal to him yet different from him, to complete the duality of human existence and make marital union possible (Genesis 2:18-23); and
- Whereas God appointed mankind as stewards over creation (Genesis 1:26, 28; Psalm 8:6-8); and
- Whereas God chose Israel, the object of his love and protection, to be his special people and a blessing to the whole world (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:7-8; Amos 3:1-2; Zechariah 2:7; Romans 9:4-5; 11:28-29); and
- Whereas human sinfulness deeply afflicts our relationship to God and to one another (including how men and women, parents and children, rich and poor, strong and weak, and people of differing races relate to each other) and also afflicts our understanding of ourselves (who we are as human beings), tempting us to define ourselves in subjective humanistic ways rather than according to our creator's design (Genesis 3:16; 6:5; 8:21; Romans 1:18-32; 3:10-18);

We therefore affirm several ethical implications of these biblical truths:

1. All human life (including the unborn, those with mental and physical infirmities and those who are terminally ill) is precious and worthy of our protection and care.
2. The loss of any human life by the actions of another is tragic. Nonetheless, taking human life is justifiable in narrow circumstances such as self-defense or defense of others (whether exercised by an individual or by the magistrate). Yet even this is tragic, for God himself takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11).
3. Abortion as practiced in the United States and many other countries is abhorrent to God and an assault on human dignity. Its practice is to be opposed legally and morally and ministries of care for the mother and child must be developed and offered. Of special concern is new legislation that allows abortion up to the moment of birth. Adoption is always an honorable alternative to abortion. Men and women must avoid sexual sin and both must take responsibility for its consequences.

4. Assisted suicide is an illegitimate response to human suffering toward the end of life. Instead, ministries of care, support and pain management are to be offered to the dying. Assisted suicide for those suffering a terminal illness will easily be rationalized to justify suicide for other reasons and to justify taking human life without consent.
5. The Word of God justifies capital punishment as a proper judgment against those who commit premeditated murder. Rather than being a violation of our creation in the image of God, capital punishment is actually based on this truth (Genesis 9:6). However, the actual practice of capital punishment must be by legitimate authorities and must rest on equity and sufficient evidence and always be seriously judged by biblical standards.
6. To serve human needs we must declare and practice “the true fast” of Isaiah 58—do not exploit workers, do not engage in quarreling and malicious talk, loose the chains of injustice, set the oppressed free, feed the hungry, shelter the poor, clothe the naked, service the needy, defend the defenseless.
7. We call for opposition to all forms of human trafficking, especially sexual exploitation, and abuse against immigrants. Families should be kept intact as much as possible.
8. Support and justice must be extended toward all who are abused or sexually assaulted, especially in situations of subjugation or fear. Protections and an atmosphere supporting honest disclosures are vital. Sexual assault under the guise of religious or secular positions is especially offensive to God and should be to us.
9. Christians must never forget the historical sufferings of the Jewish people and must express alarm at increases in anti-Semitism in our own day and nation. We must be bold in expressing our love for the Jewish people and our repentance for wrongs in the past. We must stand up and be counted and call for actions against anti-Semitism.
10. Marriage is foremost an establishment by God, not an institution of man. Marriage is a union between a man and a woman, sealed in the covenant sign of sexual union. Sexual relationships are appropriate within marriage only. Marriage is God’s plan for birthing and raising children in a loving, supportive home. God intends that marriage be a life-long covenant not “put asunder” by man.
11. People may choose to live honorably before God in singleness, as exemplified by many biblical personalities including Jesus and the Apostle Paul. This choice may lead to greater undistracted service to God. It may also open avenues of temptation that must be resisted.
12. “Gender identity” needs to be understood by fair analysis of data and by listening to those who do not identify themselves by conventional male/female categories. However, our ultimate directives come not from social constructions but from biblical understandings. God created human beings as either male or female. Departures from this understanding, whether due to dysfunction or choice, are not the plan of God. Our society must be careful not to coerce people and institutions (including churches) that do not support current expansion of gender identity

rights. Boys and girls (and their parents) have a right to privacy and safety and to fair instruction on this subject that is not agenda driven.

13. Human governments are established by God for promotion of justice and punishment of evil and for the peace and safety of their citizens. Governments exist to further the wellbeing of all, not to accumulate power and wealth into the hands of the rulers and the privileged at the expense of subjects. Governments should enhance human flourishing and liberty, not repress these in any way. Governments must protect freedom of religion. Christians should pray for all who are in authority and be open to participate in government through voting, influence and service as much as is ethically possible.

14. America's prisons are often places of bureaucracy and neglect that assault the human dignity of prisoners while failing to truly reform them. Prison reform must include fitting punishment that makes victims whole, plus training that enable willing prisoners to return to society and live constructive lives. Those who have paid their debt to society should have a process to accrue citizen rights once again, including the right to vote.

15. Civility in speech and good conduct toward others who are in God's likeness are our duties. Our communications with one another must be consistent with loving our neighbor as ourselves. Civility must begin at the highest levels of government—the president and the Congress in America—and continue to all other levels. Civility must avoid the ad hominem attacks on opponents that have become so much a part of today's charged political climate. Civil communication must characterize all "social media" and Christians especially must not communicate with gossipy, malicious, or oppressive words in their use of social media.

16. Humanity must understand "dominion over creation" not as ownership but as stewardship. We must also recognize God is infinite and creation is finite. To consume creation's resources as if they are infinite is a form of idolatry. We are free to use and enjoy creation, not to misuse it or deny future generations its enjoyment. In our quest to be good stewards of creation, we must always and only worship God the Creator and never deify or worship creation in any way.

17. Since God created the entire human race, his "Common Grace" flows to all people. Common Grace is seen in the benevolence of creation, a basic sense of right and wrong given to all, institutions such as family and good government, wholesome human achievements and enjoyments, and in other positive features of human existence. Christians are able to work with non-believers to expand the benefits of common grace.

Governmental Responsibility

Governments must operate with a strong sense of integrity and faithfulness to the laws of the nation. They must honor their commitments to their citizens by fulfilling their basic duties, controlling entitlements and spending, and avoiding immense deficits that will burden future generations. We warn our government against yielding to the passion for an ever-broader expansion of rights that are popular at the moment but are not wise or good for the long-range health of the nation.

Religious Freedom

We strongly support religious liberty in America and around the world as we look with alarm at the deterioration of this freedom, especially as it is repressed in countries like China but even incrementally in the United States. We support:

- Genuine freedom of religion for all, not to be reduced to “freedom of worship.”
- The free exercise of religion, not to be reduced to the right to believe as you choose.
- Freedom of religion for all religious organizations, not merely “houses of worship.” This includes the right to employ people who adhere to the doctrines and morals of the church or religious organization.
- Freedom for people to live out their religious convictions in public and in their workplaces and not be harassed and penalized by adverse governmental action.

Immigration Reform

America has been a land of immigrants since before the nation was founded. Between the extremes of nativism and open borders, most citizens have open arms toward immigrants but also see the rule of law and secure borders as essential for a safe and civil society. Today our nation and our churches are increasingly populated by people from a multitude of cultures and lands, and many of these people are undocumented.

How can our Charis Fellowship respond?

1. We call on our churches to give prayer, thought, discussion, and action toward addressing the problem of the undocumented immigrant in a God-honoring way.
2. We recognize the divisive and controversial nature of this debate, and we encourage dialogue in the churches that is respectful, open-minded, and solution focused.
3. We further call on our churches to be the “reconciling presence of Christ” in the midst of a broken system that creates rancor, resentment, racism, selfishness, fear, exploitation, danger, and disregard for the law.
4. We call on our society and elected leaders to rise above political posturing and rancor to work toward a solution on immigration that is compassionate and realistic—a solution that accomplishes the government’s responsibility to protect its citizens and guests, while at the same time provides relief to the oppressed.
5. We recognize that meaningful solutions to this problem are not easily reached and must come through a determined will to achieve them. We deplore the present situation when our Federal Government is unable to resolve key immigration issues year after year.
6. We also recognize that the United States cannot accommodate everyone who desires to come to this country. Correcting the situations that force many to flee their home countries is one way to reduce the number attempting to gain entry into the United States.
7. We also call on the Federal Government to be wise in its use of Foreign Aid to aid in reforming situations in those foreign countries.

COVID-19

The Bible speaks a great deal about sickness. We read in the Scriptures of a God who heals every disease (Psalm 103:3, Matthew 9:35, 10:1) yet we also read in those same scriptures that God brought about various plagues or diseases for a clear purpose (Exodus 9:14-16). God can and has used diseases as punishment for sin to a specific people for specific sins (Leviticus 26), but in doing so, His goal is always repentance and restoration (2 Chronicles 7:13-14). It is also clear in the Word of God, that not every plague, disease, or disaster is of God's direct judgment, but many are symptoms of living in a world marred by sin (Genesis 3). Such events as the global pandemic of COVID-19 may be an example of this.

The Scriptures teach that no one knows the time of Christ's return (Matthew 24:36). However, to be able to biblically interpret historical and current events and recognize them in light of the signs of our times is both wise and comforting (Matthew 16:1-4). The spread of disease is a foreshadowing of the sickness and pandemonium that will be part of the end times. Jesus taught of this even while He was here on earth (Matthew 24, Luke 21). The current COVID-19 situation is a sign that should be a catalyst that causes all people to ponder issues of life, death, and eternity. In so doing, seek and find the truth of Almighty God.

We know God is Sovereign and is working out His perfect will (Romans 8:28, 11:36) even amongst these trying and seemingly uncertain times. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we call upon Christians to:

- Be diligent and persistent in pursuing opportunities to minister to those who have been greatly affected by the pandemic or who are serving those impacted. (Colossians 4:5)
- Follow civic and medical directives in an attempt to help from spreading the virus, so long as those directives do not violate the commands of God as it is our personal responsibility to protect ourselves and to help protect those around us. It is also our responsibility to set aside our rights or opinions for the sake of others or the gospel. (1 Corinthians 8-10, Philippians 2:4-11)
- Follow as best we can within the cultural setting and atmosphere the biblical mandate to assemble and to carry out the mission and function of the body and bride of Christ. (Hebrews 10:25)
- To not hoard resources or price gouge necessities for personal use or profit. (Matthew 7:12)
- To not panic or be controlled by fear, but to labor tirelessly to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be a people whose lives demonstrate His love to those who are watching. (Philippians 4:6-7)

- To be a people who provide biblically relevant and logically practical answers within the scope of our knowledge and experience to those who are asking honest questions in regard to the pandemic. (1 Peter 3:15)
- Be continuously in prayer for... (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
 - o ...those who have contracted the virus to recover to full health. (James 5:16)
 - o ...the protection of those who are serving those who are infected—, for their emotional, physical, and spiritual strength as they minister to their fellow man. (Psalm 27)
 - o ... those who have lost family and friends to the pandemic, that they may be able to properly mourn and honor their loved ones. (Matthew 5:4)
 - o ...those in civil leadership that they will make decisions that honor the dignity of all human life and not be influenced or directed by political gain or agendas. (1 Timothy 2:1-2, Psalm 2:10-11, Proverbs 21:1)
 - o ...those who take care of the most vulnerable in nursing homes or assisted living that they can still provide tender, compassionate care as well as deal respectfully with those who are separated from their loved ones. (Matthew 25:40)
 - o ...those who have lost employment or income-earning ability to find jobs where they will be able to provide for their families. (Jeremiah 29:7)
 - o ...those who are in church and ministry leadership that they will be able to sort through the information, discern truth, and make decisions that will honor God. (Colossians 1:9, Ephesians 1:15-17)

Resolution Towards Racial Harmony

The Charis Fellowship affirms our belief in a God who has created all persons in His image and who commands that all persons be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their social, economic, or ethnic background. We call for justice for all as prescribed within the US Constitution and Pledge of Allegiance. We condemn racism in any form.

We commit ourselves to join a common quest for God-honoring solutions to racial inequity and ensure equal access to justice and opportunity for all. We commit ourselves to be part of the national self-assessment and to pursue the actions now needed to bring about racial harmony, justice, and unity in our land. We call upon all who form the Charis Fellowship to pray

for our nation, its leaders, and all who are part of our judicial system. We call upon our churches and leaders to boldly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus, the true and sole source of racial harmony. We also call upon our entire Charis family to proactively engage in ethnically diverse dialogue, education, and interactions that will collectively move us toward God's desire for racial unity and harmony.

We affirm our commitment to the Biblical truth that God cares deeply about issues of justice and human dignity. Yet we recognize that our society continues to struggle with injustice and inequality toward minorities and we grieve with those who suffer the consequences. We believe followers of Jesus cannot remain passive or silent and must embrace our responsibility to "stop doing wrong; learn to do right; seek justice; and defend the oppressed" (Isaiah 1:16-17).

We affirm the First Amendment right of protesters to peacefully assemble. Yet we denounce rioting, arson, and looting as completely unacceptable activities. Regretfully, these actions often shift the focus away from the underlying causes of injustice. Such activities also harm the very people who need our support. (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15)

We affirm and respect God's ordained agency of law enforcement. We honor those engaged in this noble profession. Yet we appeal to those agencies to root out any actions and attitudes that manifest the evils of racism, which include both crimes of commission and omission. And we believe that officers who participate in or allow the use of excessive or inappropriate force should be called to account. (Romans 13:1-7)

The Nation of Israel and Anti-Semitism

Preamble:

- The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:2-3) is both historically significant and confirms God's eternal purpose is to bless all nations and peoples through Israel (John 4:22, Isaiah 27:6).
- The biblical nation of Israel is chosen and special to God (Genesis 7:6-8) and it still has a role to play in God's plan.
- It is our duty to recognize this plan and to pray for the Nation of Israel (Psalm 122:6) and for all Jewish people who in their secular state have, except for a remnant, rejected their Messiah (Romans 11:5).

We Recognize and Resolve:

- The nation of Israel is a legitimate secular state with the rights and responsibilities of any nation.
- Israel has been in a continuously hostile environment where its national legitimacy is not recognized.
- Israel, as a secular political state, has contributed at times to the hostility in the region.

- We resolve not to be biased against either the Israelis or the residents of Gaza and the West Bank.

Nevertheless:

- Aggression against Israel is the same as aggression against any other state.
- Aggression against Israel based on anti-Semitism is especially egregious.
- Hostility against Israel as political theater is dangerous both to people and political stability.
- Bias in political institutions and biased media coverage is anti-Semitic.
- Legitimizing anti-Semitism based on real and supposed faults of Israel is bogus.

Therefore:

- We call upon the church to publicly voice support for Israel and opposition to anti-Semitism.
- We call upon the church to take action in ways deemed biblically fitting for that support.
- We call upon the church to pray for Israel's protection and responsiveness to the gospel.

Proposal on Critical Race Theory

Goals:

We seek to build on the Resolution Toward Racial Reconciliation.

We seek racial reconciliation, and we seek unity.

We seek these through a careful discussion of important racial issues from a biblical foundation.

We want to acknowledge and hear from the variety of perspectives in our Fellowship.

Section One: Overview

The focus on race in the U.S. has been both worthy and troubling; both reasonable and not. We have needed a sobering view of racism though it is challenging to take a balanced view that neither excuses nor delegitimizes our society.

Critical Race Theory has its origins in academics and in Critical Theory. A combination of critical race theory, intersectionality and other ideas has provided a popular framework for understanding racial oppression that many find useful for putting racism behind us. However, among white and non-white Christians there are biblical concerns.

We believe that this topic is worthy of further study and want to have time to get the input of all voices and to let our understanding grow.

Section Two: Specifics Areas of Exploration of Critical Race Theory (CRT)

There are several areas of biblical concern that warrant our attention. We are confident in the reliable biblical record of Genesis 1-3 as a basis of informing us. This is a brief list of Critical Race Theory issues:

- *The Nature of Humankind:* What direction does creation of the human race give us?
- *Identity:* To what extent are we part of a collective and to what extent are we responsible individuals?
- *Determinism:* To what extent are our lives defined by our race, ethnicity, and gender?
- *Justice:* What are the roles of biblical justice and social justice in our understanding?

- *Understanding*: To what extent does an oppression narrative have merit?
- *Forgiveness*: To what extent are forgiveness and reconciliation between races possible?
- *Violence*: To what extent are the ingredients of resentment and violence involved?
- *Government*: To what extent should we rely on our various levels of government?
- *Context*: What does the full social and biblical context add to our understanding?

Section Three: Action

We will take the coming year for this study and then expect to propose a resolution. Whatever we may find, we must not excuse the church from its responsibility, nor should this issue prevent the church from taking biblical action. Our main response should be determined by our biblical understandings and values, but we must not end there. We must take action that is in harmony with Christian discipleship and the mission of the church.

During this study we must increase our efforts as believers and as churches to understand, listen, serve, build family bonds and ministries as well as be involved in neighborhoods, schools, and socially oriented organizations to impact the lives of all who are in need and specifically those who are people of color. We expect to do this through calm, local, and personal efforts of churches and individuals in spite of the confusion we see around us.