**TRANSCRIPT**

**Phillip Bethancourt:** Welcome back to the Questions and Ethics program I'm Philip Bethancourt, joined here with Russell Moore. Today, Dr. Moore, I want to have you help us think some more about issues related to racial reconciliation. In the past week or two the country has been captivated by the issues that have unfolded in Ferguson when there was no indictment made there. And just today we found out that the police officer who killed Eric Garner by chokehold in New York City was also not indicted for what took place there.

I think it raises a lot of questions for a lot of people about how should we be thinking about these issues and what it means about the justice system in America. How do we help our churches navigate the types of controversy that's going on around us. What thoughts would you have for us in the wake of this about what it means for racial reconciliation in our culture and our churches in particular.

**Russell Moore:** Well, I've said quite a few times that when it comes to the Ferguson decision you have a lot of white people, particularly, who look at it only in terms of Ferguson itself. And they're saying, and they're right, that we don't know exactly what happened between Michael Brown and this police officer. We don't know exactly what happened between Michael Brown and this police officer. We don't know exactly what this altercation was about.

But we have our African-American brothers and sisters who are saying to the rest of the community that we're looking at this through a bigger picture of a situation in which there is often unjust and unequal treatment happening, especially for black males in this culture. I think that's an important point to make. Now with this Eric Garner thing . . . I just found out about this within the last hour—we're here recording in our studio—and I am shocked and grieved. I'm sitting here wondering what could possibly be the explanation for this.

I mean, there is no excuse that I can think of for choking a man to death for selling illegal cigarettes. This is about cigarettes. This isn't a violent confrontation. This isn't a threat that anybody has reported, a threat of someone being killed. This is someone being choked to death. We have it on video with the man pleading for his life. There is no excuse for that I can even contemplate or imagine right now. And so we've heard a lot in recent days about rule of law, and that's exactly right. We need to be emphasizing rule of law. And a rule of law that is Biblically just is a rule of law that carries out justice equally.

Romans 13 says that the sword of justice is to be wielded against evildoers. Now, what we too often see still is a situation where our African-American brothers and sisters, especially brothers, are more likely to be arrested, more likely to be executed, more likely to be killed. And this is a situation in which we have to say, I wonder what the defenders of this would possibly say. I just don't know. But I think we have to acknowledge that something is wrong with the system at this point and that something has to be done.

Frankly, nothing is more controversial in American life than this issue of whether or not we are going to be reconciled across racial lines. I have seen some responses coming after simply saying in light of Ferguson that we need to talk about why it is that white people and black people see things differently. And I said what we need to do is to have churches that come together and know one another and are knitted together across these racial lines. And I have gotten responses and seen responses that are right out of the White Citizen's Council material from 1964 in my home state of Mississippi, seeing people saying there is no gospel issue involved in racial reconciliation.

Are you kidding me? There is nothing that is clearer in the New Testament that the gospel breaks down the dividing walls that we have between one another. The gospel is what turns us away from hating our brother so much so that John says in 1 John 3 that the one who hates his brother is not of the spirit of Christ, but is of the spirit of the evil one, of the spirit of the devil. If that is not a gospel issue then I don't know what is. S

So we do have some real problems in society around us. We have some real problems in our own hearts and in our own churches. We have a group of people—a small group of people, not a lot of people—some unreconstructed racists in American society and we have some who continue to come and to sit in pews of churches and pretend as though they are disciples of Jesus Christ. And we have some other people who are willing to speak to any possible issue, from the framework of Scripture that goes on in the world until it comes to the question of whether or not we maybe do have some legitimate problems being faced by our African-American brothers and sisters in Christ, and then at that point they become completely silent and say the gospel doesn't speak to this. I think that's wrong.

Some of these issues are going to be complicated, and some of these particular. . . when it comes to Ferguson we're going to have different understandings of what the grand jury should have done and how they should have handled it. There are going to be some differing interpretations. But folks, when we've got police officers killing a man on video with a chokehold, can we not say there are still some problems in American society when it comes to race?

And if the church of Jesus Christ cannot say that . . . we don't have all the answers to fix the systemic structure. But what we do know is that we in our churches ought to be grieving over the fact that we are siloed away from one another into white churches and black churches and Latino churches far too often. And that one of the ways that we ought to embody the gospel of Jesus Christ is by congregations that love one another and that go beyond carnal divisions and instead signal what Paul says to the church in Ephesus at Ephesians chapter 3 is the manifold wisdom of God in breaking down the division between Jew and gentile, breaking down the division between Scythian and Jew. All of these divisions broken down so that our identity is in Christ, so that we love one another and know one another.

The situation that we have right now is not the book of Acts. It would be easy in Acts chapter 6 for the disciples to simply say, "Well, the Greek widows are having problems—that's the Greeks problem. Let the Greek church handle that." No, it's Jewish apostles setting aside deacons, Jewish deacons in many cases, to minister to the Greek widows. Why? Because the Greeks weren't some other part of the body of Christ. They are part of one body. And if we can't start to model that in our churches and start to show that in our churches to the outside society, then I'm not sure what we have to say.

**Phillip Bethancourt:** Thanks for listening to this special edition of the Questions and Ethics program. We want to encourage you to pray for our country and our churches in light of these recent things that have unfolded on racial reconciliation. We'll be back again with you soon to talk about how to apply the gospel to the pressing issue of the day.