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Subject: Downtown Campus Update, January 14 — Christ's Sufficient Grace



## Bethlehem Baptist Church

Downtown Campus

Dear Downtown Campus,

On [Ethnic Harmony Sunday](#), I sought to position all we do at Bethlehem in the pursuit of ethnic harmony and racial reconciliation underneath the New Commandment of Jesus:

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*—John 13:34–35

I believe that without the spiritual power of Christlike love, we will not only depart from any meaningful experience of harmony in the church, but also, without it we will depart from anything resembling biblical Christianity.

For decades, Pastor [John Perkins](#) has been a leader in the cause of racial reconciliation in the church. Growing up as a Black man in Jim Crow Mississippi brought horrific experiences of racism and racial injustice. Perkins has not been quiet about how Christ transformed him, from a person who hated white people, into a person who loves people of every ethnicity by the power of Christ's love. He is now 91 years old and recently published what many expect to be his last book, entitled, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race*. He writes ...

I came to know ... God. And I believe the purpose of us knowing ... God is to love Him back and make Him known to others. Almost immediately God began to do something radical in my heart. He began to challenge my prejudices and my hatred toward others. I had learned to hate the white people in Mississippi. I hated their control over our lives. I hated them for what they had done to my brother, Clyde. I hated them for refusing to see me as a person deserving of respect just because I was a human being. I had so much hate! And if I had not met Jesus I would have died carrying that heavy burden of hate to my grave. But He began to strip it away, layer by layer. He reminded me again and again that I could not hoard His love. And I could not be selective about who I would share it with. The love He had shed abroad in my heart was meant to be shared with others regardless of their color. (*One Blood*, p. 37)

In an earlier book, *He's My Brother: A Black Activist and a Former Klansman Tell Their Stories*, Perkins and coauthor Thomas A. Tarrants III, tell how the power of Christ's love overcame their hatred and racial hostility, turning them from foes into dear friends. A former Klansman, Tarrants was transformed by the love of Christ and later became the pastor of an interracial church in Washington, D.C.

Just as the love of Christ cannot be stopped, our commitment to ethnic harmony and racial reconciliation will not be stopped by the challenges of the last year. For further information on our convictions, I recommend a careful reading of our 2021 elder statement, [Ethnic Harmony Affirmations & Denials](#). Please join me in praying that we love one another just as Christ loved us, and thereby, create a church culture in which ethnic harmony will grow and flourish

—to the glory of Christ.

### *An Apology ...*

On Saturday, November 6, at a Q&A session (held before the vote on my pastoral role change), I made a careless remark about journalist Julie Roys. In that meeting, I said that I had spoken to reporters from *WORLD* magazine, *Christianity Today*, and the *StarTribune* newspaper. I said that I had declined to speak with Julie Roys, because when she asked to talk to me, I said that “she threatened to expose me as a flip-flopper.” Those words were not careful and were a paraphrase of Julie’s email to me. When Julie heard my comment on a recording, she was offended. In December, I sent her this apology:

*Julie ... Actually, you did NOT say that I was a ‘flip-flopper’. You said that I had done an ‘apparent about face’, first calling for “an internal investigation” and then voting to “dismiss the allegations without an investigation.” At that time, with the threat of your publication pending, and your inaccurate presentation of my own thoughts and intentions and actions as ‘an about face’, I felt that you were putting pressure on me to talk to you ....*

*Julie, for my flippancy, inaccuracy and the offense it has caused you, I am sorry. Please forgive me. In a pastor’s letter to our church after the holidays, I will correct this. I’ll cc you when I write it.*

For those of you who attended that Q&A meeting (or who may have heard about this elsewhere), please let the record stand corrected.

Praying for Christ’s sufficient grace as we walk into 2022. For the glory of God, who has reconciled us to himself in Christ Jesus and has called us to be reconciled to one another in Christ,

*Pastor Kenny*