

Racial Injustice in America (Part 2)—
Responding Biblically to the Issue:
What Should We Do?

--CEFC 11/15/20

As you know, if you were with us last week,

I have interrupted my usual of practice of preaching expositionally
through passages of the Bible.

I have been asked by the elders to spend two weeks
addressing the very difficult topic
of how we should respond to racial injustice in America.

We want to avoid mere virtue signaling
and respond in a thoughtful and biblical manner
that tries to wrestle with some of the tough questions which this issue raises.

Last week I began by looking at this theologically—
considering some of the central biblical truths that address this issue,
with a special focus on biblical justice.

We saw that it is an entailment of living out the gospel
that we should seek to love God and our neighbor
by showing compassion to the poor
and seeking justice for the oppressed.

This week we will seek to apply that theology practically,
as I first turn and look at the problem that needs to be addressed,
and then consider the two extreme responses to it that we see in our culture,
before suggesting some concrete responses that we can make

as individuals and as a church.

Before we launch into this, I think we should pray--

In the 1830s, the French aristocrat Alexis de Toqueville toured America seeking to understand what was distinctive about this new democratic nation. His book *Democracy in America*, first published in 1835, sought to capture the essence of this country's culture and values.

There was much that Toqueville greatly admired about America, but he saw one central, and, in his view, insolvable problem:

“The most [formidable] of all the evils that threaten the future of the United States,” he wrote, “stems from the presence of Blacks on its soil. In seeking the cause of the Union's present difficulties and future dangers, one almost invariably arrives at this primary fact no matter where one starts.”¹

Here, Toqueville is referring specifically to the institution of race-based slavery.

He realized that its scope in the South would make it extremely difficult to eradicate, but even its inevitable legal prohibition would not heal its most grievous wound.

“Slavery is receding; but the prejudice to which it gave rise is unaltered,” he wrote.²

“There is a natural prejudice that leads a man

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. English Edition. Translated from the French by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2004), p. 392.

² *Ibid.*, p. 395.

to scorn a person who has been his inferior
long after that person has become his equal.”³

Toqueville recognized that, because slavery in America was grounded in race—
with the enslavement of black Africans by white Europeans,⁴
skin color would become a visible representation
that would perpetuate its impact:

“The memory of slavery dishonors the race,
and race perpetuates the memory of slavery.”⁵

“The law may destroy servitude,
but only God can obliterate its trace,”⁶ Toqueville concluded.

And he was right.

The race-based nature of slavery in America created an indelible association
between obvious physical differences and extreme social discrepancies—
a stigma that would be difficult to erase.

Black skin was inextricably linked to servitude
and the social inferiority which that servitude entailed.

This created deep prejudicial attitudes toward African-Americans
that were perpetuated through generations and that are still found today.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁴ There are some rare exceptions. In Louisiana, there were some black-owned plantations with their own slaves. In the history of slavery in the world, slavery based in race was not the norm. In fact, the word “slave” is a corruption of the word “Slav,” because Slavic people were once a common source of European slaves. Historically, most slaves have been racially similar to their masters, but usually came from some other ethnic, tribal, or religious group.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

If, as one Black writer puts it, “The essence of American racism is disrespect,”⁷
that disrespect has its roots in the institution of race-based slavery.

Slavery—what has been called America’s “original sin”—
became fully entrenched in American, and especially Southern, culture,
and many Christians simply accepted it,
and even defended it,
as a necessary part of life.

The famed New England pastor Jonathan Edwards owned slaves,
as did the leading evangelist of the First Great Awakening of the 1730s and 40s,
George Whitefield.

Whitefield preached to both Whites and Blacks,
but he petitioned the British Parliament to allow slavery in Georgia
so that he could fund his orphanage there.

Once slavery had taken hold, it needed to be justified,
especially in a culture deeply influenced by Christian ideals.

Prominent among the justifications
was the social, cultural, and even intellectual inferiority of Blacks.

This dehumanizing effort was embodied in the US Constitution
which counted slaves as only three-fifths of a person
for the purposes of Congressional representation.

As the movement to abolish slavery grew in the North,

⁷ Ta-Nehisi Coates, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

several major Christian denominations split over the issue—
the Methodists divided in 1844,

the Baptists in 1845,

and the Presbyterians in 1857.

Christian preachers of the South defended their view

with both practical and biblical arguments,

and in so doing, they displayed a cultural captivity;

they had become slaves to their own economic and social interests.

The Civil War was about the future of slavery in America.

And the fact that those in the North were willing to go to war over this issue

is significant.

One Union soldier died for every ten slaves who were liberated.

But unfortunately, emancipation did not lead to equality.

A strict social caste based on race was established that subjugated Blacks,

and it was rigidly enforced.

Any attempt by former slaves to advance themselves was deeply resented

and often violently resisted by the White majority.⁸

This was true even of many Christian abolitionists

who continued to insist on racist policies of continued segregation.

During the days of Reconstruction after the war,

⁸ For example, when black Methodists at St. George's Church in Philadelphia were segregated into the balcony in 1792, Bishop Richard Allen, helped form the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME).

newly enfranchised Blacks finally gained a voice in government
 and many won election to southern state legislatures
 and even to the U.S. Congress.

But when Federal troops withdrew from the South in the late 1870s,

new laws were enacted, now known as Jim Crow laws,
 to subjugate the Black population.

Voting rights were diminished, and everything from restaurants to restrooms,
 and busses to water fountains, were segregated by law.⁹

After experiencing unfair treatment in White churches.

Blacks formed their own congregations and denominations.

Vigilante justice in the form of lynching, often supported by officers of the law,
 sought to keep the lines of separation of the races very clear.¹⁰

The Ku Klux Klan was formed as an instrument of White supremacy.

Shamefully, the church did little to oppose these forces of oppression. /

The onset of World War I

drastically increased the demand for labor in manufacturing,
 resulting in a mass immigration of Blacks to northern cities.
 where they were generally received by Whites

⁹ All of these were legally sanctioned by the U. S. Supreme Court in the decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896.

¹⁰ Research by the Equal Justice Initiative puts the number of lynchings or other violent deaths resulting from racism between 1865 and 1950 at nearly 6,500. As a child my father had an encounter he had with a violent mob that was ravaging the countryside after savagely lynching a black man unjustly accused of murdering a white woman. This lynching of Claude Neal in 1934 in Marianna, Florida, is often considered one of the most egregious “spectacle lynchings” of the 20th century. The description is nothing but horrible (<https://kentakpage.com/claude-neal-the-last-spectacle-lynching-in-the-united-states/>).

as an unwanted threat,
And forced residential segregation,
followed by White flight (and jobs) from the cities to the suburbs after WWII,
led to the modern plight of poor, Black urban ghettos. /

This legacy of slavery in America

has had a lasting impact.

Racist housing policies, VHA loan policies, banking practices,

and various HOA covenants

all conspired to suppress Black housing opportunities and housing values,

depressing home ownership

and the accumulation of household wealth that goes with it,

and perpetuating residential segregation in our

society.

Other factors, like poor education and the loss of employment,

increased poverty levels,

which contributed to the breakdown of families,

which led to a culture of hopelessness and despair,

which only increased drug use and crime

which fostered a huge increase in incarceration

which contributed to a spiral of dysfunction

and a whole host of racial inequalities.

The household wealth¹¹ of African-Americans

¹¹ This is a measure of total assets, not current income.

is only one-tenth of that of Whites.¹²

The unemployment rate of Blacks is twice that of Whites and has been since 1950.

The incarceration rate of Blacks is six times that of Whites,¹³

and 1 in 23 Black men are on probation or parole,

compared to only 1 in 81 Whites.¹⁴

And this past year, Covid deaths among Black Americans

is six times higher than that of Whites.

What is to be done about all this inequality?

How should we respond to the biblical call for justice in our country—

the call **“To act justly and to love mercy**

and to walk humbly with our God” (Mic. 6:8)?

Before addressing that question directly,

I want to consider two contrasting viewpoints—

two extremes that are offered in our culture today.

One response to the call for racial justice

is simply **to deny that race is a problem.**

Didn't the election of a Black President,

¹²<https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/recent-trends-in-wealth-holding-by-race-and-ethnicity-evidence-from-the-survey-of-consumer-finances-20170927.htm>

¹³<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/30/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/>

¹⁴ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/12/06/community-supervision-marked-by-racial-and-gender-disparities>

and, now, a Black Vice-President,

usher us into a post-racial America?

Isn't racism no longer socially acceptable?

I mean, to be called a “racist” is deeply offensive.

Aren't civil rights laws in place to protect against discrimination and prejudice? What more can be done?

In fact, it is argued that drawing attention to race only makes matters worse.

What we need is a **cultural colorblindness**, they say—

judging people,

in the words of Martin Luther King,

solely on the quality of their character and not on the color of their skin.

Shouldn't we forget the discrimination of the past and just move on.

What are we to think of this Cultural Colorblindness approach?

It's true, Dr. King's vision of a colorblind society is inspiring,

but, remember, it was set in the context of a “dream.”

It is the way the world ought to be,

and, as Christians, we know it is the way the world one day will be,

but it is not hard to see that it is far from the way the world is in our day.

In fact, being racially colorblind can blind a person

to the real disparities that continue to exist along racial lines.

Equal opportunity is a worthy goal, and our civil rights laws

seek to ensure that equality,
but it is naïve to think that it really exists in any real sense.

The same rules may apply for everyone,

but people begin at very different starting lines.

Is the opportunity of a child born in a household without a father,

in an inner city rife with poverty, crime, and poor education,

without role models offering a vision of success—

is the opportunity of that child equal to the opportunity which I had—

with two college-educated parents, living in a comfortable suburb,

with excellent schools and people all around me inspiring me to excel?

I don't think so.

I was blessed with immense economic and social capital that many others don't have.

This inequality of opportunity is related especially to poverty,

but the significant overlap of poverty and race can't be ignored.

More than that, as President Lyndon Johnson observed over fifty years ago,

Black poverty is not White poverty.¹⁵

There is a legacy of prejudice, discrimination, and injustice

that has had generational effects that can erode the spirit

and reinforce a hopelessness regarding the central connection

between present sacrifice and future reward.

Colorblindness in the law is a critical goal and has largely been accomplished.

But the progress of the present does not automatically undo

the damage of the past.

As one write puts it:

¹⁵ This point was made quite strongly in his 1965 Howard University commencement address.

It is as though we have run up a credit-card bill
and, having pledged to charge no more,
[we] remain befuddled that the balance does not disappear.
The effects of that balance, interest accruing daily,
are all around us.¹⁶ /

As Dr. King declared, a colorblind society is the goal,
but over fifty years after his speech, it is still a dream.

I fully acknowledge that being fair to all people in the present
while seeking to overcome the injustices toward some people in the past
is a very tricky matter.

But however we deal with that challenge,¹⁷
issues of race are very real in our country,
and we must not simply close our eyes to them.
That can simply reinforce the status quo with all its inequities.

On the one side, some argue that race means nothing.

¹⁶ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

¹⁷ William Wilson makes the interesting observation that “recent studies reveal that although they oppose the ‘preferential’ racial policies associated with quotas or job hiring and promotion strategies designed to achieve equal outcomes, most white Americans approve of ‘opportunity-enhancing’ affirmative action policies, such as race-targeted programs for job training, education, and recruitment.” They are supported, Wilson contends, “because they reinforce the belief that the allocation of jobs and economic rewards should be based on individual effort, training, and talent.” (William Julius Wilson, *More Than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City* (New York: Norton, 2009), pp. 139-140).

But on the other side, some contend that **race means everything**,
and what is required in response is nothing less than a cultural revolution.

Since the racism embodied in slavery was a part of our nation's founding
and slavery was embedded in our national Constitution,¹⁸
some believe that everything about us as a nation
has been affected by this original stain.

It is claimed that the structures of American society are inherently and completely racist,
and a total reconstruction of our culture is the only way to alleviate the problem.

This view has come to dominate academia and has become popularized
in a number of movements,
including the controversial *New York Times 1619 Project*,
which asserts that the date of the first arrival of the enslaved Africans in Virginia
should be declared this "nation's birth year." ¹⁹

In its extreme form, this view flows out of a way of thinking
that developed in American law schools in the 1970s
that came to be known as "Critical Race Theory"
which is a form of what is simply called "Critical Theory."

¹⁸ Art. I.2 refers to slaves being counted as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of Congressional representation.

¹⁹ In its words, the *New York Times Magazine's 1619 Project* "aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of [the United States'] national narrative."

I won't go into it in detail—

Critical Theory can become very philosophical and, well, "theoretical."

But I do want to discuss it briefly,

because it is becoming a controversial part of our national conversation,

and though it points to some important truths,

I think it is ultimately antithetical to a Christian worldview.

Critical Race Theory follows Karl Marx in his view that human societies

must be analyzed in terms of the power imbalance

between oppressors and the oppressed.

Marxism saw this power imbalance purely in economic terms,

but proponents of Critical Theory broaden this to include

the entirety of cultural ideas and values.

Those in power control what is considered normal, true, valuable, and good

in every aspect of culture,

In so doing, they oppress those who don't belong or measure up

as abnormal, deviant, or worthless.

And this very biblical notion of sympathetic care for the outcast,

like Jesus' concern for the leper,

becomes a central driving force in the proponents of the Theory,

and that is part of what it makes it so attractive,

This conflict of power is the fundamental problem in the world,

and only when one understands these dynamics of power and oppression

can one begin to overcome it.

Critical Theory asserts that American society is dominated by a “White culture”
in which those who are White are in a position of power and privilege
over people of color.

Whether intentional or not, if you are White,
you participate in a system that perpetuates ways of viewing reality in the culture
that provide norms and values that give you an advantage over others.

Thus, White supremacy is the oppressing ideology that must be overthrown. /

Now, there is no question that ideas flowing from Critical Race Theory
have become very popular in recent years,
partly because they contain important truth.

As I said, it is true that we ought to be concerned for the outcast and the marginalized.
Jesus demands no less.

It is sadly true that those in positions of power do often oppress those
who are socially weaker.

The Bible gives us plenty of illustrations of that sin,
and the prophets often spoke against it.

It is true that social structures and institutions can reinforce and perpetuate
forms of oppression.

Slavery itself was one such institution,
and the racist legacy of slavery has hindered
the economic and social prospering of African Americans,
thereby benefiting the White majority.

It is also true that, as the saying goes,

“Where you stand is determined by where you sit.”²⁰

Perspective matters in how we view the world.

And because of the pervasive influence of human depravity,
power can corrupt our perception of reality,
leading to self-deception and self-justification in support of unjust structures.

We all have blind spots—especially in those areas where we have some vested interest.

The support of slavery by White Christians in the South is a shameful example.
It is important that we approach these topics with great humility

and seek to listen to minority voices,

because their “lived experience” is a valuable part of the social discussion.

Critical Race Theory can be a useful tool in uncovering and making us aware
of often subtle ways that racism can be hidden in our culture.

Finally, we can affirm the desire for liberation from oppression

that Critical Theory promotes.

The liberation of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt

was a central event in the formation of Israel as a nation

and provides a paradigm of God’s saving work.

Jesus, citing Isaiah 61, described his mission as one in which he was sent

“to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18)

and, as we’ve seen, the Great Commandment of love for God and neighbor

includes seeking “justice for the oppressed.”

Certainly, we must be careful to distinguish what is meant by liberation in Critical Theory

²⁰ Known as “Mile’s Law,” this was first used with reference to perspectives within government bureaucracy.

from a Christian conception,
but the notion of liberation itself in Critical Theory
is an attractive feature for many. /

On a superficial level, then,
much of what Critical Theory espouses sounds reasonable
and is helpful.

But at a deeper level, it contains ideas that a Christian must reject.

In the end, we are confronted with two contrasting views of the world,
with different assessments both of the problem and of the solution.

In denying the reality of God
and condemning the biblical story as an oppressive “meta-narrative,”
Critical Theory has created its own counter narrative.

Society is reduced to two opposing groups—
the oppressors and the oppressed,
and the one is evil and the other good.

In so doing, they have negated both individual responsibility
and anything that unites all humanity.

In contrast, the Bible affirms that all human beings are created in God’s image
and are worthy of respect,
and that all human beings have turned from God
and are sinful and need redemption in Christ.

And each of us is a responsible moral agent, under the judgement of God. /

Critical Theory’s insistence on various group identities

also denies the possibility of a new identity in Christ
where “**there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female**” (Gal. 3:28).

We can acknowledge that structural racism exists,
in the sense that social structures can reinforce and perpetuate
the effects of racism,
but Critical Theory must see all present inequities between White and Black populations
through the single lens of racism,
and, therefore, as evidence of present racism.
This is reductionistic, denying the complexity of human society.

Some of the real racial inequalities may be result of blatant racism,
but some may be the legacy of past racism,
some may be the result of unconscious bias
that is common in all social groupings,
some may be the result of racially neutral economic policies
that dis-proportionately affect the poor,
and some may be the result of negative cultural values
within the African American community itself.

To label all Whites as “racists” is unhelpful.

Yes, it is important to listen to the voices and “lived experience” of minorities,
but “privileging” those voices must not mean
that those voices can’t be challenged.

Certainly, they must not be placed above the voice of God in Scripture,
for God establishes norms for human behavior that apply to all.

Finally, the liberation that the Bible speaks of is not the freedom from all standards
and the overturning of the “violence” of “hegemonic narratives.”
Instead, the Bible points to the liberation
both from physical violence, cruelty, and enslavement,
and, even more, from the captivity to sin that corrupts our hearts.

Critical Theory fails to address the root of the human problem—
our own sin in turning from God.
It tries to deal with symptoms without addressing the cause—
the deadly cancer within all our hearts.

All it offers is a never-ending conflict
between the oppressors and the oppressed,
for some group will always and necessarily use their power in oppressive ways.

In contrast, the gospel offers the hope of forgiveness,
the hope of moral transformation,
and ultimately the hope of a divine renewal and reconciliation,
in which God’s just kingdom will be found on earth as it is in heaven. /

It is true, Critical Theory points to some real dynamics in our fallen world.
But the partial truths of Critical Theory become untruths
when they are perceived as the whole truth.

And in some circles today,
the claims of Critical Theory are held with a fundamentalist religious fervor.
Racism is its notion of “original sin.”

Becoming aware of the racist power structures of society

is seen as a form of religious awakening—becoming “woke.”

But being “woke” without works is worthless.

The Theory demands a continuing process of repentance for one’s racism

and all manner of rites and rituals to signal one’s virtue

and to attempt to absolve one’s guilt.

You can never fully earn one’s salvation, however,

for your efforts to overcome the privileges of Whiteness will never be enough.

But at the same time, the temptation of self-righteousness is ever present,

when you look down on those who fail to own their own racism.

Failing to adhere to this Critical Theory’s dogmatic faith

will result in being silenced and “canceled.” /

As Christians, we must beware of the deceptions of this social religion,

but, equally, we mustn’t label everyone who sees racism as a critical problem

a neo-Marxist adherent of Critical Race Theory,

nor is that true of everyone who uses the slogan “Black Lives Matter.”²¹

For you see, in assessing the cultural responses to racial injustice in America

we must avoid two extremes.

It is inadequate to say either that race is nothing

or that race is everything.

²¹ It is unfair to label everyone who uses the slogan “Black Lives Matter” as a “cultural Marxist” and one who has embraced Critical Race Theory, even though that may be true of the founders of that movement. That slogan can capture a wide spectrum of views about the nature of the problem of race in America and what ought to be done about it.

Racism is real, and it needs our attention
as we are informed by biblical truth
and our Lord's requirement that we show concern for the poor
and to seek justice for the oppressed.

We must seek the "mind of Christ" as we address the complexities of race in America.

So after all this, let me get practical
and close by offering a number of ways we can respond
to racial injustice in America.

1. First, we must Engage in Personal Reflection.

I encourage you to begin where I began this series—
with reflection on your own attitudes toward race.

What are the events and influences that have shaped your own perceptions—
whether for good or ill.

Racism is clearly wrong.

It is a denial of our common human dignity,
and it is contrary to the command to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We must root out the racism in our own hearts,
as we reflect on possible negative stereotypes and associations
we make on the basis of race.

May we also seek to root it out in our homes—
in our conversations around the dinner table with our children,
and in our interactions with neighbors, friends, and fellow workers.

I commend to you the words of Psalm 139: 23-24—

**Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.**

2. Second, we must courageously Face the Truth.

As Christians we not only believe that every human being
has dignity as God's image bearers in the world,
but also that every human being (apart from One) is fallen
and subject to the corruption of sin.

This depravity affects every one of us and every part of us.

It should not surprise us, then, to find darkness within our own hearts.

We must face that truth, confident of God's grace to forgive and redeem.

But what we find in ourselves can also be found
in the human institutions of which we are a part.

No human endeavor is immune from sin's stain.

As we consider the history of our nation, there is much to be proud of,
but we must also be willing to face what is painful and shameful.

The unjust treatment of African Americans in this country,
beginning with the institution of slavery,
must be acknowledged honestly and openly.

This applies also to the history of the Christian church.

Only Jesus was without sin.

All our Christian heroes were flawed in some ways.

Throughout history Christians and churches have had blind spots
and have, at times, been captive to their culture
and pursued their own selfish interests.

We must admit that and seek to learn from it,
humbly recognizing that we, too, are subject to the same sinful forces.

3. Third, we need to Listen and Learn.

As sinners, we tend to view the world in a self-centered way,
always justifying our actions.

But Jesus calls us to look to the interests of others, showing compassion.

One way we can do that is through listening to the stories
of those who have felt the burden of injustice
and learning from their experience.

It has been eye-opening to me to hear from almost every African American man I talk to
some story about being pulled over by the police
simply because they were Black.

One Black pastor told me that when he gets in his car,
he always takes his wallet out of his pocket and places it on the dash board
so that if he gets stopped, the police officer won't think he is reaching for a gun.

Stories like this help me to understand the different world I live in
and my need to empathize with those
who must deal with the reality of race every day.

Take time to go to the Museum of African American History.

Watch documentaries about the racial history of our country.

Access websites and podcasts created by and for racial minorities.

I also encourage you to broaden your network of friends.

Engage in some ministry activity that would enable you to serve alongside people
different than you.²²

Reach out to someone of a different race

to seek to build a relationship of trust and openness

that will help you appreciate the experience of others.

Ask them to share their experience and their stories.

Ask them what they think and why, and then listen.

Be open to letting their perspective broaden your own,

perhaps even changing it in the process.

I encourage you to take some time to read articles and books, and listen to podcasts,

that broaden your perspective on the issues of race—

and not just perspectives that confirm what you already believe.

The elders have created an annotated list of resources that you might find helpful.

I have sent it out to you on Friday, and we will be posting that on our website.

I encourage you to pick out at least two items on that list to read, watch, or listen to.

We all have much to learn.

4. Fourth, we should Lament.

²² I have appreciated my involvement with OneHeartDC which includes a large number of African American pastors.

The Bible calls us to “**weep with those who weep**”

as a means of learning to live together in harmony (Rom. 12:15-16).

And the Bible itself gives us a language to use in that process—the language of lament.²³

Biblical lament recognizes the fallenness of this world

and looks to God to intervene and to rescue.

It is the prayer language for processing and expressing pain, grief, and even protest.

In lament, both White and Black believers can go before God in a common voice,

expressing their sorrow for the injustices of the past

and the hardships of the present,

resulting in a divided church before a watching world.

Lament is both an expression of our unity in grief and pain,

as well as an appeal to God to act in power

to bring justice and peace in his world—

that his kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

5. Fifth, we need to Put Faith into Action.

Because of the complexity of these issues,

Christians can honestly disagree on just what would

best express compassion and promote justice.

But we can all agree on the Great Requirement of Micah 6:8 and its call to action.

In the words of Tim Keller, “to ‘do justice’ means to go to places

²³ For a helpful look at lament as a tool for racial reconciliation, see Mark Vroegop, *Weep with Me: How Lament Opens a Door for Racial Reconciliation* (Crossway, 2019).

where the fabric of shalom has broken down,
where the weaker members of societies fall through the fabric,
and to repair it.”²⁴

Let me suggest some actions that address these issues of reparative justice
on three levels.

A. First, we must begin by seeking to meet immediate needs.

This can be as simple as helping people pay their rent or find a job.

We as a church are engaged in such short-term measures,
especially through our connection with Young Lives and Assist,
ministering to women and girls in difficult circumstances
who often have limited financial means.

We also support the work of ACCA,
which works with government services to meet pressing financial needs
and to provide food and furniture to needy homes.

Such short-term action is often called “**relief**”
as it seeks to meet temporary necessities
but provides no long-term solutions.²⁵

But love compels us to help those in need as we are able.

Jesus warned us of the rich man who neglected Lazarus at his gate (Lk. 16:19-31).

²⁴ *Generous Justice*, p. 177.

²⁵ Long term dependence on such relief efforts can promote dependency and undermine personal responsibility and the goal of self-sufficiency. This is part of the controversy surrounding government welfare programs and the important “safety net” which they provide. The biblical practice of gleaning, for example, required a contribution of the person who was helped by it.

B. Second, there are Middle-Term Measures that call for Policy Reform.

Short-term measures generally affect individuals,

but the issues of racial justice often involve structural matters

that require structural reform.

Currently, much attention is focused on policing practices

and the equity of the judicial system

and the attendant incarceration rates and sentencing guidelines

as they affect the African American community.

These kinds of issues generally involve complex policy decisions

that are outside the expertise of churches,

but there are Christian groups that are devoting much time and attention

to some of these issues,

and they deserve our attention.

Prison Fellowship, for example, has developed a number of policy guidelines

regarding criminal justice reform,

that Christians ought to consider as they wrestle with these issues.²⁶

Though churches ought to be cautious

about endorsing the specifics of such policy initiatives,

individual Christians ought to be encouraged

to actively engage such issues in the public arena.

They should promote what they see as more just and equitable public policies,

and we should require our public officials to address them.

²⁶ For more information, cf. www.prisonfellowship.org/about/justicereform/justice-action-center.

C. Finally, we need to consider Long-Term Measures,
involving not only Economic, but also Social and Spiritual Development.

Long-term development is often seen in terms of economics.

This is reflected in measures such as set-aside preferences
for minority-owned businesses
and inner city “enterprise zones,” as well as in job training programs.

Such economic development is critical,

but I think an even more important form of development is social—
or, you might say, moral and spiritual.

This is something that government is ill-equipped to address.

I think the greatest impact for overcoming the cruel legacy of slavery in this country
can come through the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the church.

I say this because what is most often cited as a root problem

in the African American community is the lack of spiritual capital—
particularly a loss of hope.

Without hope, no one will seek to take advantage

of the opportunities that may be available.

Hope for a more just and equitable society,

and hope for the future,

is a major factor in enabling people to persevere in the face of hardships.

Bryan Stevenson, best known for his book *Just Mercy*

and executive director of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#),
reminds people frequently that “hope is your superpower.

Don’t let anyone or anything make you hopeless.

Hope is the enemy of injustice.”²⁷

And there is no greater source of hope—real hope—

than that which is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel gives us hope that God can overcome the sin in the human heart
that is the root of prejudice and discrimination.

The gospel gives us hope that the God who loves justice and righteousness—
can bring us to a better place—

that his ways are the ways of forgiveness,

of reconciliation,

and of human flourishing.

The gospel creates a new community, a new extended family,

a new social network of support and encouragement.

It is this gospel hope that can promote a culture of personal responsibility.

It is this gospel hope that can build strong Christian marriages and families,

which can then nurture children in the virtues that lead to human prospering—

respect for authority, delayed gratification,

reserving sex for marriage, and self-denial for the benefit of others.

It is this gospel hope at the personal level

that will give young people the will to persevere

in seeking to better themselves.

²⁷ Cited in <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/caste-isabel-wilkerson/>

And it is this gospel hope that can sustain a patient engagement
in the hard work of reconciliation and justice,
which in the end, will demand costly solidarity, forgiveness, and Christlike love.

And what can bring this gospel hope—
and especially to the African American community?
It's the church.

Civil rights activist and pastor John Perkins has said,
“There is no institution more equipped and capable of bringing transformation
to the cause of reconciliation than the church.”²⁸

The gospel has a power to unite like none other,
and it radiates hope to the world.

And wherever you hear stories of Black success and progress,
inevitably it connects somehow to the legacy of the Black church. /

As we discussed this issue of racial injustice,
the Cornerstone elders agreed that the most important contribution
we as a church can make as a long-term response to racial injustice in America
is to find ways to support the work of African American churches.

We want to learn from African American pastors
to develop ways that that we can join them in their critical work
of long-term social and spiritual development.

We have discussed a number of possibilities:
like contributing money to a fund established to assist Black churches

²⁸ See his book, *One Blood*.

that have been hard hit by the coronavirus;²⁹
or helping to support seminary scholarships for African American students;
or supporting church planting efforts in the Black community.
But we have just begun to think through
the best ways we may be able to contribute in this effort.
We invite you to join us in those efforts.

Short-term relief, middle-term, reform and long term development.

These are just a few ideas.

There are no easy answers.

I know I still have much to learn.

May the Lord help us as we seek to be faithful.

For racial injustice in America is an issue that is near to the heart of God,
for "**The LORD loves righteousness and justice**" (Psa. 33:5).

May the Lord help us all.

Prayer—

The words of a contemporary lament—

O Lord, how long will your church be divided along racial lines?
How long will the lingering effects of animosity, injustice, and pride
mark your blessed bride?
How long, O Lord, will my white brothers and sisters
not understand the pain in those whose experience is different than ours?

²⁹ Sponsored by the [ANDCampaign](#).

How long, O Lord, will my minority brothers and sisters
struggle with distrust and feel ostracized?

O God, grant us the heart to weep with those who weep.

Give us empathy and understanding.

Create trust where there is pain.

Make your church the united bride you want her to be. . . .

Hear us as we weep together, that we might walk together.

In the name of Jesus our King.³⁰

Quartet: “Disturb Us, Lord” -- *Quartet [after sermon]*

Closing Song: *Shine On Us* [I may cancel this.

Benediction:

**May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,
who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,
encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.**

Those of you both on Zoom and in person

who want to know more about the fund raising event April mentioned earlier
are invited to stay put—

Ursula will join you momentarily—

³⁰ Mark Vroegop, *Weep with Me*, p. 25.

I invite everyone else here to move out into the narthex, the patio, or the parking lot.

Nov. 15, 2020

Racial Injustice in America (Part 2)—

Responding Biblically to the Issue:

What Should We Do?

In this second part of our discussion on how we ought to respond to racial injustice in our country, we move from theological principles to cultural analysis with a focus on some of the history that has resulted in our present situation. We will consider two extreme contemporary responses, before considering some possible actions we can take as we seek to live out the gospel faithfully in our day.

I. The Root of the Present Problem:

Race-Based Slavery

II. The Present Consequences of a Racist Past

III. Two Contrasting Responses:

A. Race is Nothing—“Cultural Color-Blindness”

B. Race is Everything—"Cultural Revolution"

**A Critical Assessment
of Critical Race Theory**

IV. Ways We Can Respond:

A. Engage in Personal Reflection

B. Face the Truth

C. Listen and Learn

D. Lament

E. Put Faith into Action

1. Short-Term Relief

2. Middle-Term Reform

3. Long-Term Development:

The Need for Social and Spiritual Capital

The Power of the Gospel to Provide Hope!

Sermon Response:

Racial Injustice in America (Part 2)—

Responding Biblically to the Issue:

What Should We Do?

- Why do you think it took so long for African Americans to receive full legal rights in this country? How did the strict correlation of slavery in America with black skin help to perpetuate racism in America?
- How do you deal with the fact that some of our Christian heroes owned slaves and, sometimes, even justified slavery?
- What do you think are some of the causes of the great disparity in wealth and prosperity between Whites and Blacks in this country?
- What are some of the strengths of the “race is nothing—color-blind” perspective in addressing racial issues in this country? What are some of its weaknesses?
- What are some of the strengths of the “race is everything—Critical Race Theory” perspective in addressing racial issues in this country? What are some of its weaknesses?
- Review the list of suggested responses/action steps we can take. What do you think you would like to pursue?
- Take some time in your group to pray--especially lamenting before God the problem of racism in our country, the pain it has caused, and the problems that still exist because of it. Pray that Christians can be instruments of reconciliation and justice.

