**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 1)**

**by Pastor Kynes**

Yet once again the issue of racial injustice has thrust itself onto the national stage, as the cruel death of George Floyd has prompted protests around our country. We as Cornerstone Elders have been discussing what might be an appropriate response to this continuing challenge in our culture, both as individuals and as a church.

Though the basic sin of racism is simple and clearly condemned by God, the myriad related issues can be complex and confusing (and quite controversial!). How can our nation move forward and heal? What specific public policies are needed? And what is the distinctive role of the church in all this? While we continue to wrestle with these questions, the elders have asked me to share some pastoral perspectives that might help us think through our response. This is but the first in a series of such posts, and I begin with some reflections on my own past.

**Some Personal Reflections**

The issue of racial injustice is nothing new for me. I grew up in the segregated South, where explicitly racist attitudes and actions were common and accepted, even in the church. I recognize that I could hardly be unscathed by that environment. But in my home, I perceived at an early age that such behavior was wrong.

As a young boy in the panhandle of Florida, my father’s attitude toward racism was influenced by 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.[[1]](#footnote-1) He remembered his father telling the black maid riding in their car to hide so she wouldn’t be killed.

Later, as the Attorney General of Florida during the civil rights marches in St. Augustine in 1964 led by Martin Luther King, he sought to maintain order while ensuring the right to protest. He insisted on the arrest of violent KKK members and urged obedience to the new civil rights laws. Then, as head of a corporate legal department in Tampa, he hired the first African-American corporate lawyer in that city.[[2]](#footnote-2) He also quietly lobbied against the “all-white” policy at the local country club (which did eventually change). Our own racial attitudes can be complex (and never entirely pure), but I believe that his attitudes, at least as I perceived them, helped to shape my own.

As a boy, I had little contact with African-Americans, apart from the black maid who came to our home several days a week and was almost a part of our family. But that changed when, in my sophomore year, our high school was racially integrated through forced bussing. Within the first month we had a riot at the school when the black students getting off the bus were greeted with racist graffiti on the sidewalk. Tensions were high, and we all had to seek some peace together.

During my senior year I was elected as president of the student council, and protests from the black students ensued when all the elected officers were white. I was involved in extensive negotiations to devise a system to expand the leadership team by six, with some elected at-large and others elected just from among the bussed students (which were majority black). The new arrangement worked very well, and I remember that senior year with great satisfaction as one with surprisingly positive racial relations.

As a pastor, I have appreciated the “all peoples” initiative in the EFCA led by former president Bill Hamel, which sought to help this largely white denomination look more like the diversity of America. He launched special outreach initiatives to include African-American, Hispanic, and Asian minorities. We as a church have sought to support such efforts wherever we could, and we have been encouraged to see more diversity within our congregation. We also participated in the Promise Keepers movement which had racial reconciliation as a major focus.

But perhaps since the protests related to the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, I have been giving more attention to this issue. I realized that I need to learn more about the history and legacy of racism in this country and to seek to better understand the experience of African-Americans. The EFCA’s annual theology conference was dedicated to this theme in 2018, with a number of very helpful speakers.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In my own reading, I found the work of Michael Emerson particularly helpful. His book, *Divided by Faith* (2000), looks at these issues through the lens of Evangelical faith, not only tracing the checkered and often racist role the church has played in America, but also the more recent positive efforts at reconciliation. He helped me to see how, inadvertently, some aspects of our theology and our own American way of “doing church” can actually reinforce structures detrimental to African-Americans (the elders are currently reading this book together).

I have also learned a great deal from black authors, including the classic work by NAACP founder W. E. B. Du Bois (*The Souls of Black Folks* [1903]), who addressed the “"double-consciousness” of African-Americans—“the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others." I struggled through Christian writer Jemar Tisby’s *The Color of Compromise* (2019), which chronicles the painful complicity of the church in America’s racist past. I also gained insight from Harvard sociologist William J. Wilson (*More Than Just Race* [2010]), who helped me to see the overlap of poverty and race in America, and the way in which policies that affect the poor, and certain economic and cultural trends, even though “racially-neutral,” disproportionately affect the black community.

I have also tried to broaden my relationships with African-American pastors to help me better understand the issues they face. This is in addition to lots of articles and blog posts and podcasts from all sides that, I hope, help me to think more fairly about these issues.

**What Shapes Our Thinking?**

I share this because I wanted you to know where I have come from in these discussions. Our “racial autobiography” can shape the way we view the issues of racial justice, so we need some self-reflection to examine how we have been formed—both positively and negatively. We can get locked into our past experience, and the partisan nature of cable news and social media can reinforce our own predilections and prejudices if we don’t probe our own hearts and expose ourselves to broader views. I encourage you to consider your own history when it comes to race. What events have influenced your thinking? How can you listen and learn from others?

But more than anything, we need to search the Scriptures for those divinely-given principles that ought to govern our thinking. For most of all, we want our attitudes and actions to reflect those of Christ more than any political platform or social movement. We need “the mind of Christ.”

**What Is to Come**

In the articles to follow, I want to begin by going to the Bible. What is the distinctive message of the church in this discussion? What are the central biblical principles that ought to inform our thinking? Then I want to examine the reality that race still matters a lot in our culture and why that is the case. I want to look at some of the responses to this issue that we see around us, and some of the loaded terms that make understanding (and discussion) difficult. I want to look these responses in the light of our theological principles and our biblical conception of justice. Finally, I want to present some possible steps forward as we seek to respond to the unjust inequalities of race in our land with the conviction and compassion of Christ.

As a beginning to our response, I have found that you cannot engage with issues of race in America without at some point turning to lament—as you grasp the pain that has resulted from this deeply embedded American sin of racism. May the Lord give us humble hearts in these days, quick to weep with those who weep.

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**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 2)**

**Biblical Foundations**

What distinctive perspectives do we as Christians have to bring to the national discussion of racial justice? The Bible provides some fundamental theological principles that ought to guide us and which shed important light on these issues.

**Human Dignity**

The first theological truth is foundational. All human beings are created in God’s image and, therefore, all human beings are to be treated with dignity. Our worth is not determined by wealth or power or social position. Our skin color or other physical characteristics make no difference in the honor we owe to one another. The fact that we are created in God’s image is what unites us as human beings, and it separates us from all other creatures. As Job puts it,

Did not he who made me in the womb make them?

Did not the same one form us both within our mothers? (Job 31:15).

We honor God by honoring his image. For this reason, Jesus links the command to love God with the command to love one's neighbor, who is created in the image of God (Mt. 22:37-40). In his letter, James speaks of the evil inconsistency of the tongue: with it "we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness" (3:9). What the Proverbs says about rich and poor applies equally to black and white:

Rich and poor have this in common:

The LORD is the Makerof them all (Prov. 22:2).

Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,

but whoever is kind to the needy honors God (Prov. 14:31).

We cannot hate the image and say we love the One it represents.

Biblical justice is grounded in this foundational principle that every human being possesses a divine sacredness in virtue of their creation as God’s image—a sacredness that must be recognized and honored. Racism, which is the explicit or implicit feeling or belief or practice that values one race over other races, or devalues one race beneath others,[[4]](#footnote-4) is a direct violation of this fundamental biblical truth. Black Americans want to be afforded real dignity in this dominant-white culture, a dignity of which they were so long deprived.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Human Depravity**

I begin with the **dignity** of our humanity grounded in our creation in the image of God. But that is not the whole story of our humanity. The Bible also declares that human beings have turned from God and that our humanity is also characterized by moral **depravity**. Through the sin of one man, Adam, sin spread to all, a legacy which theologians call “the fall.”

The Bible describes our depravity in both its breadth and its depth. It is universal in scope (“all have sinned” [Rom 3:23]), and only Jesus himself has escaped its grip. And our sinful nature affects our whole person; nothing escapes sin's defilement. Jeremiah speaks of it this way: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). Everything about us that was created to love God and to worship him and bring him glory has now turned against him in sinful rebellion (cf. Rom. 3:10-18). None of our motives is entirely pure, and none of our intentions is completely praiseworthy. Sin pervades our entire personality, as we are “curved in upon ourselves,” full of self-centered pride.

This human depravity is the soil in which the seeds of group hostility sprout and blossom. In our pride we put ourselves above others, and form in-group prejudices against those who are “other.” We exalt ourselves and consider others as inferior; we excuse ourselves and condemn others; we look after our own interests first, and disregard the interests of others. We find this in every culture among every people. In America, as a result of slavery, this sin has taken on a particularly “racial” form, with white and black skin providing sharp dividing lines of group identity.

We as Christians ought to be the first to recognize that because of our depravity, we are all vulnerable to the sin of racism. It is “natural” to us as fallen sinners. Therefore, we must approach this subject with great humility. We will have our own blind spots (as have Christians of the past), so we need the eyes of others to see what we do not (or do not want) to see. And we must be quick to take the log out of our own eye before condemning others. This is not an easy thing to do. We also recognize that any solution to this problem that does not take into account this universal human depravity will ultimately fall far short.

**Structural Evil**

But our fallen state has further implications. The power of our pride to produce the evil of racism is compounded by the demonic forces at work in our world. We now live in a “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4), a “dark world” (Eph. 6:12) and a “world” that we should not love (1 John 2:15). John says that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19, cf. Eph. 2:2). Sin has affected our social and political structures, creating injustices and oppression that give evil an institutional power. We should not be surprised by this—power often corrupts, and those in power tend to act to preserve their positions of power. Sinful human pride is woven into our every institution, making “the world” an evil system in its hostility to God that must be overcome (1 John 5:4).

This understanding of the breadth and depth of human depravity, coupled with an understanding of the malevolent power of demonic forces at work in our world, lead to the conclusion that the evil of individual racism can find expression in the injustice of societal structures. How could it not? Whole cultures can be corrupt in various ways. As a result, any strategy to address the injustice of racism in America must address it at both the individual and structural levels.

As Christians, with an understanding of the pervasive effects of sin, we are not naïve about the possibility of creating perfect justice in this fallen world. But that in no way resolves us of the demand of love to seek the best for others as we are able.

**God’s Redemptive Grace in Christ**

Human beings, created by God in his image with an intrinsic dignity, are also characterized by immense depravity that affects every aspect of human life. These truths provide both the reason for racism in our world, and the supreme ground for opposing it as a great evil. We must address this issue with both of these realities firmly rooted in our thinking. But we must introduce another biblical theme.

God has entered into this fallen world in his Son Jesus Christ. In Christ we see the fullness of God’s grace, forgiving rebellious sinners. In the light of such grace, we need not be fearful of facing the sometimes ugly truth about ourselves and our national history. After all, to receive God’s grace, we must, in some measure, accept responsibility for the cruel crucifixion of the Son of God. God’s mercy is greater than our sin.

And in Christ we see God’s power to reconcile. If our creation as God’s image in the world gives us a point of unity with all humanity, our new creation in Christ creates an even greater unity with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ from every nation, tribe, people, and language. In the church we are called to demonstrate to the world a reconciling power that goes beyond anything the world can provide.

**A God of Unity and Diversity**

One final biblical theme has great relevance to this discussion. Our triune God—mysteriously one God in three divine Persons—has created a world of rich diversity. And the one body of Christ is to encompass the rich diversity of people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. Our cultural differences are not erased when we are united to Christ; they are redeemed and subsumed into a higher unity. And the less socially and racially homogeneous the church is, the more it displays the supernatural power of the gospel to bring unity.

The church is to be a body of many members, each with its own distinctive contribution for the well-being of the whole. My natural inclination is to want be with people like me—those who share my values, my preferences, my opinions, my life experiences. A church must have a fundamental unity in the gospel, but if we are all too much alike in other ways, we diminish the way the fullness of Christ is to be displayed through the varied gifts within the body and its various cultural expressions. We ought to embrace the divine design of unity with diversity.

These are but a few of many biblical themes that demonstrate that we as Christians have great resources for addressing the racial divide in our country. (I plan to give the theme of biblical justice greater attention in a further article.) May God help us to seek to be instruments of his grace and truth in our day.

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**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 3)**

**What Is Biblical Justice?**

Last week we looked at some biblical foundations that provide the groundwork for a Christian response to the issues of racial injustice in our country. Human dignity and human depravity along with an understanding of God’s grace and forgiveness and his delight in unity and diversity are some of the themes that we bring to the table. But discussions about racial injustice often fail to make progress simply because people disagree on what is meant by justice. Again, as Christians we must look to the God of the Bible to form our conception of what it means to “do justice.” In this article we explore the rich theme of biblical justice.

*Thus says the LORD:*

*“Keep justice, and do righteousness,*

*for soon my salvation will come,*

*and my righteousness be revealed.” (Is. 56:1)*

**The Biblical Language of “Justice”**

The Hebrew word for “justice,” mishpat, occurs in its various forms more than 200 times in the Old Testament. It contains the notion of a judgment, usually with a sense of its fitness and equity. More broadly, it has the sense of giving people what they are due, whether punishment or protection or care.[[6]](#footnote-6) For example, in Deuteronomy 18, the support of the Levitical priests is described as “the priests’ *mishpat*”—their fair share of people’s income.

This word is closely coupled with another—“righteousness” (*tzedakah*), which involves conforming to a standard. In the prophecy of Isaiah, for example, these two words are found in parallel in the same verse 16 times.[[7]](#footnote-7) And in the New Testament one Greek word—*dikaios*—can be translated either as “righteous” or “just,” depending on the context.

**God is Righteous and Just**

Both righteousness and justice refer, first, to the character of God himself:

"The LORD loves righteousness and justice;” (Psa. 33:5)

"Your righteousness [O LORD] is like the highest mountains,

your justice like the great deep.” (Psa. 36:6)

"the heavens proclaim his righteousness,

for he is a God of justice.” *(*Psa. 50:6).

Since God displays himself in his creation, both terms also refer to the way things ought to be in God’s world. They speak, especially, of right relationships with God and among people.

**True Religion Includes Doing Justice**

The biblical writers declare God’s righteousness and justice and demand that any religion without these qualities is an abomination to the Lord. For example, Prov. 21:3—"To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.” Or in Isaiah: “Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. . . . Learn to do right; seek justice” (Is. 1:13,17).

Biblical law is a reflection of the just and righteous character of God, and in it we see a number of key principles of biblical justice.

**1. Biblical Justice Assumes That**

**Transgression Deserves a Just Punishment**

We are moral agents, responsible for our moral choices. The Bible displays God as a righteous Judge, and his moral authority is to be reflected in human affairs. Justice entails giving the transgressor his due—such that his punishment fits the crime.

This is the thrust of the often misunderstood principle: “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”This was never taken literally, and, in fact, was meant to protect the criminal from a disproportionate punishment. Justice demands that the severity of the punishment fit the crime--no more, no less. Biblical law made no provision for imprisonment, so usually the criminal had to make things right with the victim through some form of compensation or restitution (e.g., Ex. 22:3-14). [[8]](#footnote-8)

**2. Biblical Justice Requires that**

**Everyone is Treated Equally Under the Law**

The equal treatment of every person under the law, what is called “procedural justice,” is deeply embedded in Biblical law: "You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born” (Lev. 24:22); “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly” (Lev. 19:15).

The practice of bribery, widely condemned in the Bible (e.g., Prov. 17:23; 2 Chron. 19:6,7), in particular, clearly undermines this principle, for it provides special treatment for those with wealth. In his New Testament letter, James is adamant that the wealthy must not receive preferential treatment in the life of the church (Jam. 2:1ff).

**3. Biblical Justice Gives Some People Special Protection**

Procedural justice demands equal treatment before the law, but there is more to justice than that. This is a fallen world, and the reality is that the legal structures that govern our common life are created by those with power, and they tend to be structures that inevitably tilt in their favor. Legal equality can still be blind to social inequality. As one writer cynically observed, "In its majestic equality, the law forbids [rich and poor alike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rich_and_poor_alike) to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets, and steal loaves of bread."[[9]](#footnote-9)

Laws may apply to everyone in the same way, but they do not affect everyone in the same way. The Bible is very sensitive to the inequalities that can exist through the imbalances of wealth and power, resulting in a distortion of “distributive justice,” that is, a fair distribution of the world’s goods. The Bible acknowledges the many factors that may affect how much of life’s goods a person may receive—including a person’s own effort, their moral choices, and the degree to which they live wisely. All of these may affect the distribution of goods. But one of these factors is injustice. We see, for example, in Prov. 13:23—"A poor man’s field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away.”

Justice demands that we treat everyone the same, but, because of the imbalance of power resulting in injustice in the world, God puts himself on the side of the poor and the powerless. God himself will be their advocate and defender.

This is a powerful theme in the Proverbs:

Prov. 22:22,23—"Do not exploit the poor because they are poor

and do not crush the needy in court,

for the Lord will take up their case

and will plunder those who plunder them.”

Prov. 23:10-11—"Do not move an ancient boundary stone

or encroach on the fields of the fatherless,

for their Defender is strong;

he will take up their case against you.”

To mistreat the poor is to mistreat God himself:

Prov. 14:31—"He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,

but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”

But this concern for the poor and the powerless is affirmed across the Biblical canon. In the prophets, Zechariah declares--“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor” (Zech. 7:9-10). And Isaiah says,

Is. 1:17 Learn to do right; seek justice.

Defend the oppressed.

Take up the cause of the fatherless;

plead the case of the widow.

In the Psalms we read,

" the LORD secures justice for the poor

and upholds the cause of the needy" (Ps. 140:12).

In the Law of Moses—

“Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin” (Deut. 24:14-15; cf. 10:17,18).[[10]](#footnote-10)

Jesus condemned that rich man who lived in luxury every day and ignored the beggar Lazarus who lay at his gate (Luke 16:19-31). James tells us that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

Our God is a God who gives special protection to the weak and powerless.

This is who God is; this is how he is to be known:

Psa. 68:4,5—"Sing to God, sing praise to his name, . . .

his name is the LORD—

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,

is God in his holy dwelling.”

Widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor—these are the vulnerable in society, those with no material or social power. As one writer put it: “The widow has no husband to watch over her rights, the orphan has no parents, the poor have no money, the stranger has no friends.”[[11]](#footnote-11) To that list could include the elderly, the disabled, the unborn, the immigrant, the minority, or the mistreated. Because of that, God himself pledges to be their protector. His justice requires it, because, as one writer put it, “Injustice is not equally distributed.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

**4. Biblical Justice Provides Social Provisions for the Poor**

Equal justice under the law did not require an equal distribution of wealth, but Israel did have laws specifically designed to protect the poor and to provide at least a minimal amount of material support. The law of gleaning, for example, prevented a landowner from harvesting to the very edges of his field, so that poor people could come in and forage food for themselves. The law requiring the cancelation of debts every seven years (Dt. 15:1-3), enabled an Israelite to get out from an oppressive burden of debt. And the law of the Jubilee, a kind of bankruptcy law, required that every fifty years land ownership be returned to its original owner who had lost it to debt (Lev. 25). These laws of the state mitigated some of the worst aspects of poverty.

**5. Biblical Justice Includes Generosity and Mercy**

In the Bible, justice is not just a legal term, related to the court and the laws of the state. It is also a social term, related to our righteous interactions with other people. Justice includes kindness and generosity, sharing with those in need. Hence, biblical justice includes what we might call charity.

**The Example of Job**

When Job, for example, speaks of what he has done to live a just and righteous life, he includes his acts of “charity”:

Job 31:13 “If I have denied justice to any of my servants, whether male or female,

when they had a grievance against me,

14 what will I do when God confronts me?

What will I answer when called to account?

15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them?

Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?

16 If I have denied the desires of the poor

or let the eyes of the widow grow weary,

17 if I have kept my bread to myself,

not sharing it with the fatherless — . . .

19 if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing,

or the needy without garments,

20 and their hearts did not bless me

for warming them with the fleece from my sheep,

21 if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,

knowing that I had influence in court,

22 then let my arm fall from the shoulder,

let it be broken off at the joint.

23 For I dreaded destruction from God,

and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.”

Job’s “fear of the Lord” compelled him to act with compassion and mercy toward those who were weak. This is what it means to live a righteous life, a life of justice.

**How Is Mercy Also an Element of Justice?**

It’s true: no one “deserves” mercy, but that doesn’t mean I am not obligated to show mercy. My obligation to show mercy does not come from the person to whom it is shown but from the God who has shown mercy to me.

We see this often in the Old Testament—

Ex. 23:9--“Do not oppress a foreigner;

you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners,

because you were foreigners in Egypt.”

The Lord had mercy on the Israelites when they were foreigners in Egypt, so they had an obligation to show mercy to foreigners in their midst.

Didn’t Jesus use the same logic in that parable of the unmerciful servant (Mt. 18:21-35). Because that servant had been forgiven a great debt, wasn’t he obligated to forgive his own servant’s debt? The mercy he had received bound him to show mercy to others. Justice required it.

That’s why our understanding of the grace of the gospel should lead us to be champions of justice and mercy, especially toward those who are poor or marginalized. In the gospel the recognition of our spiritual poverty and alienation ought to open our hearts toward those who are materially poor or socially outcast.

Jesus entered into my spiritual poverty, when I was undeserving of his grace, when I had turned my back on him, spurning his love, living as my own king—and he acted in mercy toward me, even as he satisfied God’s justice in dying for my sin. Now, as a recipient of that mercy, I am justly obligated before God to act with mercy toward others. How can I not?

That’s what justice ultimately entails—to “do justice” means to bring about human flourishing as God intended it; it means restoring the right relations that make for God’s shalom. As Keller puts it, “to ‘do justice’ means to go to places where the fabric of shalom has broken down, where the weaker members of societies fall through the fabric and to repair it.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

**The Example in Ezekiel**

Many of the principles that we have listed come together in a single passage in the prophecy of Ezekiel, in which he describes a “righteous man who does what is just and right.” I quote the passage in full:

Ezek. 18:5 “Suppose there is a righteous man

who does what is just and right.

6 He does not eat at the mountain shrines

or look to the idols of Israel.

He does not defile his neighbor’s wife

or have sexual relations with a woman during her period.

7 He does not oppress anyone,

but returns what he took in pledge for a loan.

He does not commit robbery

but gives his food to the hungry

and provides clothing for the naked.

8 He does not lend to them at interest

or take a profit from them.

He withholds his hand from doing wrong

and judges fairly between two parties.

9 He follows my decrees

and faithfully keeps my laws.

That man is righteous;

he will surely live,

declares the Sovereign LORD.

There are **religious dimensions** to righteousness and justice: The one who is faithful to the covenant, who does righteousness and justice, does not engage in the worship of idols, and he is concerned with ritual purity. Hence, the reference to avoiding the blood associated with a woman's menstrual cycle (Ezek. 18:6).

Righteousness and justice also involve very personal and intimate **sexual relationships**—"He does not defile his neighbor’s wife" (Ezek. 18:6).

And righteousness and justice also include what we would call public **social, economic and judicial activities.** The one who does righteousness and justice doesn't rob anyone, nor does he take advantage of someone in great need by charging excessive interest or by failing to return what was taken in pledge for a loan (Ezek. 18:7-8).

This description of the righteous man also includes what we usually associate with justice—that is, **procedural fairness:** "he judges fairly between two parties" (Ezek. 18:8). But it includes more than that. It is not just following the rules, and not doing any harm. It includes doing positive good. Righteousness and justice include giving food to the hungry and providing clothing for the naked (Ezek. 18:7).

**Biblical Justice: Giving Each Person Their Due**

Justice, then, means giving a person what they are due—as those created in God’s image, as those for whom God cares. So the just treatment of people can include both penalty and protection, chastisement and care. It is about right relations among people—and in God’s world, a right relationship of justice necessarily includes mercy.

**What Does This Mean for Us?**

This brief exposition of biblical justice if far from exhaustive, and it doesn’t begin to answer all the questions we have about how we should respond as individuals and as a church to the present call for racial justice in our land. I will explore this further in articles to come. But looking at what the Bible says is critical as the place to begin. We must seek the Lord and his word (rather than just our favorite media outlet) to understand what justice requires.

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**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 4)**

*He has shown you, O man, what is good.*

*And what does the LORD require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy*

*and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic. 6:8).*

**The Social Dimensions of Biblical Justice**

In our look at principles of biblical justice one aspect needs further attention—its social dimensions.

**Individual Responsibility**

To be sure, the Bible affirms our individual moral responsibility before God. In a famous passage in Ezekiel the Lord declares, “The one who sins is the one who will die” (Ezek. 18:4). And the Apostle Paul warns that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). The gospel calls for a personal response of faith from each person (John 1:12). We are moral agents who are responsible before God for our own choices.

In Europe, this biblical theme of individual responsibility was given special emphasis and was developed during the 17th- and 18th-centuries in Enlightenment political theory. Individual liberty became a central feature of our American culture. We see ourselves supremely as independent and autonomous individuals.

**Corporate Responsibility**

But such “individualism” is not the whole of the biblical view. Ezekiel may affirm individual responsibility, but at the same time he declares God’s judgment on the whole nation of Israel. Elsewhere in the Bible, Amos announces God’s judgment on the surrounding nations on account of the sins of their leaders (Amos 1,2). Daniel, by all accounts a righteous man, confesses the sin of his nation, saying, “[W]e have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws” (Dan. 9:5).

King David sinned by taking a census of the nation, and the Lord sent a plague on the nation (2 Sam. 24). God punished an entire family for the sin of one of its members (Josh. 7). God holds Israel responsible for an injustice done to the Gibeonites by King Saul even though he had since died (2 Sam. 21). And Jesus himself condemned whole cities because they did not repent (Mt. 11:20-24). What are we to make of this corporate understand of sin?

**Social Solidarity and Sin’s Effects**

By nature, human beings are social creatures; we are created for relationships. It was not good for Adam to be alone. Our lives are necessarily connected to others in all sorts of ways—from families and tribes, to neighborhoods and nations. Each of these groupings creates a social solidarity, a moral matrix, in which our lives intersect and influence one another. Our individual choices affect others at the same time that the choices of others affect our own.

A healthy society has a host of such social groupings—families, churches, civic organizations, professional or alumni associations, or political parties. All of these can influence our lives positively or negatively. Pure “individualism” fails to deal with the very real communal realities that we all experience.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Because of the solidarity of the family, for example, the sin of parents can have consequences that affect their children for generations. This reality is expressed when we read that Lord “visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:7 ESV; also 20:5; Num. 4:18; Deut. 5:9). All the citizens of a nation are implicated in the decisions of its leaders, resulting in prosperity or hardship. And in a representative democracy, who is actually responsible for an unjust law? Aren’t we all implicated in the decisions of those we elect to represent us? And aren’t we, whether we like it or not, and whether we are aware of it or not, entangled in the culture of which we are part and infected by its norms and values?

**Social Solidarity and the Gospel**

This notion of social solidarity is integral to an understanding of the gospel. Negatively, Paul says that we are all implicated in the sin of our first ancestor: “through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19). Adam served as the representative of the entire human race, and his sin affected us all. But, thanks be to God, our God chose another representative, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose life of obedience, even unto death, brings righteousness to all who are united with him by faith. A purely individualistic understanding of moral accountability undermines this gospel message of grace.

Our reception of the gospel and our union with Christ then incorporates us into a new social solidarity—the church. We each become members of that one body, and, interestingly, it is churches, not individuals, that the risen Christ judges in Revelation 2-3. It is in our solidarity with Christ and his church that we are saved.

**The Social Dimensions of Sin**

Because of our human propensity to form groups, our human depravity can work through groups to assert unjust power and to foster unfair self-interest. The wealthy and powerful can pervert the criminal justice system (Lev. 19:15), or institute unjust loans (Exod. 22:25-27) or unfair wages (Jer. 22:13; James 5:4; Deut. 24:14-15). They can also live in such a way that they ignore the needs of those right in front of them (Luke 16:19-31). This creates the context for the sinful treatment of people that go beyond individual decisions, as they can become “accepted practices.” Societies often develop group prejudices based on any number of factors—religion, tribe, class, or ethnicity—prejudices that explicitly, or sometimes implicitly, create unjust treatment. In other words, just because you don’t engage in unjust behavior yourself doesn’t mean that injustice in general doesn’t or can’t exist.

**The Need for “Social Justice”**

The social dimensions of biblical justice suggest that “doing justice” involves more than just our individual interactions with other individuals. To illustrate, consider what may be involved in seeking justice for the unborn. I could say that if I don’t have an abortion myself (or encourage someone to have one), then I am acting justly. But the Bible calls for more. In Proverbs, for example, we read:

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,

for the rights of all who are destitute.

Speak up and judge fairly;

defend the rights of the poor and needy (Prov. 31:8-9).

My opposition to abortion rightly leads me to address some of the social aspects that promote the practice. I may seek to change the values of the culture related to sexual immorality and the value of marriage. I may support agencies that provide help for those women who may feel unprepared or ill-equipped to care for a baby. And I may seek to lobby government officials to change laws to limit the availability of abortion. All of these are aspects of seeking “social justice” for a vulnerable group of people—babies in the womb.

Admittedly, the term “social justice” has acquired various connotations in our culture, including our Christian culture, that conjure up particular political and social agendas. Some may avoid the term for that reason. But Christians can rightly use this term to describe the social dimensions of biblical justice. We engage in social justice whenever we seek moral reform of our society in ways that ensure that no group is dealt with unjustly and every person is treated with dignity and given their due—as those created in God’s image and as those whom God loves.

There is much more to consider. I want to move in my next article to the role of the church in the task of seeking justice in our fallen world. Yes, I plan to get specifically to the issue of race in America, but please be patient. We cannot think clearly about that issue without a broader understanding of what God requires of us. Our goal is to think biblically about this issue, rather than simply letting our culture frame the discussion.

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**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 5)**

**The Gospel’s Call to Compassion and Justice**

In the revision our EFCA Statement of Faith in 2008, we felt it important to include an article that affirmed the new way of life to which we are called by the gospel. This statement on Christian living was originally titled “God’s gospel compels us to Christ-like living and witness to the world.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

It was introduced by the declaration that “God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose.” In other words, the gospel not only results in the forgiveness of our sins, but also includes God’s purpose to conform us to the image of Christ and God’s power to move us in that direction. The article then references the Great Commandment, the Great Spiritual Battle, and the Great Commission in these words:

God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God’s Word, the Spirit’s power and fervent prayer in Christ’s name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ’s commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

In the Great Commandment, our Lord Jesus declared that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:37-39). Article 8 of our Statement expands that command using two phrases that are particularly relevant in our discussion of our response to racial injustice. I quote now from our exposition of this Statement found in the book *Evangelical Convictions*--

**1. Acting with Compassion Toward the Poor**

In loving our neighbor as ourselves, one category of people that we are especially called to love in the Bible is those who are poor, which we take to include any who are needy, powerless and vulnerable, such as widows and orphans, the elderly, the disabled, the unborn, the immigrant, the minority, or the mistreated (cf. Zech. 7:10; Luke 14:13). The Bible is quite explicit and realistic about this responsibility: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land" (Deut. 15:11).

This biblical instruction is clear:

Prov. 14:21—"He who despises his neighbor sins,

but blessed is he who is kind to the needy."

Prov. 22:9—"A generous man will himself be blessed,

for he shares his food with the poor."

Prov. 28:27—"He who gives to the poor will lack nothing,

but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses."

Jesus condemned that rich man who lived in luxury every day and ignored the beggar Lazarus who lay at his gate (Luke 16:19-31). James tells us that "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

We are called to have compassion[[16]](#footnote-16) for the poor because this reflects God's concern. God identifies himself with those who have no value in the eyes of the world:

Prov. 14:31—"He who oppresses the poor

shows contempt for their Maker,

but whoever is kind to the needy honors God."

Prov. 19:17—"He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,

and he will reward him for what he has done."

Though perhaps referring particularly to believers, Jesus nonetheless identifies with those who are poor and needy when he says that inasmuch as you have met the needs of the least of these my brothers you have done it to me (Matt. 25:31-46).

Showing kindness to the poor and giving with compassion to meet their needs is an act of love toward God. It demonstrates a sincere and selfless love, since it promises no return in this world. Jesus commended this kind of love when he said, “When you give a . . . dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12-14).

Those who are poor in this world have no resources of their own to depend on; they have no one to turn to. Therefore, God in his compassion becomes their defender. "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (James 2:5; cf. also 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

A life of generosity toward the poor flows out of our experience of the gospel (Matt. 10:8). Paul encourages the Corinthians to contribute to his offering for the poor in Jerusalem[[17]](#footnote-17) by reminding them of God's gift in Christ:"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus became poor for us; he entered into our poverty, for before God we are all "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Hearts touched by the gospel, those who have experienced God's compassion toward them in their own poverty (Matt. 5:3), cannot help but extend that compassion toward others.[[18]](#footnote-18) But the Bible also warns that those indifferent toward the poor may find God indifferent toward them: "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered" (Prov. 21:13).

The church, at her best, has always lived out the gospel in this way. In the early church, it was evident in the way God’s people cared for those with physical needs, especially among those whom society marginalized. This compassion was also seen in how the church cared for those who were converted from a profligate life, thus losing their means of livelihood. Such were received into the church family and provided for. In another example, inspired by the Spirit-prompted Great Awakening that infused life into the church and a recommitment to the gospel, William Wilberforce started or supported over 60 humanitarian works. This “compassion for the poor” was rooted in his understanding of the gospel.

Acting with compassion toward the poor—showing mercy toward those in need—is one of the ways we love our neighbor.

**2. Seeking Justice for the Oppressed**

Contrary to the one-sided views often heard from those on the political left or on the political right, the Bible speaks of various ways that people find themselves in poverty and need. Sometimes such a state is the result of circumstances beyond their control—disaster, famine, illness, injury, or the death of a provider, like a husband or a father. Consider Joseph and his family fleeing to Egypt during a famine in Israel or the frequent mention of the plight of the widow and the orphan.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Sometimes people are poor because of their own deficiencies—they lack self-discipline or enduring effort: "All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty" (Prov. 14:23; also 6:9-11; 24:30-34). Our own failures or irresponsibility, of course, did not stop God from showing compassion to us.

But another cause of poverty mentioned often in the Bible is injustice and oppression: "A poor man’s field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away" (Prov. 13:23). We live in a fallen world, and the structures of this fallen world often lead to unjust conditions and ill-treatment. People in authority take advantage of others, and the rich and powerful make the laws which generally protect their own interests. Because of these structural forms of evil in society, our love for our neighbor ought also to include not just compassion for the needy but also a desire for justice for the oppressed.

We must take to heart the biblical teaching on this important theme. The commands of Scripture are explicit and unambiguous:

•"Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless;

maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.

Rescue the weak and needy;

deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 82:3-4).

•"The righteous care about justice for the poor,

but the wicked have no such concern" (Prov. 29:7).

•“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,

for the rights of all who are destitute.

Speak up and judge fairly;

defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov. 31:8-9).

•"'He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well.

Is that not what it means to know me?'

declares the LORD" (Jer. 22:16).

•" Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!

Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.

Defend the cause of the fatherless,

plead the case of the widow" (Isa. 1:16-17).

In the Bible, the Lord is on the side of the poor because no one else is. And he is on the side of the poor because he is on the side of justice:

•"Do not exploit the poor because they are poor

and do not crush the needy in court,

for the LORD will take up their case

and will plunder those who plunder them"

(Prov. 22:22-23; 23:10-11).

•"I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor

and upholds the cause of the needy" (Ps. 140:12).

•“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling” (Ps. 68:5).

•“Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin” (Deut. 24:14-15).[[20]](#footnote-20)

This concern for justice[[21]](#footnote-21) is dear to God's heart. Therefore, we read, "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice" (Prov. 21:3). And the Lord through the prophets Isaiah[[22]](#footnote-22) and Amos[[23]](#footnote-23) refused to accept Israel's worship when their hands were guilty of injustice to the poor and needy. The biblical prominence given to this theme has led some to label the instruction in Micah 6:8 as “The Great Requirement”:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

**The Role of the Church**

It is important to recognize that the church in the New Testament is not in the same situation as Israel under the old covenant. Israel was a nation-state with the coercive power of a judicial system and taxation at its disposal. The church is a spiritual family comprised of people from all nations. Ours is a spiritual power that comes through the gospel. How we seek justice must bear these differences in mind, as well as the difference between the corporate action of the church and the work of individual Christians. But whether it be, for example, through the proclamation of God's truth about the dignity of every human being deserving of respect and honor, or through the efforts of Christians involved in the actual affairs of the political process, we are called to seek justice for the oppressed as an aspect of our love for our neighbor in the world.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The early church was committed to biblical righteousness in caring for the “least of these.” In the *Didache*,[[25]](#footnote-25) an early post-apostolic writing, abortion was spoken against strongly as it was considered murder: “you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born.” Later in church history, a similar commitment to biblical righteousness bore fruit in the abolition of slavery in Britain.[[26]](#footnote-26) [The frequent failure of the church to promote justice, especially racial justice in America, will the subject of a future article.]

**Compassion and Justice vs. Preaching the Gospel**

Regarding ministries of compassion and justice, the church has often vacillated between two extremes, either focusing on the physical needs of people while assuming or neglecting the spiritual or seeing people only as "souls to be saved" and disregarding their tangible suffering in this world. The example of the early church in Acts 6 provides a helpful model. In response to the inequitable distribution of food among widows based on their ethnic identity, the apostles saw to it that some were assigned to address that situation. But they did so while maintaining the priority of their ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:2-4).

The church today must do the same. Ministries of compassion have been a strong part of our Free Church history, both in America and around the world, through the establishment of orphanages, homes for the elderly and hospitals. We now have a ministry known as TouchGlobal dedicated to this purpose. Certainly, our highest priority must be the proclamation of the gospel, for the gospel alone can address our deepest need, and the church alone can bring this gospel to the world.[[27]](#footnote-27) But while maintaining this priority, we ought not to neglect the very pressing material needs of those around us. Love requires no less.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Showing compassion toward the poor and seeking justice for the oppressed are integral to our understanding of what God’s gospel compels us to do in light of the Great Commandment to love God and love our neighbor. Pray that we may be faithful to that gospel as we explore ways to live it out wisely in word and deed in these days, especially as we respond to calls for racial justice in our country.

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**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 6)**

After laying a theological foundation for addressing the issue of racial injustice in America, I turn to look at the problem to be addressed, moving from biblical truth to cultural analysis. Human culture is exceedingly complex, and charting the connections between cause and consequence can easily lead to over-simplification, which can result in false conclusions. I recognize that people can interpret sociological data differently. I present the following as an analysis that I have found helpful in considering the social situation in America as it relates to race.

**Race Matters in America**

I begin with a simple statement: *Race matters in America*.

Some may contest that. Or at least they may argue that it doesn’t matter as much as it used to. And with that I agree. We no longer live in an age of chattel slavery or in an era of Jim Crow laws that gave racist segregation a legal basis in our country. Overt racism—the view that one race is inherently inferior to another and ought to be treated badly—is no longer socially acceptable (though, unfortunately, forms of it still exist). We have even elected a black President. How can I say that race matters all that much in twenty-first century America?

But race does still matter. Sociologist Michael Emerson describes America as a “racialized” society, by which he means “a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships,” and where these differences result in advantages and disadvantages along racial lines.[[29]](#footnote-29) By all sorts of measures, race[[30]](#footnote-30) divides our nation.

**Our “Racialized” Society**

In choosing a marriage partner, race matters. Less than 2% of marriages are interracial. In housing, race matters. There is more residential segregation between blacks and whites than any other racial/ethnic category. In employment, race matters. The unemployment ratio from black to white is 2-to-1, and this has remained largely constant since 1950. In health and health care, race matters. Differences in this area between whites and blacks are striking, and these have been most recently highlighted in the fact that Covid-19 deaths among black Americans is six times higher than that of whites. And our racialized culture can be seen in church life, with 11:00 Sunday morning once described as the most segregated hour of the week.

One difference along racial lines is particularly significant: the household wealth[[31]](#footnote-31) of African-Americans is only one-tenth of that of whites.[[32]](#footnote-32) This has enormous implications, for household wealth is where resources are found to fund college, to start a small business, to weather adverse circumstances like a medical emergency, divorce, or job loss, and to pass on wealth to the next generation.[[33]](#footnote-33)

**Housing: A Key Component of Wealth Disparity**

A significant source of this present disparity in household wealth is found in overt racist practices in the past that hindered black home ownership, the chief contributor to household wealth. These included not only segregationist Jim Crow laws, but also the discrimination against African-Americans in providing VA home loans to veterans after WWII when the suburban home ownership boom began, various HOA restrictive covenants prohibiting the sale of homes to blacks, and the refusal of the FHA to provide loans in certain areas of the city deemed financially risky—which were often areas in which African-Americans lived. These areas were actually delineated on maps with red lines. Hence, the expression “red-lining” as a form of discrimination with devastating effects in the entire mortgage industry adversely affecting black home ownership and black home values.

**Effects of Residential Segregation**

Residential segregation has a host of adverse social consequences. Certainly, it has had a detrimental effect on education. Even after the state-sanctioned segregation of public schools was ruled illegal in the landmark Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the quality of schools continued to be racially differentiated and unequal. Most school systems are funded by local property taxes, resulting in low funding for schools in largely black neighborhoods.

The segregation of black Americans within our inner cities had dire economic consequences when good manufacturing jobs began to move out to the suburbs. This increased unemployment then increased poverty. As housing opportunities for blacks increased, many who were able to move away from their old neighborhoods did so, leaving the poor behind.

**Increased Incarceration**

Poverty bred crime and hopelessness, which then increased drug use. Then, in the 70s and 80s, America’s “War on Drugs” had a disproportionate impact on the black community with harsh mandatory sentences focused particularly on those drugs more common in the inner city. This negatively affected the relationship between police and the local community. Even more significantly, the incarceration rate increased dramatically. In 2008 there were 667% more people incarcerated than were incarcerated in 1972.[[34]](#footnote-34) Currently, the incarceration rate of blacks is six times that of whites,[[35]](#footnote-35) and 1 in 23 black men are on probation or parole, compared to only 1 in 81 whites.[[36]](#footnote-36)

**The Effects of Poverty**

Time spent in jail can not only harden the heart of a person but can also permanently damage the prospect of getting a decent job, contributing to widespread poverty

Yes, poverty is a problem to some degree for every American demographic. But as President Lyndon Johnson declared in a 1965 commencement address at Howard University,

Negro poverty is not white poverty. Many of its causes and many of its cures are the same. But there are differences -- deep, corrosive, obstinate differences -- radiating painful roots into the community, and into the family, and the nature of the individual.

These differences are not racial differences. They are solely and simply the consequence of ancient brutality, past injustice, and present prejudice.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Further, the frequent correlation between African-American communities and poverty means that economic policies that have an adverse effect on the poor will have a disproportionate effect on blacks. Such policies may not be racially motivated, but their effect, nonetheless, has racial implications.

**Broken Families**

Poverty as a result of unemployment has been one of many factors that has hindered the formation of a strong marriage culture in the African-American community.[[38]](#footnote-38) The breakdown of the family has greatly increased the number of children raised without a mother and father in the home,[[39]](#footnote-39) which then only increases a cycle of poverty and hopelessness.

The breakdown of the family structure continues to be a central obstacle to prosperity in the African-American community. As is declared in the Book of Common Prayer Wedding Service, “Human society can be strong and happy only where the marriage bond between a man and a woman is held in honour.” The family, more than any other force, shapes the hearts of children—their attitudes, their values, their ambitions, and their hopes. And when the family collapses, it is the children who are most hurt. And when this happens on a broad scale, the entire community is devastated.[[40]](#footnote-40)

**Segregated Churches**

Finally, the segregated lives of whites and blacks in America in housing is also reflected in churches. Sadly, the racist attitudes of white Christians pushed African-Americans brothers and sisters out of their congregations, forcing them to form their own. This has resulted in the development of two distinct church cultures in America. The differences in worship, music, and preaching styles makes integrating black and white Christians in a single congregation a great challenge, as most Christians prefer to be in churches which reflect their own inherited cultural practices and traditions.

Yes, race matters in America. It is important to recognize that we do live in a racialized society, usually to the detriment of African-Americans. Our Christian mandate to seek justice for all ought to make us care about such disparities.

In my next article, I want to take us back to the source of this problem—our human depravity as it was expressed in massive race-based slavery.

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**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 7)**

Why does racial injustice seem to be such an intractable problem in our country? In this article, I take a temporary detour from cultural analysis to consider history, looking at the long-lasting impact of race-based slavery in America. Again, discussions of our history can be controversial, based simply on what one chooses to emphasize. But here, in this very cursory and simplistic survey, is a perspective that I have found helpful to consider as I think about this issue.

**The Root of Racial Injustice in America—**

**Race-Based Slavery**

***“The law may destroy servitude,***

***but only God can obliterate its trace.”***

***—Alexis de Toqueville (1835)*** [[41]](#footnote-41)

In the 1830s, the French aristocrat Alexis de Toqueville toured America seeking to understand what was distinctive about this new democratic nation. His account in *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, 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 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.[[42]](#footnote-42)

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 grievous wound. “Slavery is receding;” he wrote, but “the prejudice to which it gave rise is unaltered.”[[43]](#footnote-43)

“There is a natural prejudice that leads a man to scorn a person who has been his inferior long after that person has become his equal. The real inequality resulting from fortune or law is always replaced by an imaginary inequality rooted in mores;”[[44]](#footnote-44)

Toqueville recognized that the fact that slavery was grounded in race gave it a visible representation that would perpetuate its impact—"The memory of slavery dishonors the race, and race perpetuates the memory of slavery,” he wrote.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Toqueville was right about this issue. Slavery has been called “America’s original sin.” Through a long struggle, that included a bloody Civil War, the legal rights of African-Americans have been established, but the “mores,” the ways of thinking that slavery cultivated, still reverberate in our day.

**Slavery in History**

Forms of slavery have existed throughout human history and among all societies wealthy enough to afford it and powerful enough to maintain it.[[46]](#footnote-46) It is assumed in the Old Testament, though it was strongly regulated. No Jews could be held as slaves (Lev. 25:39-44); slave owners who injured their slaves were required to set them free (Ex. 21:26-27); and Jews were not to return escaped slaves to their masters (Dt. 23:15-16).

Greco-Roman society, in which the early church was born, was a slave-owning culture. At times, half the population was living in bondage. The Greek philosophers owned slaves and defended it based on the natural inferiority of certain groups of people, though it was never based on race.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The practice is again assumed in the New Testament, but the radical equality that the gospel introduced (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11) and that Paul’s own dealings with the slave Philemon demonstrated (Philemon 15,16), sowed the seeds for the church’s later condemnation of the practice.

Greco-Roman slavery diminished significantly after the fall of Rome in the fifth century, as the Northern European invaders had neither a tradition of slavery nor the economic and military strength it required. In the Middle Ages slavery flourished in Islamic culture, largely through conquest and through acquisition made possible by slave-traders in India and Africa.[[48]](#footnote-48) But slavery in Christian Europe all but disappeared, never to return.

Christian opposition to slavery can be seen as early as the seventh century in pronouncements against the practice of the Vikings.[[49]](#footnote-49) It was given definitive expression in the work of the great Christian theologian of the Middle Ages Thomas Aquinas. In the thirteenth century he called the enslaving of other human beings a sin, a position affirmed in 1537 by Pope Paul III. In the Catholic Church slavery was repeatedly denounced as a ground for excommunication.[[50]](#footnote-50) That slavery emerged in the New World in the Age of Discovery is more a reflection of the weakness of the church’s authority than of its position on slavery.[[51]](#footnote-51)

**The Development of Slavery in the West**

The forced enslavement of other human beings to be held as property is unquestionably a result of human depravity. And that sinful practice re-emerged in the West when the powerful nations of Europe realized the opportunity to control and exploit the vast regions of the Americas for their own advantage. To do that required an enormous labor force. They soon recognized that such a force, with substantial immunity to tropical diseases, could be obtained cheaply on the west coast of Africa.

There soon developed a lucrative enterprise with European slave traders purchasing slaves from African dealers and then selling them to land owners in the Americas. Some 400,000 of the ten million African slaves crossing the Atlantic came to British North America.[[52]](#footnote-52) By 1790 slavery was legal in every state except Massachusetts and Maine (owing largely to their Puritan heritage).[[53]](#footnote-53) But because of the crops conducive to its climate, an entire economy in the American South was soon built on the backs of slave labor. Tragically, established cultural practice and economic interest overruled Christian conviction when it came to White response to Black enslavement. Human sinfulness showed its ugly head.

**The Particular Stigma of Race-Based Slavery**

Slavery in America was exclusively based on race—the enslavement of black Africans by white Europeans.[[54]](#footnote-54) In the history of slavery in the world, this 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.

The race-based nature of slavery in America created an indelible association between the obvious physical differences and the extreme social discrepancies—a stigma that Toqueville recognized would be difficult to erase. Black skin was linked to servitude and the social inferiority which that servitude entailed. This created deep prejudicial attitudes toward African-Americans that are still found today. If, as one black writer puts it, “The essence of American racism is disrespect,”[[55]](#footnote-55) that disrespect has its roots in the institution of race-based slavery.

**Christian Responses to American Slavery**

The first anti-slavery, abolitionist tract written in America appeared in 1700 by the devout Puritan from Boston, Samuel Sewall.[[56]](#footnote-56) It wasn’t until the mid-1700s that a more organized movement began to form through the work of the Quaker John Woolman, who devoted his life to the abolitionist cause. But opposition to slavery posed a difficult challenge.

Slavery had become fully entrenched in American, and especially Southern, culture, and many Christians had come to accept it as a necessary part of life and even provided ecclesiastical support for it. The famed New England pastor Jonathan Edwards owned slaves, as did the leading evangelist of the First Great Awakening, George Whitefield. Whitefield preached to both whites and blacks, but petitioned the British Parliament to allow slavery in Georgia so that he could fund his orphanage there. Even many who were opposed to slavery still held racist views and were rigid segregationists. By 1750 20% of the population was black, and the freeing of the slaves seemed a dangerous prospect, and white Christians longed for order and feared chaos.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, British opposition to slavery began to grow, and William Wilberforce, an evangelical Christian, led the move in Parliament to end the British slave trade, seeing a bill pass near the end of his life in 1807. In America, the call for freedom from British rule raised the issue of freedom for slaves, and new theological reasoning emerged opposing slavery. In the North, agricultural practices were never conducive to slavery, and the Black population was never more than three per cent. In that context, a growing anti-slavery movement began to develop, increasing tensions with the South.

By the 1830s the dividing lines were being drawn, and this led to the split of the major Christian denominations over the issue of slavery—the Methodists 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 to their own economic and social interests.

Opposition to slavery in the North intensified, led by devout Christian activists, many of whom were clergy. This included Congregationalist pastor Lyman Beecher, the founder of the American Bible Society. His daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which vividly exposed slavery’s cruelty and greatly advanced the abolitionist cause.[[57]](#footnote-57) The opposing positions on slavery in America became so unshakable that only a civil war could decide the outcome.

**Post-Civil War**

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.

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. 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.[[58]](#footnote-58) 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, 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.[[59]](#footnote-59) Blacks continued to form their own churches after experiencing unfair treatment in White churches. 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.[[60]](#footnote-60) The Ku Klux Klan was formed as an instrument of White supremacy. Shamefully, the church did little to oppose these forces of oppression.

In 1870 ninety per cent of African Americans lived in the South, the vast majority in rural areas. This changed very little in the next forty years, but the onset of World War I drastically increased the demand for labor in manufacturing, resulting in a mass immigration of Blacks to northern cities. They were received by Whites 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.[[61]](#footnote-61)

**The Civil Rights Era**

The 1950s and early 1960s saw a remarkable movement of African American religious leaders from within Black churches to change the social landscape of America. Led most prominently by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., these Christians brought their faith to bear on the problems of their community and set them before the American people in dramatic fashion.

Appealing to the Christian virtues of justice and compassion and to the American ideals of freedom and equality, they used boycotts, protests, and civil disobedience (and great personal suffering) to press for change. The civil rights laws enacted in the mid-60s were a tangible result of that movement, but the deeper legacies of the treatment of the past, especially as it related to the problems associated with the poverty were difficult to overcome. White evangelicals were largely passive and offered only tepid support for these efforts.

The last fifty years have seen much improvement in the role of Blacks in American life, but significant inequities remain. Our current national discussion is largely about the causes of these discrepancies and their remedies in an on-going effort toward racial equality in this country.

**What We Can Learn from History**

It is said that those who refuse to learn from history are condemned to repeat it. So what can we learn from this brief survey of slavery and its impact in America?

As Americans, we must face our past honestly. I believe that God has used our nation mightily, and, I believe, all things considered, America has been a force for good in the world. But I also believe in the fallenness of this world, and the devastating effects of sin on every human endeavor. The history of slavery and its effects in our nation is a demonstration of that depravity.

America was not unique in its embrace of slavery. Slavery has been nearly universal in human societies, as the rich and powerful have often exploited the weak and vulnerable. But this nation bears a particular burden of guilt in the betrayal of its own ideals regarding inalienable human rights for all, endowed by their Creator. That is an ideal that is still, in some measure, unrealized.

And as Christians, we, too, must face our past honestly. On the one hand, opposition to slavery in this country arose out of deeply Christian commitments. The abolition movement which brought attention to the brutality of this institution and which appealed to the moral conscience of White citizens eventually led to the sacrifice of many lives in the cause of freedom and justice.

But equally, we must acknowledge that human sinfulness, which allows self-interest to blind us to biblical truth, was very evident in the Christian responses of many to the challenge of slavery. In the South especially, where economic interests were so strong, Christians used every means available to justify the possession and exploitation of human lives as mere property. May the Lord give us eyes to see our own blindness today, giving us freedom from a cultural captivity.

Further, the stigma of race-based slavery has had a deep and destructive impact on attitudes toward Black Americans through our history. I have no doubt that negative stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes remain in many of our own hearts. We must pray for the Lord’s help in expunging them completely.

Finally, we must realize that the past has consequences in the present. We must ask God to give us wisdom to know how best to respond in repairing the damage of the awful legacy of race-based slavery in our land.

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**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 8)**

**by Pastor Kynes**

We have looked at the ways in which race matters in America and the roots of present inequities in the race-based institution of slavery with which this country began. What is to be done about it? How should we respond to the call for racial justice in our country? Before addressing that question directly, I want to consider two contrasting viewpoints that are offered in our culture today.

**I. Race Means Nothing—**

**Cultural Colorblindness**

One response to the call for racial justice in our country is to deny that race is a problem. Didn’t the election of a Black President usher us into a post-racial America? Isn’t racism no longer socially acceptable? 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.

It is acknowledged that economic and social inequities remain, but substantial progress has been made.[[62]](#footnote-62) The American ideal has never been an equality of result, but an equality of opportunity. And, some contend, African-Americans have every opportunity to get ahead in this country, as the number of Black millionaires in business, entertainment, and professional sports demonstrates.

Often this response emphasizes individual responsibility. People simply need to take advantage of the opportunities that are open to all. Also, many believe that the problems between Black and White America can be overcome through individual relationships—people getting to know one another, overcoming past offenses, and reconciling their differences.

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 just forget the discrimination of the past and move on.

**Assessing Cultural Colorblindness**

King’s vision of a colorblind society is inspiring, but 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 *will* be, but it is not hard to see that it is far from the way the world *is* in our day. There have been dramatic improvements in the legal and social status of African-Americans, but, as we outlined earlier, great disparities still exist. A position of cultural colorblindness blinds one to the continuing problems that persist.

Equality of 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 different groups begin at very different starting lines. Is the opportunity of a child born in a single-parent household, without a father in the home, 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 seek to excel? I don’t think so. I was blessed with immense economic and social capital that many others don’t have.

The inequality of opportunity is related to poverty, but the overlap of poverty and race cannot be ignored. More than that, as President Lyndon Johnson observed over fifty years ago, Black poverty is not White poverty. 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 very connection between present sacrifice and future reward.

Such colorblindness can ignore the real problems regarding race in our country, thus simply reinforcing the status quo with all its inequities. It can become a shield for members of the White majority, relieving them of any personal responsibility to deal with problems of race, while putting the entire burden of responsibility for improving their condition on the shoulders of African Americans. It also tends to subtly assume a cultural assimilation of everyone to the dominant culture, ignoring the value of some cultural distinctives in the Black community that members of that community rightly cherish.

Personal responsibility is important, and reconciling individual relationships ought to be pursued, but one cannot ignore social structures which perpetuate injustice.[[63]](#footnote-63) These may include continued residential segregation which diminishes important social networking opportunities, aspects of the legal system and rates of incarceration that disproportionately affect Blacks, certain policing practices involving profiling, and the ways public schools are funded resulting in gross disparities. Addressing individual relationships without addressing these more structural problems is not enough to bring about real change.

Colorblindness in the law is a critical goal and has largely been accomplished. But the social and economic effects of America’s long history of racism (and some continuing prejudices in our own day) remain. Activist Ta-Nehisi Coates argues that even the progress of the present does not undo the damage of the past:

Now we have half-stepped away from our long centuries of despoilment, promising, “Never again.” But still we are haunted. It is as though we have run up a credit-card bill and, having pledged to charge no more, remain befuddled that the balance does not disappear. The effects of that balance, interest accruing daily, are all around us.[[64]](#footnote-64)

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.[[65]](#footnote-65) But however we deal with that challenge, issues of race are real in our country, and we must not close our eyes to them.

**II. Race Means Everything:**

**A Call for Cultural Revolution**

As we consider responses to the issues of racial injustice in our country, one side wants to deny that race is a problem. Race means nothing, and they propose that we all become culturally colorblind and simply treat everyone equally. But on the other side is a contrasting response—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,[[66]](#footnote-66) some believe that everything about us as a nation has been affected by this original stain.[[67]](#footnote-67) American society is inherently and structurally 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. In its extreme form, it 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 (CRT).

**Critical Race Theory**

CRT 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 CRT 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, especially through the use of the language and stories that shape the way people view the world. In so doing, they oppress those who don’t belong as abnormal, deviant, or worthless. They use their position to maintain their own power and status in society. 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.

CRT 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.

**Critical Theory**

Critical Race Theory is itself just a branch of a broader movement known simply as Critical Theory, which seeks to unmask the power relations that affect other groups in society related to sex, sexual orientation, class, gender identity, physical ability, etc. Each group experiences oppression from the (White, male, heterosexual, able-bodied) power structures of society in a unique and sometimes overlapping way. This creates “identity politics,” with each group pressing for its own rights and privileges. A further extension of this idea is known as “intersectionality,” reflecting the ways these various group identities can intersect, creating still more identifiable groups within groups, each with its own forms of oppression. For example, a lesbian, Black woman has her own perspectives that is not shared by women who are White or by women who are Black but heterosexual.

According to Critical Theory, membership in an oppressed group entitles a person to privileged knowledge. Their “lived experience” of oppression gives them special access to truths that are generally concealed from dominant groups. Therefore, their perspective must be honored as authoritative by virtue of their status as a victim. Demands for “objective evidence” or “rational argument” are merely attempts to invalidate what the oppressed know as true through their own embodied and intuitively subjective “ways of knowing.” This postmodern aspect of Critical Theory undermines the notion of objective truth, which itself is seen as an oppressive tool of the powerful.

The goal of Critical Theory is to unmask the power relations between groups by deconstructing the stories, the language, and the practices that oppressor groups use to justify their dominance in society, and to work for the liberation of oppressed groups. “Social Justice,” defined as liberation, ultimately means the blurring of all conceptions of what is normal or valued, since those categories themselves are simply socially constructed by the powerful and oppress those who don’t fit within those categories.[[68]](#footnote-68)

**A Critique of Critical Theory:**

**Positive Features**

The ideas flowing from Critical Theory and, more specifically, Critical Race Theory, have become very popular in recent years partly because they contain important truth. As Critical Theory emphasizes, it is sadly true that those in positions of power 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 we have pointed to various ways in which 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.”[[69]](#footnote-69) 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.[[70]](#footnote-70) 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.

Finally, we can affirm the desire for liberation from oppression that Critical Theory promotes. Jesus, citing Isaiah 61, described his mission as one in which he was sent “to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18). 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. We must be careful to distinguish what is meant by liberation in Critical Theory from a Christian conception, but the notion of liberation itself in Critical Theory is an attractive feature for many.

**A Critique of Critical Theory:**

**Negative Features**

On a superficial level, 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 the biblical story as an oppressive “meta-narrative,” Critical Theory has created its own counter narrative. Without a vertical dimension, it must depend only on horizontal relationships to explain human identity. 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 responsible to 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 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 as evidence of present racism. This is reductionistic, denying the complexity of human society. Some of the real differences that exist 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 negative stereotyping, 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 trends within the African American community itself. To label all Whites as “racists” is unhelpful.

With regard to knowledge, it is important to listen to the voices and “lived experience” of minorities, but “privileging” those voices must not mean that those voices cannot 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. Further, privileging the voices of the oppressed can negatively reinforce a victim mentality, since victim status itself becomes a source of social power. In addition, we must recognize that the voices of the oppressed can also be affected by our common depravity. Finally, there is no one “voice” that represents any entire group, though Critical Theorists try to argue that anyone dissenting to their perspective within an oppressed group has simply adopted the oppressive narrative of their oppressors. In this way, all dissent to their view is ruled out by definition. In response, we must hold to objective truth that transcends the perspective of any particular group or individual, and we must continue to point out that any (rational) argument that contends that rationality is itself oppressive is self-contradictory.

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 from the captivity to sin that corrupts our hearts. In fact, Critical Theory fails to deal with sin, and, consequently, it presents a never-ending conflict between the oppressors and the oppressed, for some group will always and necessarily use their power in oppressive ways. 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—and the cancer within our hearts will continue to be deadly. In contrast, the gospel offers the hope of forgiveness, moral transformation, and ultimately a divine renewal in which God’s just kingdom will be found on earth as it is in heaven.

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, the claims of Critical Theory are held with a religious fervor. Its notion of original sin is racism and the structures it creates. Becoming aware of these 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. One can never fully earn one’s salvation, however, for one’s 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 one looks down on those who fail to own their own racism. Failing to adhere to this Critical Theory’s dogmatic faith will result in rejection and “cancelation.”

Christians must beware of the deceptions of this social religion, but, equally, we mustn’t assume that anyone who sees racism as a critical problem is an adherent of Critical Race Theory.[[71]](#footnote-71)

**Conclusion**

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. Racism is real, and it needs our attention as we are informed by biblical truth and the Lord’s requirement that we show concern for the poor and to seek justice for the oppressed. Our next article seeks to put this together as we consider a way forward in our response to racial injustice in America.

**Racial Injustice in America:**

**How Should We Respond?**

**(Part 9)**

**by Pastor Kynes**

**Lord, What Would You Have Us Do?**

We have covered a lot of ground fairly quickly in the previous eight articles. But before I suggested some concrete steps we can take to respond to racial injustice in America, I thought it important to establish some key theological principles and a biblical perspective on justice (including its social dimensions) so that we might address this topic in a distinctively Christian manner.

We live in a highly polarized political culture, where tribal loyalties preclude nuanced thinking on most of the issues that confront us.[[72]](#footnote-72) Too often the positions we take are driven more by Twitter tweets and Facebook “likes” than by carefully reasoned deliberation. As Christians, we ought to do better. Our first allegiance ought to be to Christ as Lord, above any political party. We must seek the “mind of Christ” as we address the complexities of race in America. We must humble ourselves before the word of God, and then seek to discern our present condition and its historical roots, so that we might be like the men of Issachar “who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chr. 12:32).

In what follows, I offer a number of ways we can respond to racial injustice in America.

**1. Engage in Personal Reflection**

I encourage you to begin where I began this series—with reflection on your own attitudes toward race. Explore your own “racial autobiography.” What are the events and influences that have shaped your own perceptions—whether for good or ill. Racism—the negative pre-judging of people based on the color of their skin—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. 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.

Facing the truth is critical, and a failure of White Americans to acknowledge the wrongs of the past has been a major obstacle to racial reconciliation.[[73]](#footnote-73)

**3. 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 office 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 in our country every day.

I encourage you to take some time to read articles and books that broaden your perspective on the issues of race—and not just perspectives that confirm what you already believe. The elders are creating an annotated list of resources that you might find helpful. We all have much to learn.

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.[[74]](#footnote-74) 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.

**4. Lament**

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.[[75]](#footnote-75) 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. I offer this excerpt of a prayer of lament as but one example of this biblical expression:

O Lord, how long will your church be divided along racial lines? How long with 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? How long, O Lord, will my minority brothers and sisters struggle with distrust and feel ostracized?

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.[[76]](#footnote-76)

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. Put Faith into Action**

Jesus calls us to love God and to love our neighbor, which, as we have seen in earlier articles, must include acting with compassion toward the poor and seeking justice for the oppressed. So, who is your neighbor? Since many of us live in largely segregated neighborhoods and worship in largely segregated churches, we must first expand our vision of what constitutes a neighbor, just as Jesus called us to do in the parable of the Good Samaritan. We must begin locally, opening our eyes to those the Lord puts in our path. Then we must broaden our vision as he lays the needs of others before us.

I see the biblical injunction to show concern for the poor and to seek justice for the oppressed to go beyond race, but because of the overlap of race and poverty and because of the historical injustice toward African Americans, this biblical injunction has particular relevance to racial issues. 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:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

In the words of Tim Keller, “to ‘do justice’ means to go to places where the fabric of shalom has broken down, where the weaker members of societies fall through the fabric, and to repair it.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Here I suggest actions that address these issues of reparative justice on three levels.

**A. Short-Term Measures:**

**Immediate Relief**

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. In fact, 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.[[78]](#footnote-78) 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).

**B. Middle-Term Measures:**

**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 some Christian groups have devoted much time and attention to some of these issues. Prison Fellowship, for example, has developed a number of policy guidelines that Christians ought to consider as they wrestle with these issues.[[79]](#footnote-79) Other Christian groups are involved in other policy areas that need reform,[[80]](#footnote-80) and these deserve our attention.

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, promoting what they see as more just and equitable public policies, and we should require our public officials to address them.

**C. Long-Term Measures:**

**Social and Spiritual Development**

The issues related to race run deep in our culture. Slavery existed and was morally justified in our country for close to 250 years. After 1865, racial discrimination was lawful and defended morally for another century. The Civil Rights laws of the 1960s did not erase racist attitudes, but they gave African Americans the legal tools to fight discrimination. Much progress has been made in the last fifty years, but it is unreasonable to think that the damage done in the previous 350 years can be overcome in a few short generations. There is still much work to be done, and it must take place at deeper levels.

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 social 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, executive director of the [Equal Justice Initiative](https://eji.org/), reminds people frequently that “hope is your superpower. Don’t let anyone or anything make you hopeless. Hope is the enemy of injustice.”[[81]](#footnote-81) And there is no greater source of hope—real hope—than that which is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this biblical hope that can promote a culture of personal responsibility; it is this biblical 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 hope at the personal level that will give young people the will to persevere in seeking to better themselves; and it is this 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 hope, and especially to the African American community? 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.” 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 work with 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: contributing money to a fund established by the [ANDCampaign](https://www.andcampaign.org/) to assist black churches that have been hard hit by the coronavirus; helping to support seminary scholarships for African American students; and 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.

**Moving Forward in Faith**

These are just a few ideas. There are no easy answers. 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.

1. 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 (found [HERE](https://kentakepage.com/claude-neal-the-last-spectacle-lynching-in-the-united-states/)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. That lawyer’s son later became a federal judge in Tampa, and my nephew clerked for him after graduating from law school. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Those lectures can be accessed [HERE](https://www.efca.org/resources/document/gospel-compassion-and-justice-and-efca). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Using the definition given by John Piper (https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/structural-racism) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As one black writer puts it, “The essence of American racism is disrespect” (Ta-Nehisi Coates, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On this subject I draw heavily on Tim Keller, “What is Biblical Justice?”

   [https://relevantmagazine.com/god/practical-faith/what-biblical-justice](https://relevantmagazine.com/god/what-biblical-justice/)[TIM KELLER](https://relevantmagazine.com/author/timkeller/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. They also occur together nine times in Ezekiel. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Zacchaeus provides New Testament example of this principle (Luke 19:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. French author [Anatole France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatole_France)  in 1894, *The Red Lily*, [Chapter VII](http://www.online-literature.com/anatole-france/red-lily/8/). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. also Lev. 19:13; Mal. 3:5; Job 31:13-15; Ps. 10:14; 12:5; 14:6; 146:7; Prov. 3:27-28; James 5:1-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Chris Marshall, *Biblical Justice* [??], p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Nicholas Wolterstorff, cited in Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Penguin, 2012), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Keller, *Generous Justice*, p. ??. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. We experience this group solidarity every time our favorite sports team is successful and we say, “We won!,” or when we swell with patriotic pride on the Fourth of July. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Though this Article has no parallel in the 1950 EFCA Statement of Faith, it does expand what is stated at the conclusion of Article 4 of that Statement which refers to the Holy Spirit's work to “empower the believer for godly living and service.” This new article also reflects our Free Church heritage as evidenced by the concluding Article 12 of the 1912 Norwegian-Danish Association Statement of Faith: "We believe that the sole duty of the Christian Church is to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world, and to assist charitable institutions, to work for righteousness and temperance, for unity and cooperation with all believers, and for peace among all people and nations on the whole earth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Compassion is a divine attribute that is most clearly evidenced in the person and ministry of Jesus (cf. Matt. 9:36; 14:14; Mark 8:2; Luke 10:33; 15:20). When we show compassion to others (cf. Heb. 10:34) we are exhibiting the character of Christ. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Paul's eagerness to meet this need is evidenced in Gal. 2:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Paul sees our willingness to be generous as a test—"But just as you excel in everything . . . see that you also excel in this grace of giving. . . . I want to test the sincerity of your love" (2 Cor. 8:7-8). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Consider particularly the example of Ruth. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Cf. also Lev. 19:13; Mal. 3:5; Job 31:13-15; Ps. 10:14; 12:5; 14:6; 146:7; Prov. 3:27-28; James 5:1-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. On biblical justice, see my article, “Responding to Racial Injustice #3.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Cf. Isa. 1:1-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cf. Amos 5:7-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In 1992 the EFCA General Conference passed a resolution on racism that included this conclusion: “Realizing that even as Christians we are not immune to the sin of racism, we resolve first of all to search our own hearts and repent of any racist attitudes we may have no matter how subtle. We further resolve to work toward eliminating racism in our local churches, educational institutions and throughout the EFCA family as a whole (particularly in light of our commitment to plant and nurture many new ethnic churches).” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Cf. *Didache: The Lord’s Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*, Chapter 2. The Second Commandment: Grave Sin Forbidden. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. After William Wilberforce’s conversion (1785), his commitment to the gospel of Christ led him to labor for most of his parliamentary career to abolish the slave trade and ultimately slavery. Largely due to his efforts, the Slave Trade Act was passed in 1807 and the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, three days before Wilberforce’s death. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Our Article 10 affirms the eternal consequence of dying apart from Christ. We believe we ought to seek to alleviate all human suffering, but especially that which is eternal. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Consider these words from evangelical leader Carl F. H. Henry in 1992: “But whatever the consequences, [Christians] should set the pace in condemning injustice. . . . We should realize that the Great Commission is dwarfed and even maligned if one implies that God is blindly tolerant of social and structural evil, that he forgives sinners independently of a concern for justice.” (“Interview with Carl F. H. Henry: [A Summons to Justice Carl F. H. Henry](https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1992/july-20/interview-with-carl-f-h-henry-summons-to-justice.html),” *Christianity Today* 36/8 [July 20 1992]. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America (Oxford Press, 2000)*, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. It is helpful to understand that, though it has some objective basis, to some extent race itself is a social construct. The U.S. Census Bureau, e.g., defines “white” as “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.” It acknowledges that “The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically.” ([www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html](http://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html)). In America, the answer to the question 'Who is black?" has long been that a black is any person with ***any*** known black African ancestry. In the South this was known as the “one-drop rule.” This definition reflects the long experience with slavery and later with Jim Crow segregation. Not only does this definition apply to no other group than American blacks, but apparently the rule is unique in that it is found only in the U.S. and not in any other country in the world. (cf. F. James Davis, “Who Is Black? One Nation’s Definition”

    [ https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/mixed/onedrop.html]). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. This is a measure of total assets, not current income. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. 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 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. With this as his starting point, Phil Vischer, the creator of Veggie Tales, presents the problems I am about to describe in a concise and engaging way in this 17-minute video: [HERE](https://youtu.be/AGUwcs9qJXY). I recommend it. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The US incarceration rate (# per 100,000 people) is 698, the highest in the world. In comparison, in the UK, the rate is 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/30/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/ [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/12/06/community-supervision-marked-by-racial-and-gender-disparities [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Economics/Faculty/Glenn\_Loury/louryhomepage/teaching/Ec%20137/Ec%20137%20spring07/President%20Lyndon%20B%20Johnson%27s%20Howard%20University%20Speech.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Unquestionably, the cruel breakup of families in slavery hindered family formation among African-Americans from the beginning. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. 11.4% of black children have a parent in prison (compared to less than 2% of white children). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. This point was made quite strongly by President Lyndon Johnson in his 1965 Howard University commencement address. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. 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. 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., p. 392. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., p. 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid., p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., p. 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. This includes the slavery practiced by the Northwest Coastal Indians in North America before the Europeans arrived. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Aristotle owned fourteen slaves at his death. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. In fact, data suggests that Muslim slave traders took as many, if not more, Africans into bondage than were sent to North America. It is estimated that by 1900, as many as ten million Africans had been transported to captivity in Islamic societies (cf. Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* [Princeton: University Press, 2003], pp. 301, 303 and the sources cited there). It has been difficult for Islamic culture to condemn slavery because Mohammad himself bought, sold, captured, and owned slaves. Slavery was not legally abolished in Saudi Arabia until 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Similar to suicide and abortion, there is no single biblical text that directly prohibits the practice of slavery. The case against it must be theological—linking underlying biblical principles in such a way as to arrive at this conclusion. Sometimes social circumstances make such theological connections easier to see, as when European Christians were able to live in a world where slavery was not considered “normal.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. See Stark, *For the Glory of God,* p. 331,332. This position was reaffirmed in 1639 by Pope Urban VIII. There does not appear to be any comparable denunciations of slavery among Protestant leaders. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See Stark, *For the Glory of God,* p. 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Stark, *For the Glory of God,* p. 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Stark, *For the Glory of God,* p. 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. There are some rare exceptions. In Louisiana, there were some black-owned plantations with their own slaves. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ta-Nehisi Coates, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. It was entitled, *The Selling of Joseph.* [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. It is said that when Abraham Lincoln met Stowe, he remarked, "So you're the little woman that started this great war!” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. 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). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. All of these were legally sanctioned by the U. S. Supreme Court in the decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See my previous article on some of the racist causes of residential segregation in this country and its adverse effects. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. “Over the last half-century, the gap in Black and White life expectancy substantially narrowed, from seven years to three and a half. The ranks of the Black middle class swelled, while the Black-White poverty gap shrank. Long-standing disparities in education have been reduced as high school graduation rates converge.” (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/national/george-floyd-america/systemic-racism/>) [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Emerson (*Divided by Faith,* pp. 76-80) points out that the Evangelical emphasis on an individual relationship with Christ to the neglect of its corporate dimensions in the life of the church makes many of us blind to the importance of social structures in community life. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. 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). [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Art. I.2 refers to slaves being counted as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of Congressional representation. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. This is exemplified in the controversial *New York Times Magazine’s* 1619 Project, which "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." The project suggests that this date of the arrival of the [first enslaved Africans in the Virginia colony](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Africans_in_Virginia) represents the "nation's birth year." [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. The extreme example of this is “Queer Theory,” which seeks liberation from the normal, especially as it applies to norms of gender and sexuality. It contends that oppression arises from all forms of categorization by which language defines what is normal, and that all such categorization must be disrupted. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Known as “Mile’s Law,” this was first used with reference to perspectives within government bureaucracy. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. The support of slavery by White Christians in the South is a shameful example. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. This difficulty is heightened by the “policy packages” that the two parties present, demanding that party members endorse every part of that package. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. A recent example of such recognition is the 2018 report on the racist past of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. That report was commissioned by the seminary’s president, Al Mohler, and he has publicly released it in its entirety. In response to this report, the seminary board has recently pledged to provide up to $5 million in scholarships for African American students over the next few years. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. I have appreciated my involvement with OneHeartDC which includes a large number of African American pastors. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. 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*](https://www.amazon.com/Weep-Me-Lament-Racial-Reconciliation/dp/1433567598/?tag=thegospcoal-20) (Crossway, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Mark Vroegop, *Weep with Me*, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. *Generous Justice*, p. 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. The biblical practice of gleaning, for example, required a contribution of the person who was helped by it. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. For more information, cf. [www.prisonfellowship.org/about/justicereform/justice-action-center](http://www.prisonfellowship.org/about/justicereform/justice-action-center). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Certainly, access to health care and the improvement of education in poor communities also fall into this category. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Cited in https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/caste-isabel-wilkerson/ [↑](#footnote-ref-81)