



CHURCH INJUSTICE

Faith Explorers

WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE CHURCH

- White Supremacist ideas have historical roots in U.S. Christianity. Especially in the South racism has been advocated from the pulpit, justified biblically and socially tolerated.
- The church once supported segregated schools. Segregation academies are private schools (often church sponsored) in the Southern United States that were founded in the mid-20th century by white parents to avoid having their children attend desegregated public schools.
- Church worship is highly segregated. Racial segregation of churches in the United States is a pattern of Christian churches maintaining segregated congregations based on race. As of 2001, as many as 87% of Christian churches in the United States were completely made up of only white or African-American members.

EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN & CHURCH

- Banning women from the ministry.
- Enforcing patriarchy.
- Tolerating sexual harassment and assault.
- Exploiting women during times of pregnancy and childbirth.
- Failing to recognize or acknowledge the inherent worth of women.

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM

Christian nationalism is the belief that the American nation is defined by Christianity, and that the government should take active steps to keep it that way.

Christian nationalists assert that America is and must remain a “Christian nation”—not merely as an observation about American history, but as a prescriptive program for what America must continue to be in the future.

America is defined by its “Anglo-Protestant” past and that we will lose our identity and our freedom if we do not preserve our cultural inheritance.

THE CHURCH AND GENDER

Denominations including the Catholic Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Southern Baptist Convention have expressed official opposition to gender transition, sometimes citing Biblical references to God creating humans as "male and female."¹

Historically the church has chosen to ignore the important role women played in the early establishment of Christianity and the Church.

Historically the church has excluded women from the ministry.

JESUS ON JUSTICE



NEW TESTAMENT ON JUSTICE

Matthew 23:23: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

Luke 18:1-8: And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; ³ and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Vindicate me against my adversary.’ ⁴ For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor regard man, ⁵ yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.’” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

JESUS ON JUSTICE

- Jesus spoke more about our individual responsibility to bring justice by loving our neighbors and doing good for those around us, especially the poor and marginalized. He talked more about the responsibility of individuals than of authorities to promote good. According to Jesus, we do the work of bringing justice through our love and persistence.
- Jesus spoke of justice from another perspective as well: that of people who sought justice through faith and kept asking until they received it.

JESUS ON
MERCY,
MEEKNESS AND
PEACEMAKING

- Jesus taught the disciples the way they should live. Most of his exhortations hinged on the listeners acting justly. He set the tone with the Beatitudes: attitudes oriented toward God, loving toward others.
 - “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5).
 - “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7).
 - “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

IMPERFECT JUSTICE VS. PERFECT JUSTICE

- Too often justice is dispensed imperfectly.
- Jesus' crucifixion would be the greatest miscarriage of justice of all time if it were not for the fact that God the Father willed it that we may have justice and be freed from the slavery of sin and death.
- Jesus tells us, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). When we put on the attitude of the Beatitudes and love our neighbors as ourselves, our individual acts of justice that Jesus spoke of will make a positive influence on the demands for justice that resound throughout the world.

BIBLICAL
JUSTICE



TIMOTHY KELLER ON FACETS OF BIBLICAL JUSTICE

1. **Community: Others have a claim on my wealth, so I must give voluntarily.**
 - The Bible depicts the human world as a profoundly inter-related community. The godly must live in such a way that the community is strengthened.
 - The righteous are willing to disadvantage themselves to advantage the community;
 - The wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves.

A LESSON FROM DEUTERONOMY

An Old Testament is a case in point (Deuteronomy 24:17-22).

- ¹⁷ Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. ¹⁸ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.
- ¹⁹ When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. ²¹ When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. ²² Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.



BIBLICAL JUSTICE: PROPERTY AND PROFIT

Landowners were commanded to not maximize profits by harvesting all sheaves or picking all the olives or grapes. Rather the owner was to leave produce in the field for the workers and the poor to take through their labor, not through charity. When the text reads that the sheaves, olives, and grapes “shall be for” the poor, it uses a Hebrew phrase that indicates ownership.

Treating all your profits and assets as individualistically yours is mistaken. Because God owns all your wealth (you are just a steward of it), the community has some claim on it. Nevertheless, it is not to be confiscated. You are to acknowledge the claim and voluntarily be radically generous. This view of property does not fit well with either a capitalist or a socialist economy



KELLER ON FACETS OF BIBLICAL JUSTICE

2. Equity: Everyone must be treated equally and with dignity.

- Leviticus 24:22- “You are to have the same law for the foreigner as for the native born.”
- The Hebrew word *mesraim* means equity. Isaiah 33:15 says “Those who speak with [equity, *mesraim*]...keep their hands from accepting bribes.” Bribery is unjust because in commerce, law, and government, it does not treat the poor the same as it does the wealthy.
- Any system of justice or government in which decisions or outcomes are determined by how much money parties have is a stench before God.
- Another example of inequity is unfair business practices. Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:14-15 speak of unfair wages.
- Amos 6:5-6 speaks of ‘unjust scales, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.’ To cut corners and provide an inferior product in order to make more money but not serve customers is to do injustice.

KELLER ON FACETS OF BIBLICAL JUSTICE

- **3. Corporate responsibility: I am sometimes responsible for and involved in other people's sins.**

Sometimes God holds families, groups and nations corporately responsible for the sins of individuals. Daniel repents for sins committed by his ancestors even though there is no evidence he personally participated in them (Daniel 9).

- In 2 Samuel 21 God holds Israel responsible for injustice done to the Gibeonites by King Saul even though he was by that time dead.
- In Joshua 7 and Numbers 16, God holds whole families responsible for the sin of one member.
- In 1 Samuel 15:2 and Deuteronomy 23:3-8, he holds members of the current generation of a pagan nation responsible for the sins committed by their ancestors many generations before.

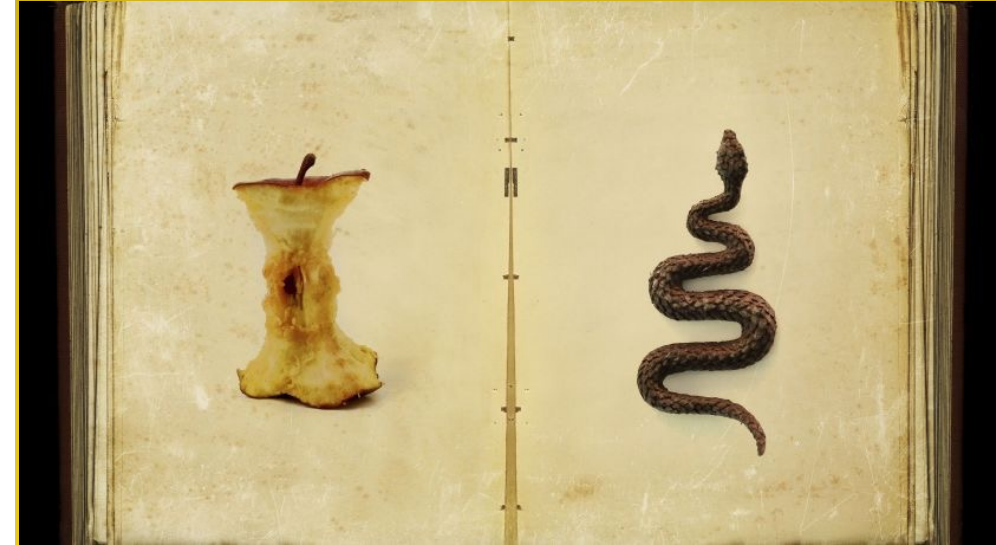
RESPONSIBILITY FOR SINS COMMITTED BY ANCESTORS

There are three reasons.

- **Corporate responsibility.** Achan's family (Joshua 7) did not do the stealing, but they helped him become the kind of man who would steal. The Bible's emphasis on the importance of the family for character formation implies that the rest of the family cannot wholly avoid responsibility for the behavior of a member. The Bible does not teach that your success or failure is wholly due to individual choices.
- **Corporate participation.** Sinful actions not only shape us, but the people around us. And when we sin we affect those around us, which reproduces sinful patterns—even if more subtle—over generations. So, as in Exodus 20:5, God punishes sin down the generations because usually later generations participate in one form or another in the same sin.^[9]

INSTITUTIONALIZED SIN

- **Institutionalized sin.** Socially institutionalized ways of life become weighted in favor of the powerful and oppressive over those with less power.
- Examples include criminal justice systems (Leviticus 19:15), commercial practices such as high interest loans (Exodus 22:25-27; Jeremiah 22:13) and unfairly low (James 5:4) or delayed wages (Deuteronomy 24:14-15).
- Once these systems are in place, they do more evil than any one individual within the system may intend or even be aware of.



KELLER: FACETS OF BIBLICAL JUSTICE

4. Individual responsibility: I am finally responsible for all my sins, but not for all my outcomes.

My sins. Despite the reality of corporate responsibility and evil, the *Bible insists that, ultimately, our salvation lies in what we do as individuals* (Ezekiel 18). There is an asymmetrical balance between individual and corporate responsibility. Deuteronomy 24:16 says that in ordinary human law we must be held responsible and punished for our own sins, not those of our parents. We are indeed the product of our communities, but not wholly—we can resist their patterns. The reality of corporate sin does not swallow up individual moral responsibility, nor does individual responsibility disprove the reality of corporate evil. To deny (or largely deny) either is to adopt one of the secular views of justice rather than a biblical one.



RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUTCOMES VS. SINS

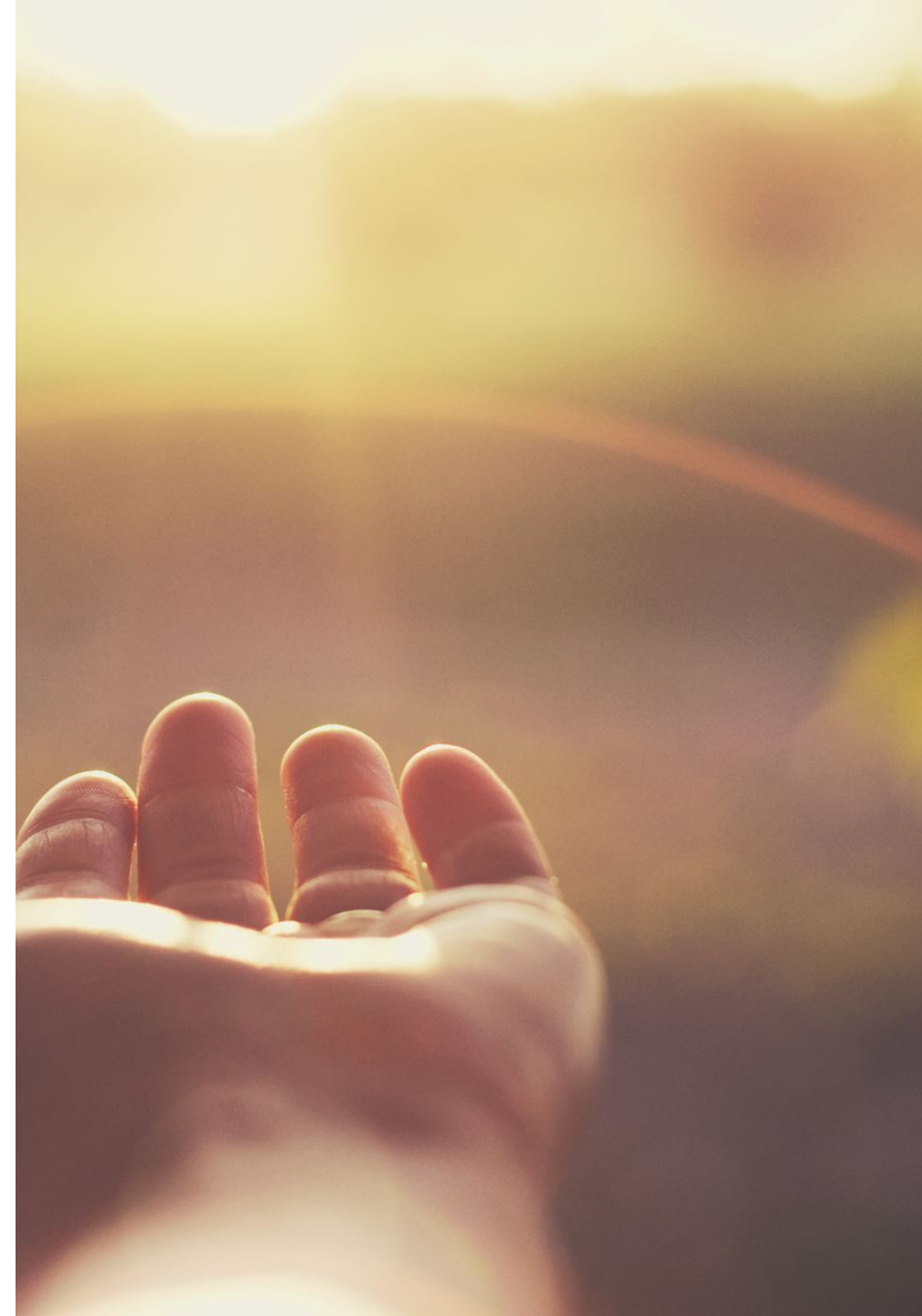
- The Bible does not teach that your success or failure is wholly due to individual choices.
- Poverty for example, can be brought on by personal failure (Proverbs 6:6-7; 23:21), but it may also exist because of environmental factors such as famine or plague, or sheer injustice (Proverbs 13:23]; cf. Exodus 22:21-27).
- So we are not in complete control of our life outcomes.



KELLER ON FACETS OF BIBLICAL JUSTICE

5. **Advocacy: We must have special concern for the poor and marginalized.**

- While we are not to show partiality to any (Leviticus 19:15), we are to have special concern for the powerless (Isaiah 1:17; Psalm 41:1).
- This is not a contradiction. Proverbs 31:8-9 says “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves...Defend the rights of the poor and needy.”
- The Bible doesn’t say “speak up for the rich and powerful,” not because they are less important as persons before God, but because they don’t need you to do this.



THE PLAYING FIELD IS NEVER LEVEL

- The playing field is not level and if we don't advocate for the poor there will not be equality.
- In this aspect of justice, we are seeking to give more social, financial, and cultural capital (power) to those with less.
- Jeremiah 22:3 says "Protect the person who is being cheated from the one who is mistreating... foreigners, orphans, or widows..."
- Jeremiah is singling out for protection groups of people who can't protect themselves from mistreatment the way others can. (cf. Zechariah 7:9-10)

