



# Christian Justice in a Postmodern Era



THE  
**BIBLE RECAP**

# New Testament Scripture on Justice

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- **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?”

# The Beatitudes

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).

# The Old Testament on Justice

## **Deuteronomy 24:17-22):**

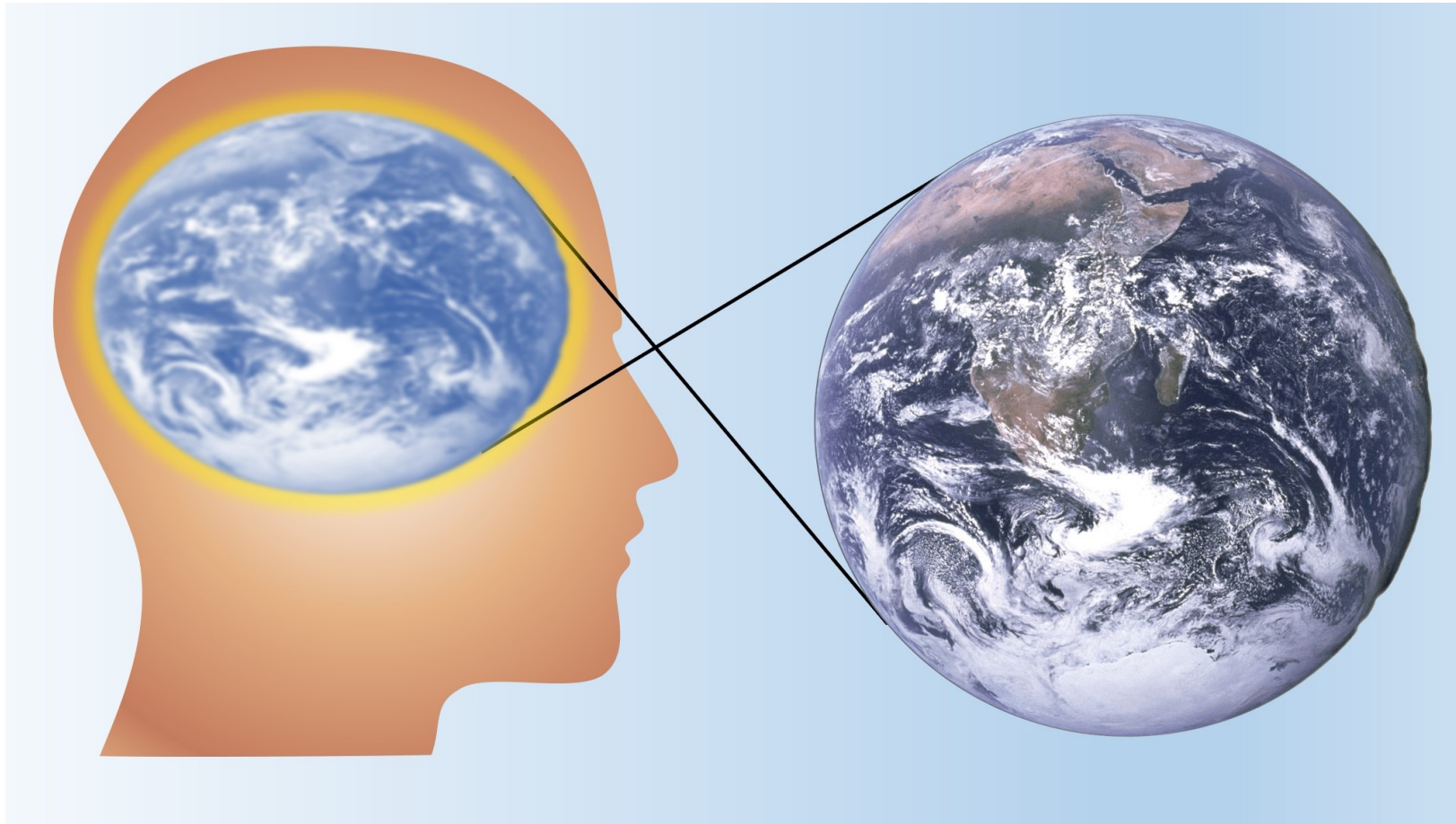
17 Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. • 19When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, 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. 20When 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. 21When 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.



# 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.

# Understanding Contemporary Worldviews





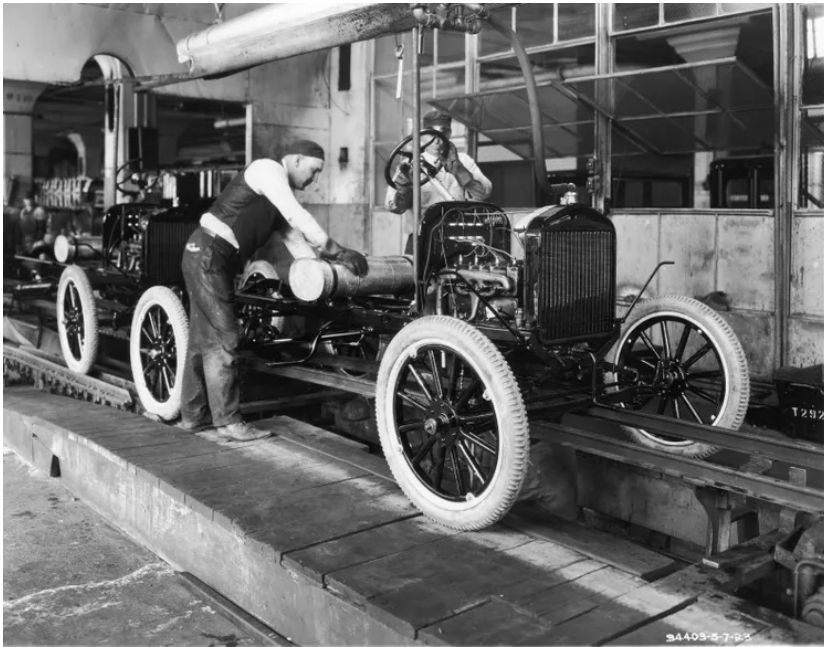
The Birth of American  
Modernism  
(1915-1945)





# Characteristics of Modernism

- Modernism fostered a period of experimentation in the arts from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, particularly in the years following.
- It was characterized by industrialization, the nearly global adoption of capitalism, rapid social change, and advances in science and the social sciences (e.g., Freudian theory).
- Technological innovations included, radio, TV, automated automobile production, assembly lines and more.



# Death of Modernism & Postmodernism

- Postmodernism arose after World War II as a reaction to the perceived failings of modernism, whose radical political, economic and artistic projects came to be associated with totalitarianism.
- Postmodernism rejects the possibility of unmediated reality or objectively-rational knowledge, asserting that all interpretations are contingent on the perspective from which they are made; claims to objective fact are dismissed as naive realism.



# Postmodernism Characteristics

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- Postmodern thinkers frequently describe knowledge claims and value systems as contingent or socially-conditioned, describing them as products of political, historical, or cultural discourses and hierarchies.
- Postmodern thought is broadly characterized by moral relativism, pluralism, and irreverence.
- Postmodernism is often associated with schools of thought such as deconstruction and post-structuralism.
- Postmodernism relies on critical theory, which considers the effects of ideology, society, and history on culture.
- Postmodernism and critical theory commonly criticize universalist ideas of objective reality, morality, truth, human nature, reason, language, and social progress.



## INDIVIDUALISM

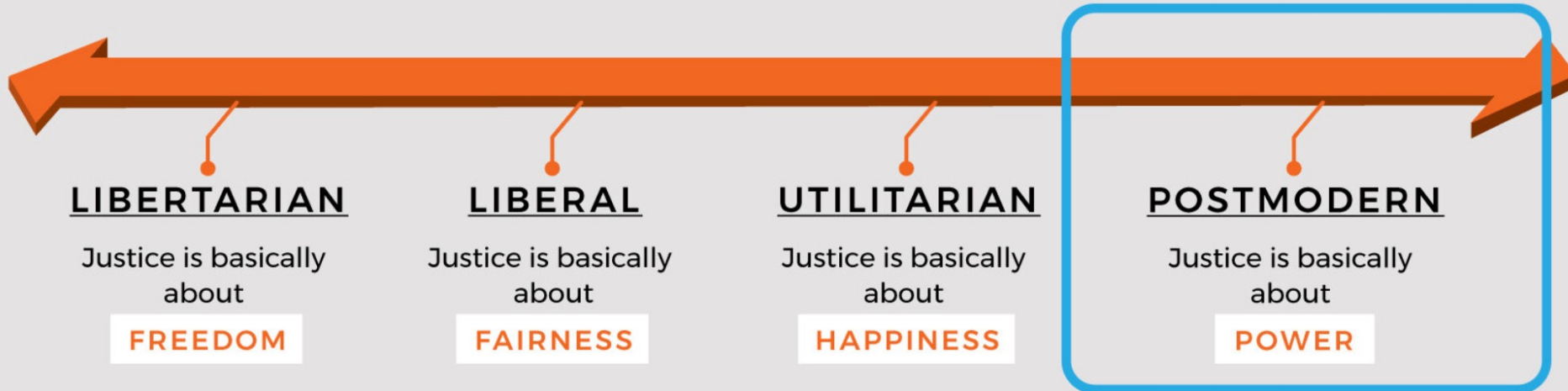
*(Locke, Hume)*

You are wholly the product  
of your individual choices

## COLLECTIVISM

*(Marx)*

You are wholly the product  
of social forces and structures





## Postmodernism, Critical Theory & Cultural Marxism

- ***Postmodern–“Power”*** *A just society subverts the power of dominant groups in favor of the oppressed.*
- ***Postmodernism draws upon the teaching of Karl Marx***, what can be called postmodern Critical Theory has emerged very recently with its own account of justice which is sharply different from the others.
- ***Postmodernism promotes a form of Marxism known as “Cultural Marxism”*** that seeks to achieve power through the coercive use of public language and by destabilizing and overthrowing all existing institutions, laws and traditions in the interest of achieving liberation of the “oppressed” as defined by Cultural Marxists.

# The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory



- ***The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory*** was founded as the Institute for Social Research in 1923 by members of the German Communist Party at Frankfurt University. They concluded that a Communist state must be preceded by a radical subversion of the cultural mores and institutions of a society.
- The “**University of Exile**,” funded by “enlightened philanthropists like Hiram Halle and the Rockefeller Foundation,” formed the faculty of the ***New School Graduate Faculty on Political and Social Science***. This transmitted Critical Theory scholarship to the U.S.
- **Influential leaders:** Antonio Gramsci, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm; Wilhelm Reich.

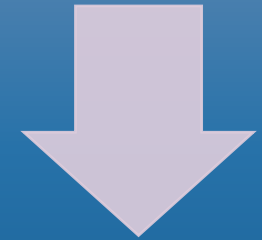
Mike Gonzalez and Katharine Gorka “How Cultural Marxism Threatens the United States—and How Americans Can Fight It” November 14, 2022. Heritage Foundation.

**T***he United States has successfully confronted Marxist attempts to derail it from its historic path of liberty and order. The multifaceted effort to defeat the enemy, generally referred to as the Cold War, concentrated many of the best minds in the country. In 1991, when the Soviet Union dissolved, many Americans and others around the globe justifiably believed that communism had been defeated. However, American Marxists, making use of the complacency that victory often produces, have gained more influence than ever before. Cloaking their goals under the pretense of social justice, they now seek to dismantle the foundations of the American republic by rewriting history; reintroducing racism; creating privileged classes; and determining what can be said in public discourse, the military, and houses of worship. Unless Marxist thought is defeated again, today’s cultural Marxists will achieve what the Soviet Union never could: the subjugation of the United States to a totalitarian, soul-destroying ideology.*

# Post-Modernism Tenets

Postmodern critical theory argues:

The explanation of all *unequal outcomes in wealth, well being, and power is never due to individual actions* or to differences in cultures or to differences in human abilities, *but strictly due to unjust social structures and systems*. The only way to fix unequal outcomes for the downtrodden is through social policy, never by asking anyone to change their behavior or culture.



*All art, religion, philosophy, morality, law, media, politics, education and forms of the family are determined not by reason or truth but by social forces as well. Everything is determined by your class consciousness and social location.*

Religious doctrine, together with all politics and law are always, at bottom, a way for people to get or maintain social status, wealth, and therefore power over others.





# Post-Modernism Tenets

***Reality is at bottom nothing but power.*** And if that is the case, then to see reality, power must be mapped in terms of the “intersectionality” of oppression. The categories are ***race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity (and sometimes others)***. If you are white, male, straight, cisgender then you have the highest amount of power. If you are none of these at all, you are the most marginalized and oppressed—and there are numerous categories in the middle.

***Each category toward the powerless end of the spectrum has a greater moral authority*** and a greater ability to see the way truly things are. ***Only powerlessness and oppression brings moral high ground and true knowledge.***

Therefore ***those with more privilege must not enter into any debate***—they have no right or ability to advise the oppressed, blinded as they are by their social location. They simply must give up their power.

# Post-Modernism Tenets

*The main way power is exercised is through language—through “**dominant discourses.**” A dominant discourse is any truth-claim, whether grounded in supposed reason and science or in religion and morality. Language does not merely describe reality—it constructs or creates it.*

*Power structures mask themselves behind the language of **rationality** and truth. So academia hides its unjust structures behind talk of “**academic freedom,**” and corporations behind talk of “**free enterprise,**” science behind talk of “**empirical objectivity**”, and religion behind talk of “**divine truth**”.*

*All of these seeming truth-claims are simply constructed narratives designed to dominate and control speech.*

# Postmodern Tenets

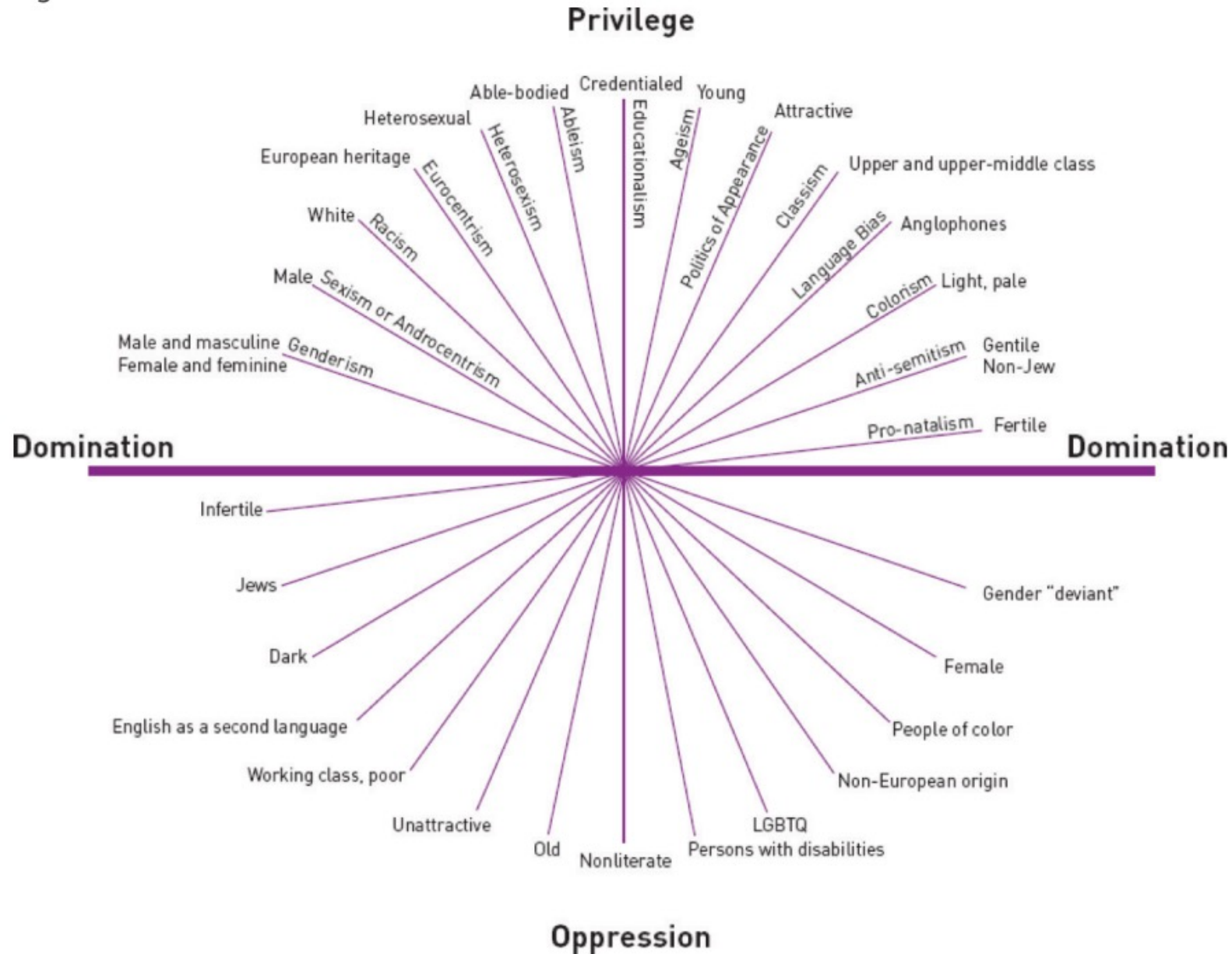
- ***Neither individual rights nor individual identity are primary.***  
Traditional liberal emphasis on individual human rights (private property, free speech) is an obstacle to the radical changes society will need to undergo in order to share wealth and power. And it is an illusion to think that, as an individual, you can carve out an identity in any way different or independent of others in your race, ethnicity, gender, and so on. Group identity and rights are the only real ones. Guilt is not assigned on the basis of individual actions but on the basis of group membership and social/racial status.

# Postmodern Tenets

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- ***Cultures, like persons, can be mapped through intersectionality. In one sense no culture is better in any regard from any other culture. All cultures are equally valid.***
- People who see their cultures as better and judge other cultures as inferior or even people who see their own culture as “normal” and judge other cultures as “exotic”, are members of an oppressive culture.
- ***Oppressive cultures are (though this word is not used) inferior—and to be despised.***

# Injustice and Intersectionality



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## Postmodern Justice Prescription

- **There is no absolute truth**—only competing narratives. It sees “lived experiences” as mattering more than facts.
- **Individuals are either an oppressor or victim.** You are predetermined by immutable characteristics such as race to fall into either category. Culture is defined by groups exercising power over each other.
- **America is systemically racist and must be dismantled.** It sees America as having been founded on the system of capitalism, which is racist, and therefore must be disrupted.
- **Dismantlement particularly applies to the church** since the church plays a critical role in American history, society, culture and values.



# A Biblical Analysis





# Biblical Analysis of Postmodernism

***First, Postmodernism is deeply incoherent.*** If all truth-claims and justice-agendas are socially constructed to maintain power, then why aren't the claims and agendas of the adherents of this view subject to the same critique? Why are the postmodern justice advocates' claims that "This is oppression" unquestionably, morally right, while all other moral claims are mere social constructs?

Intersectionality claims oppressed people see things clearly—but why would they if social forces make us wholly what we are and control how we understand reality? ***You cannot insist that all morality is culturally constructed and relative and then claim that your moral claims are not. This is not a flaw that only Christians can see, and this may therefore be a fatal flaw for the entire theory.***



# Biblical Analysis of Post-modernism

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***Second, it is far too simplistic.*** The postmodern view of justice follows Rousseau and Marx, who saw human beings as inherently good or blank slates. Any evil is instilled in us by society, by social systems and forces.

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***Any pathology (poverty, crime, violence, abuse) is due to one thing only- wrong social policy.***

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***However, biblically we know we are complex beings***—socially (both individual and social creatures made in the image of a Three-in-One God), morally (both sinful and fallen, yet valuable in the image of God), and constitutionally (we are equally soul-spirit and body).

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***The reasons for evil and for unjust outcomes in life are multiple and complex.***

# Social Reform Alone Will Fail

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The ***restoration of a poor community will require a rich, multi-dimensional understanding*** of human flourishing.

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There certainly is a ***need for social reform and the dismantling of systemic injustice.***

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But ***people also need meaning in life, and strong families, and ways to grow in character, and healthy, functional communities, and moral discipline as well.***

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***Postmodernist justice ignores the complexity of what makes humans thrive*** and therefore its programs will not actually work to liberate oppressed people. It ignores too much of what makes us human.

# Biblical Analysis of Post-modernism

- *Third, it undermines our common humanity. Biblically, we are primarily individuals before God, made in his image, and secondarily members of a race/nationality.*
- The *postmodern view, however, makes one's racial or group identity primary*, superseding all loyalties to the nation or to the human race as a whole.
- This comes close to saying that *there are humanities rather than a common, human race.*



# The Small Matter of “Sin”

- ***Fourth, Postmodernism denies our common sinfulness.*** The Bible teaches that sin is pervasive and universal.
  - ***We are each members of a race or nationality that contains much unique common grace*** to contribute to the world.
  - ***But every culture embodies particular sinful idolatries.*** No race or people group is inherently more sinful than others.
  - ***In a postmodern view of justice groups are assigned higher or lower moral value depending on their power,*** and some groups are denied any redeeming characteristics at all. ***To see whole races as more sinful and evil than other races leads to things like the Holocaust.***





## Negates Forgiveness, Peace & Reconciliation

- ***Fifth, Postmodernism makes forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation between groups impossible.***
- Miroslav Volf writes: “Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners.” Without using the word “sin”, the adherents of this view continually thwart reconciliation.

(Miroslav Volf is a Croatian Protestant theologian and public intellectual and Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology and director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture at Yale University.)

# Biblical Analysis of Post-modernism

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- ***Sixth, Postmodernism offers a highly self-righteous 'performative' identity.*** The Christian identity is received from God's gracious hands, not achieved by our actions—we are loved completely apart from our performance. Postmodernism provides two kinds of identity that are highly performative:
  - Being a ***member of an oppressed group*** fighting for justice
  - Being a ***white ally anti-racist***.
- **Both identities**—like all other identities not based in Christ—*can produce anxiety because of the need to prove oneself sufficiently justice-oriented.*
- ***The secure identity of Christians does not require shaming, othering, and denouncing*** (which is always a part of a highly performative identity) — we are simultaneously sinful and infinitely loved.

# Biblical Analysis of Post-modernism

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- ***Seventh, Postmodernism is prone to domination. This theory sees liberal values such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion—as mere ways to oppress people.***
- Often this view puts these “freedoms” in scare quotes. As a result, ***adherents of this theory resort to constant expressions of anger and outrage to silence critics***, as well as to censorship and other kinds of social, economic, and legal pressure to marginalize opposing views.
- The ***postmodern view sees all injustice as happening on a human level and so demonizes human beings rather than recognizing the evil forces in the world.***

# Comparing Biblical values to the Alternatives

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- First, ***only biblical justice addresses all the concerns of justice*** found across the fragmented alternate views.
- Second, ***biblical justice contradicts each of the alternate views*** neither by dismissing them nor by compromising with them.
- Third, ***biblical justice has built-in safeguards against domination.***
- Fourth, ***only biblical justice offers a radically subversive understanding of power.***



# Summary

- ***The Bible does not presume an end to the “binary” of power (rulers and the ruled). Rule and authority are not intrinsically wrong.***
- ***Christianity neither eliminates nor merely reverses the ruler/ruled binary—rather, it subverts it.***
- ***There is nothing in the world like biblical justice!***  
Christians must not sell their birthright for a mess of pottage. But they must take up their birthright and do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8).