

A BIBLICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

- For years, social justice has been a hot button issue in society and the church
- At stake in the issue is: How do we address racial injustices taking place in our country?
- Churches and individual Christians have been confused about how best to answer this question
 - Should believers and churches promote the social justice agenda and stand up for the oppressed and the outcast?
 - Should believers seek to reshape society through the political process by activism, protests and lobbying?
 - Should “redeeming the culture” be a key part of the mission of the church?
- Confusion on this issue poses a great threat to the unity of the church

WHAT CHRISTIANS CAN AGREE ON

- At a minimum, we can all agree on the fact that Christians ought to be loving, compassionate, and kind toward those who are oppressed, mistreated, or marginalized by society
- Christians should be known for acts of kindness and grace

Matthew 22:39 ~ The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’

The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37

James 1:27 ~ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

- Due to the fall, there will be widows, fatherless, and oppressed people in society and, modeling the ministry of Christ, we should express compassion by mourning with those who mourn

Romans 12:15 ~ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

- We must acknowledge that there are oppressed people groups in our society, that the sin of racism exists, and many in our country have been treated wrongly on the basis of skin color
- We must admit that many individuals have been hurt by prejudiced comments and actions
- We must vehemently denounce and oppose the evil of racism!
- But we have different reasons for doing so....

DEFINITIONS WITHIN THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Social Justice

- “Social Justice as a concept arose in the early 19th century during the Industrial Revolution and subsequent civil revolutions throughout Europe, which aimed to create more egalitarian societies and remedy capitalistic exploitation of human labor. Because of the stark stratifications between wealthy and the poor

during this time, early social justice advocates focused primarily on capital, property, and the distribution of wealth. By the mid-20th century, social justice had expanded from being primarily concerned with economics to include other spheres of social life to include the environment, race, gender, and other causes and manifestations of inequality.”¹

- “Social Justice – A socially just world meets everyone’s basic needs (food, housing, health care, education, job, social security) in a dignified way; treats people from every background with dignity and respect; supports the development of all people to their full potential; guarantees equitable distribution of resources; makes sure all people are physically and psychologically safe and secure; and ensures everyone has a voice in the decisions that affect them.”²
- Advocates of social justice maintain that there are always issues of power and oppression at play when there is diversity
- The aim of social justice proponents is to move towards a more just world with less oppression and more freedom and equality among people from different groups
- Usually the primary causes of social injustice are related to differences in race, class, and gender

Systemic Racism

- “Systemic racism consists of organizational culture, policies, directives, practices, or procedure that exclude, displace, or marginalize some racialized groups or create unfair barriers for them to access valuable benefits and opportunities. This is often the result of institutional biases in organizational culture, policies, directives, practices, and procedures that may appear neutral but have the effect of privileging some groups and disadvantaging others.”³
- “Racism serves the purpose of maintaining white supremacy and privilege. Racism by whites against people of color is not only those individual acts of hate, but also a system of exclusion, discrimination and criminalization, which ensures that the elites (while mostly white, the elites are now people of color as well) can maintain their power. Race Prejudice + Power = Racism.

3 expressions of racism

- **Personal:** The way in which we perpetuate racism on an individual basis. Examples: calling someone a racist name, making a racist assumption.
- **Cultural:** The norms, values, or standards assumed by the dominant society which perpetuate racism. Examples: thin, blond, white women as the basis for our society’s standard of beauty; women on welfare are assumed to be black or brown and are portrayed as irresponsible ...requiring people to speak English as a way of deliberately destroying community and culture.
- **Institutional:** The way in which institutions – Housing, Government, Education, Media, Business, Health Care, Criminal Justice, Religion – perpetuate racism. Examples: people of color under-represented and misrepresented on television, racially biased standardized tests used to determine who will be admitted to higher education programs and institutions...reliance on low-paying immigrant labor by farms and factories.”⁴

While Privilege/White Supremacy/Implicit Bias

¹ <https://www.pachamama.org/social-justice/what-is-social-justice>

² <http://www.act4socialjustice.com/social-justice-definitions/>

³ <https://www.ontario.ca/document/data-standards-identification-and-monitoring-systemic-racism/glossary>

⁴ <http://www.act4socialjustice.com/social-justice-definitions/>

- “White Privilege is perpetuated in the US by both individual and institutional racism that prevents non-white people from receiving equal access to all levels of society. It is a term to identify the privileges, opportunities, and advantages offered by the American society to anyone who is accepted as “white” (or white enough), and serves as an exemption in many particular cases from certain societal burdens or liabilities. It manifests itself in a number of ways, such as, better housing, education, economic opportunities, higher wages, etc.”⁵
- “White Supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege.”⁶
- Implicit Bias - “Thoughts and feelings are ‘implicit’ if we are unaware of them or mistaken about their nature. We have a bias when, rather than being neutral, we have a preference for (or aversion to) a person or group of people. Thus, we use the term ‘implicit bias’ to describe when we have attitudes towards people or associate stereotypes with them without our conscious knowledge. A fairly commonplace example of this is seen in studies that show that white people will frequently associate criminality with black people without even realizing they’re doing it.”⁷
- It is for this reason that reparations are being demanded
- In an extraordinary move, the Asheville City Council has apologized for the North Carolina city's historic role in slavery, discrimination and denial of basic liberties to Black residents and voted to provide reparations to them and their descendants. The 7-0 vote came the night of July 14.⁸

⁵ <http://www.act4socialjustice.com/social-justice-definitions/>

⁶ <http://www.act4socialjustice.com/social-justice-definitions/>

⁷ <https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/>

⁸ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/07/15/asheville-passes-reparations-black-residents-historic/5441792002/>

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ASPECTS & ASSUMPTIONS OF WHITENESS & WHITE CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

White dominant culture, or **whiteness**, refers to the ways white people and their traditions, attitudes and ways of life have been normalized over time and are now considered standard practices in the United States. And since white people still hold most of the institutional power in America, we have all internalized some aspects of white culture — including people of color.

- Rugged Individualism**
 - The individual is the primary unit
 - Independence & autonomy highly valued + rewarded
 - Individuals assumed to be in control of their environment, “You get what you deserve”
- Family Structure**
 - The nuclear family: father, mother, 2.3 children is the ideal social unit
 - Husband is breadwinner and head of household
 - Wife is homemaker and subordinate to the husband
 - Children should have own rooms, be independent
- Emphasis on Scientific Method**
 - Objective, rational linear thinking
 - Cause and effect relationships
 - Quantitative emphasis
- History**
 - Based on Northern European immigrants’ experience in the United States
 - Heavy focus on the British Empire
 - The primacy of Western (Greek, Roman) and Judeo-Christian tradition
- Protestant Work Ethic**
 - Hard work is the key to success
 - Work before play
 - “If you didn’t meet your goals, you didn’t work hard enough”
- Religion**
 - Christianity is the norm
 - Anything other than Judeo – Christian tradition is foreign
 - No tolerance for deviation from single god concept
- Status, Power & Authority**
 - Wealth = worth
 - Your job is who you are
 - Respect authority
 - Heavy value on ownership of goods, space, property
- Future Orientation**
 - Plan for future
 - Delayed gratification
 - Progress is always best
 - “Tomorrow will be better”
- Time**
 - Follow rigid time schedules
 - Time viewed as a commodity
- Aesthetics**
 - Based on European culture
 - Woman’s beauty based on blonde, thin – “Barbie”
 - Man’s attractiveness based on economic status, power, intellect
- Holidays**
 - Based on Christian religions
 - Based on white history & male leaders
- Justice**
 - Based on English common law
 - Protect property & entitlements
 - Intent counts
- Competition**
 - Be #1
 - Win at all costs
 - Winner/loser dichotomy
 - Action Orientation
 - Master and control nature
 - Must always “do something” about a situation
 - Aggressiveness and Extroversion
 - Decision-Making
 - Majority rules (when Whites have power)
- Communication**
 - “The King’s English” rules
 - Written tradition
 - Avoid conflict, intimacy
 - Don’t show emotion
 - Don’t discuss personal life
 - Be polite

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY & CULTURE

⁹ <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>

Oppression

- “Oppression is the systematic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that saturate most aspects of life in our society.”¹⁰

Patriarchy

- “Patriarchy is an economic, political, cultural and social system of domination of women and transgender people that privileges non-transgender men. Patriarchy is based on binary definitions of gender (male/female) with strict gender roles. It also relies upon rigidly enforced heterosexuality that places male/straight/non-transgender as superior and women/queer/transgender as inferior. Patriarchy shapes and is shaped by white supremacy, capitalism, and the state. Together, they form interlocking systems of oppression.”¹¹

Woke

- “Woke as a political term of African American origin refers to a perceived awareness of issues concerning social justice and racial justice. It is derived from the African-American Vernacular English expression ‘stay woke’, whose grammatical aspect refers to a continuing awareness of these issues.”¹²

Cancel Culture

- “Cancel culture refers to the popular practice of withdrawing support for (canceling) public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive. *Cancel culture* is generally discussed as being performed on social media in the form of group shaming”¹³
- This is what we are seeing in our country now with the removal of statues of supposed racists, the renaming of the Washington Redskins football team, the threat to destroy Mt. Rushmore, the “retirement” of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben, etc.

BIBLICAL OBJECTIONS TO THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

It is Based on Godless Ideologies

- At the core of the social justice movement are secular and worldly philosophies
 - **Marxism** – “Marxism is a social, political, and economic philosophy named after Karl Marx, which examines the effect of capitalism on labor, productivity, and economic development and argues for a worker revolution to overturn capitalism in favor of communism. Marxism posits that the struggle between social classes, specifically between the bourgeoisie, or capitalists, and the proletariat, or workers, defines economic relations in a capitalist economy and will inevitably lead to revolutionary communism.”¹⁴

¹⁰ <http://www.act4socialjustice.com/social-justice-definitions/>

¹¹ <http://www.act4socialjustice.com/social-justice-definitions/>

¹² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woke>

¹³ <https://www.dictionary.com/e/pop-culture/cancel-culture/>

¹⁴ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marxism.asp>

- Classical Marxism is primarily economic in nature
- **Cultural Marxism/Neo-Marxism** – Cultural Marxism also sees a class struggle (as classical Marxism does); however, rather than economics being the primary determiner of one’s identity (i.e. rich vs. poor), it is race, gender, and class that determines whether one belongs to an oppressor or oppressed group. Majority groups are viewed as privileged or oppressive. Minority groups are viewed as underprivileged and oppressed. Cultural Marxism aims to overthrow majority groups and the structures which keep them in power.
- **Cultural Hegemony** – “In Marxist philosophy, cultural hegemony is the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society — the beliefs and explanations, perceptions, values, and mores — so that the imposed, ruling-class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm.”¹⁵
 - According to proponents of social justice, the ruling cultural hegemony in the US is white, male, heterosexual, cis-gendered, able-bodied
 - These groups are inherently oppressive; those minorities who do not fit into these groups are the oppressed
- **Critical Race Theory** – Critical race theory places all people in one of two camps: oppressor or oppressed, largely based on their ethnicity.
 - Critical race theory is derived from Critical Theory (CT), which originated in the Frankfurt School which was a school of Marxist sociological and philosophical thought associated with the Institute for Social Research in what is today Frankfurt, Germany, in the early 20th century
 - It was a theory that was “critical” of capitalism and whose primary goal was to understand and help overcome the social structures through which people are dominated and oppressed
- **Intersectionality** – “Intersectionality is the theory that attends to the complexity of identity and experience as constructed by multiple, interlocking systems of power (such as racism, classism, sexism...) for the purpose of understanding and shifting those systems of power.”¹⁶
 - Intersectionality says that certain oppressed people are more oppressed than others based on their various identities
 - Thus, black, female, homosexuals would be more greatly oppressed because of the number of “intersections” which contradict the cultural hegemony
- Some within the church have stated that these are merely “analytical tools” to be used alongside biblical Christianity for the purpose of understanding cultural-sociological issues
- But these are more than simply tools that are subservient to biblical Christianity
- They emerge from a secular worldview and are rooted in ideologies that are incompatible with Christianity because they establish human identity in ideas other than being created in the image of God and, for believers, being identified by our relationship in Christ

It Confuses the Mission of the Church

- Again, no one would disagree that individual believers should be compassionate toward oppressed people
- But disagreement abounds when the discussion turns to how the corporate church should engage with these issues

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_hegemony

¹⁶ <http://www.act4socialjustice.com/social-justice-definitions/>

- It is argued by many today that churches must take up the mantle of social justice by making it the corporate business of the church
- It is argued that racial reconciliation must be a formal focus of the church by getting involved corporately in political activism, protests, lobbying for new laws, etc.
- On the one hand, it is appropriate for Christians to do what they can to encourage the making and enforcing of laws which protect oppressed people groups (victims of abortion, racism, sex trafficking, etc.)
- On the other hand, we must not forget the core mission of the church as described in the New Testament:

1) Exalt God

Psalm 95:6 ~ Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

2) Equip the Saints

Ephesians 4:12 ~ for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ

3) Edify One Another

Romans 14:19 ~ So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

4) Evangelize the Lost

Matthew 28:19 ~ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

- These are the primary mandates of the church and the apostles recognized these priorities:

Acts 6:4 ~ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word

- Fighting oppression, abortion, racism, sex trafficking are not unimportant issues but they are secondary
- Adopting the social justice agenda causes the church to lose its focus and leads to mission drift
- Furthermore, because of Christian compassion, it is easy to drift from biblical reasons for alleviating human suffering to cultural reasons
- We may agree with the cultural that human suffering needs to end, but we can easily begin to take up the culture's mantle of fighting oppression rather than staying firmly anchored in biblical reasons
- "Anybody, any group, can put new clothes on a man. Only the gospel can put a new man in clothes. As important as these matters are, we must make sure we keep the main thing the main thing – the gospel of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, the authority of the Word of God, and the call for humble obedience – even in the face of ethnic and cultural differences and problems."¹⁷

It Redefines the Gospel

- Identity politics are antithetical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in that they redefine the sin that needs to be repented of and the means of salvation from that sin
- CRT/I teaches that the oppressors are those whose primary "original sin" is racism

¹⁷ H.B. Charles, "The Biblical Strategy for Racial Unity" in *A Biblical Answer for Racial Unity*, 2017, 24.

- This “sin” is expressed in two different ways:
 - 1) By Nature – oppressors are inherently racist due to whiteness which puts them in a category of privilege over non-white individuals. In other words, to be born white in America is to be automatically complicit in maintaining and promoting the ideology of white supremacy.

Robin DiAngelo (author of [White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism](#)): “The challenge I want to offer my fellow white people is changing the question from ‘if’ to ‘how?’ I want to change the question to, ‘How is racism manifesting in my life?’ None of us can be and none of us are exempt from its forces...As a result of being raised as a white person in this society, I have a racist worldview. I have a deep racist bias. I have developed deep racist patterns. I have investments in the system of racism because it has served me really well.”

Ekemini Uwan: “The reality is that whiteness is rooted in plunder, in theft, in enslavement of Africans, in genocide of Native Americans.”¹⁸

- 2) In Action – the idea of intersectionality assumes that a white heterosexual male is the greatest of sinners, thus making his actions most sinful
- Thus, under the CRT/I rubric, whiteness and the racist actions inherently associated with it are the sins requiring repentance
 - Accordingly, CRT/I teach a separate salvation for the oppressor and oppressed
 - 1) Salvation for the Oppressors – They need salvation from their sin of racism inherent in their whiteness, their white privilege, and the racist actions that spring from such a heart
 - 2) Salvation for the Oppressed – They need salvation-rescue from the sociological ills and oppression which they are victims of
 - As is obvious, “the CRT/I gospel becomes one, not of salvation from the wrath of God and the presence and power of sin, but from the oppression/oppressor categories. Consequently, CRT/I becomes a different gospel than that of the substitutionary atoning work of Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 1:6-9).”¹⁹
 - Furthermore, this is a hopeless gospel because salvation for those in the oppressor category is nearly impossible since no one can work themselves out of their whiteness
 - This gospel provides no substitute by which the stain of whiteness can be permanently cleansed (like what Christ does for believers in the true Gospel by granting them His righteousness and making them new creations in Him)

IF NOT SOCIAL JUSTICE, WHAT IS THE CURE FOR RACIAL TENSIONS?

Believers Who Reject Vengeance Tactics

- We are currently living in a hate culture in which a vengeance movement is gaining steam
- But vengeance is never a proper biblical response to injustices in society

Romans 12:14, 17, 19-21 ~ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone...19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. 20 “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

¹⁸ Quotes taken from <https://thecripple.com/americas-newest-religion/>

¹⁹ <https://thecripple.com/americas-newest-religion/>

- Christians should never take part in riots, looting, and acts of vengeance

A Robust Proclamation of the Gospel Which Destroys the Racial Divide

- Jesus died to save people from every ethnic group
- His death was not specifically for a certain ethnic group nor did it purposefully exclude certain nationalities

Revelation 5:9 ~ And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Revelation 7:9 ~ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes...

- As a result, Christ came to destroy all forms of the sin of racism:

Galatians 3:28 ~ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:13-14 ~ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

Colossians 3:10-11 ~ and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him – 11 a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

- The resulting body of Christ is a “new man”...not Jews made into Gentiles or Gentiles made into Jews, but an entirely new body which transcends any racial barrier

Ephesians 2:15 ~ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

- Those who belong to Christ are not spiritually distinct from one another anymore, but fully equal

Believers Who Live as Salt and Light

- It is not wrong at all for believers to use the rights granted to them to promote morality and decency in the public arena
- In fact, this is a privilege given us in our society...we can vote, work for the making and enacting of laws that protect oppressed people groups, etc.
- But our greatest impact will not come by merely laboring for social change or behavior modification
- We must bring the light of the truth to bear in a world blinded by sin
- We do this by living godly lives and sharing Christ with individuals in our sphere

Matthew 5:13-16 ~ You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

- Being “salt” and “light” is not a reference to political, social, or moral influence
- Rather, it is a direct reference to believers speaking and living the Word of God, the light of Christ

A Willingness to Follow Christ's Example in Suffering

- Those who are oppressed have the greatest opportunity for real Gospel witness when they respond to oppression by following the example given by Christ in His oppression

1 Peter 2:21-23 ~ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

- When oppressed people groups respond with forgiveness, kindness, and love, they become attractive Gospel lights
- It is this same principle which has led to many martyrs for the cause of Christ, martyrs whose Gospel witness has become known throughout the world and has led to the salvation of many

An Anticipation of the Future Hope of Perfect Justice

- We should never expect to set up a utopian society, free from all injustices on this side of eternity
- We can strive for equal justice under the law of the land...we can ask our representatives to uphold the American ideals that have made us one of the most just nations in history
- But we will never have equal outcomes in a fallen society
- Thus, our ultimate hope is found in looking forward to the return of Christ and the establishment of His earthly kingdom
- Then, and only then, will this world know perfect justice

Isaiah 9:7 ~ There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Isaiah 11:3-4 ~ And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

Isaiah 16:5 ~ A throne will even be established in lovingkindness, And a judge will sit on it in faithfulness in the tent of David; Moreover, he will seek justice And be prompt in righteousness.

Jeremiah 23:5 ~ "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; And He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land.

- "To point to the future hope of perfect justice is not a trite way of dismissing current issues. This is what the prophets did without fail, and yet they never minimized their own suffering (Lam 3). To admit that we ourselves cannot accomplish perfect justice by human means is not to excuse or ignore the sins that confront us in this fallen world. Rather, it is to increase our longing for *another* world. The Christian's hope is a Messianic hope, an eschatological hope, a future hope (Rom 8:24-25)."²⁰

²⁰ <https://thecripplegate.com/a-compassionate-counter-cultural-christian-response/>