



Key Issues + Beliefs  
2025

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# Study Guide 1: The Impact of the Gospel

One of the basic theological premises of Redeemer is that the gospel can change *anyone* and *any place*. Part of the driving force behind Redeemer is the conviction that most people have not heard the gospel clearly, whether they have been raised in liberal churches or conservative churches. Many people are on trajectories of reaction to either their conservative or their liberal backgrounds or experiences. **But the gospel is off the continuum altogether.** When people actually hear the gospel, they are surprised and brought up short. There can be neither personal transformation nor social transformation without a grasp of it.

The gospel transforms our hearts and thinking and approaches to *everything*. As you read the following, consider ways that the gospel might transform your ways of thinking through these areas.

## 1. Approach to multiculturalism

- The liberal approach is to relativize all cultures.
- The conservative approach is to idolize some cultures.
- The gospel of grace leads us to be: a) somewhat critical of all cultures, b) morally superior to no individual, c) hopeful about any individual, and d) respectful and courteous to each individual.

## 2. Approach to the poor

- The liberal elite tends to scorn the religion of the poor and see them as helpless victims needing their expertise.
- The conservative elite tends to scorn the poor as failures and weaklings.
- The gospel of grace leads us to be: a) humble, without moral superiority knowing you were saved by grace, b) gracious, remembering your former deserved spiritual poverty, and c) respectful of believing poor Christians as brothers and sisters from whom to learn. The gospel alone can bring “knowledge workers” into a sense of humble respect for and solidarity with the poor.

## 3. Approach to difficult emotions

- The moralizing say, “You are breaking the rules—repent.”
- The psychologizing say, “You just need to love and accept yourself.”
- The gospel leads us to say: “Something in my life has become more important than God, a pseudo-savior, a form of works-righteousness.” The gospel leads us to repentance, but not to merely setting our will against superficialities.

## 4. Approach to sex

- The moralist is afraid of or indifferent to physical pleasure and wholeness.
- The hedonist makes sex a central identity marker and ultimately an idol.
- The gospel leads us to see that God has invented both body and soul and so will redeem both body and soul. Thus, the gospel leads us to enjoy the physical pleasures he created, yet gives us boundaries for how those pleasures ought to be experienced.

## 5. Approach to love and relationships

- Moralism makes relationships into a blame game and a never-ending need to earn our love; often this creates co-dependency, a form of self-salvation through neediness.
- Liberalism reduces love to a negotiated partnership for mutual benefit.
- The gospel leads us to sacrifice and commit, but not out of a need to convince ourselves we are acceptable. So we can love the person enough to confront, yet stay with the person when it does not benefit us.

## 6. Approach to suffering

- Moralism takes the *Job's friends* approach, laying guilt on yourself: "I must be bad to be suffering."
- Liberalism lays the fault at God's doorstep, claiming Him to be either unjust or impotent.
- The gospel shows us that God redeemed us *through* suffering. He suffered not that we might *not* suffer, but that in our suffering we could become like Him.

## 7. Approach to self-control

- Moralists tell us to control our passions out of fear of punishment. This is a volition-based approach.
- Liberalism tells us to express ourselves and find out what is right for us. This is an emotion-based approach.
- The gospel tells us that the free, cannot-be-lost grace of God teaches us to say no to our passions (Titus 2:13) if we listen to it. This is a whole-person based approach, starting with the truth descending into the heart.

## 8. Approach to ministry in the world

- Legalism tends to place all the emphasis on the individual human soul. Legalistic religion will insist on converting others to their faith and church, but will ignore social needs of the broader community.
- On the other hand, liberalism will tend to emphasize only amelioration of social conditions and minimize the need for repentance and personal conversion.
- The gospel leads to love which in turn moves us to give our neighbor whatever is needed—conversion or a cup of cold water, evangelism and social concern.

## 9. Approach to worship

- Moralism leads to a dour and somber worship which may be long on dignity but short on joy.
- A shallow understanding of acceptance without a sense of God's holiness can lead to frothy or casual worship. (A sense of neither God's love nor His holiness leads to a worship service that feels like a committee meeting.)
- But the gospel leads us to see that God is both transcendent yet immanent. His immanence makes His transcendence comforting, while His transcendence makes His immanence amazing. The gospel leads to both awe and intimacy in worship, for the Holy One is now our Father.

**Summary**

All problems, personal or social, come from a failure to use the gospel in a radical way. All pathologies in the church and all its ineffectiveness comes from a failure to use the gospel in a radical way.

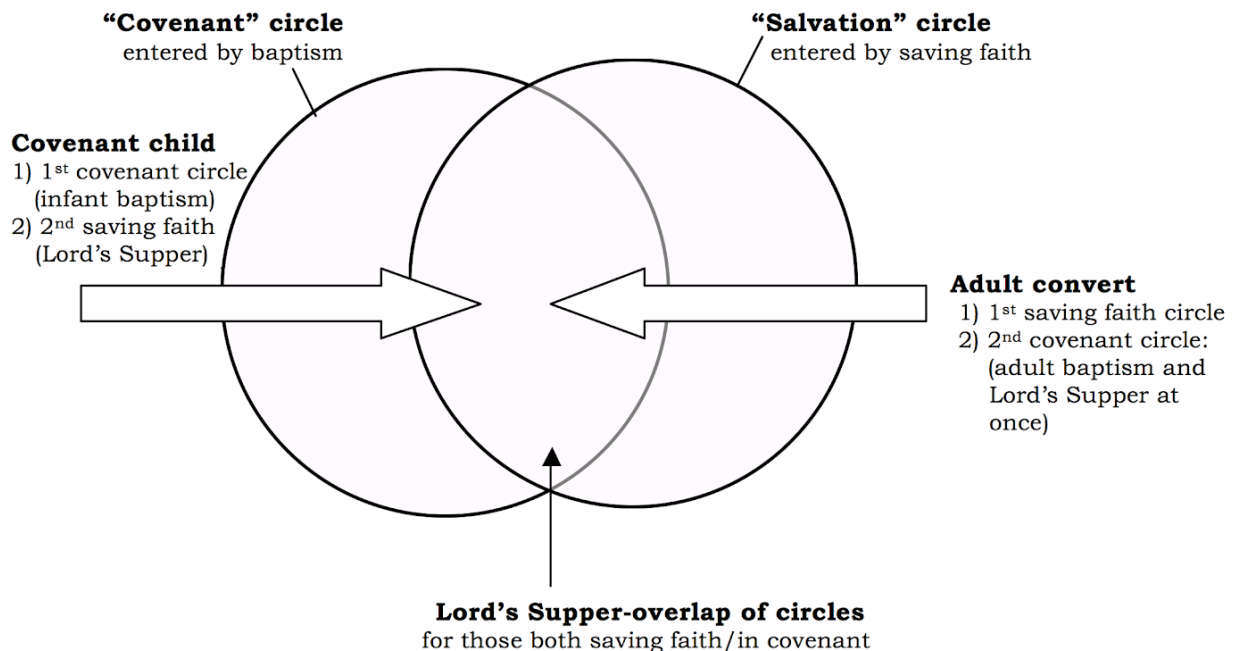
We believe that if the gospel is expounded and applied in its fullness in any church, that church will look very unique. People will find both moral conviction yet compassion and flexibility. For example, gays are used to being bashed and hated or completely accepted. They never see anything else. The cultural elites of either liberal or conservative sides are alike in their unwillingness to befriend, or live with, or respect or worship with, the poor. They are alike in separating themselves increasingly from the rest of society.

Avoiding the excesses of the dispensationalist, charismatic, or mainline liberal churches (who all lose the balance of the gospel truth in different ways), a gospel-centered church will break stereotypes and shine brightly in the city.

# Study Guide 2: God's Covenant - Baptism and Infant Baptism

## The Pathways of Baptism

One of the easiest ways to understand the Reformed understanding of baptism is to think of two overlapping circles. In the "Covenant" circle are those who are bound by public vow to worship and live with the people of God, formed and shaped by his Word, held accountable by the whole community to do so. In the "Salvation" circle are those who have exercised saving faith that therefore gives evidence of regeneration. Notice that it is quite possible for someone to be in one circle or the other—but the goal is for people to be in both, in the overlap. In the Presbyterian ecclesiology, there are two paths *in* to the overlap:



- Children of believers are to be placed in the covenant. They do not take their vows themselves, but their parents take their vows for them. At this point they enter the Covenant circle. They are then raised up into the people of God—worshiping, obeying, being responsible and accountable to the whole body. Nonetheless, we believe (at least in the British tradition—see below) that many of our children may be doing all this without yet understanding the gospel and exercising saving faith. At some point (either as individuals or through a communicants class) the child exercises saving faith and is admitted to the Lord's Supper. This is the sign that they have entered into the overlap of the two circles.
- Adults enter from the other side. They exercise saving faith and then enter the covenant. When they are baptized as adults they are admitted to the Lord's Supper at the same moment and enter the 'overlap.'

The practical reality in many parts of the U.S. is that this nice neat process is interrupted. Many people baptized as infants in various churches do not go on to saving faith in their childhood or youth and most or all sense of being Christian is lost. When they begin to return to church they will often take the Lord's Supper (as adult, baptized persons) but when they exercise saving faith there is now no "rite of passage." Their only action is to come forward and take membership vows with people transferring from other churches. This doesn't seem to be a sufficient worshipping-community response to something so momentous.

- The practical difference between Baptists and Presbyterians is depicted graphically on the illustration above. Presbyterians see baptism as the sign of entering the left Covenant circle and the Lord's Supper as the sign of entering the right Salvation circle. Baptists connect baptism strictly to the Salvation circle. Only saved people can be baptized. Technically, the Baptists do not believe in overlapping circles at all, and should treat their children as unbelievers until they profess faith. However, that is virtually impossible. You must require your children to pray, to obey the Ten Commandments—you require your child to live like a Christian in a way you would never require other non-Christians to live. Ironically, Baptists have instituted "dedication" rituals for their new babies that further acknowledges this reality. (Some Presbyterians sarcastically call these "dry baptisms"!) In other words, there is an unavoidable sense of *covenant* that is followed even by those churches that don't have the theology that makes room for it.

A helpful story-analogy to teach this:

- My great-grandmother's parents (Tim Keller speaking) were from Sicily, living in Wilmington, Delaware. When she was only about 11 or 12 they betrothed her to my grandfather (who was then in his 20s.) When she was 17 they married.
- Most Americans find this lack of self-determination horrible, but that is largely because of the influence of European movements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism on us. We believe in coming in to marriage first by falling in love and secondly by making a legal commitment. But my grandmother came in through the 'other direction'—first by being betrothed and committed, and later by falling in love. Many cultures have been doing it that way for centuries. My grandmother used to say that it worked just fine for her. Her parents raised her to think well of her future husband. They would tell her how great he was and how great it would be to be married to him. Of course, legally she could have run off and married someone else—so her own personal choice was involved. It was not, however, given primacy. The choice of the family and the community had pride of place in the whole process.
- Covenant children are, then, "betrothed" to Jesus. They are raised by their parents being shown how beautiful and great Jesus is. They are urged to give themselves to him personally. And then they do. That's how it is supposed to work.

### Covenant Children

As hinted, there is some diversity of practice among Reformed churches in how they regard the spiritual status of covenant children.

- In general, the British Reformed churches have been more influenced by revivalism and pietism and they put more emphasis on the need for covenant children to exercise saving faith. They would not treat their children as unbelievers nor simply as believers. (The traditional, inelegant term is 'non-communing members.')
- They require them to live and walk in obedience to Christ but urge them to exercise saving faith and admit them to the Lord's Supper only when they see it.

Even after a communicant's class (usually in these churches it is done later, about age 14) if there is no evidence of saving faith, the child might not be admitted to the Lord's Table.

- The Continental Reformed churches, e.g. Dutch and German, often do not do so. They have a view that is sometimes called 'presumptive' regeneration. That is, they assume baptized children are regenerated and will express that regeneration in stages as they age. In this approach, children are simply given instruction at a particular age (usually in these churches the age is younger, like age 9-10) and admitted to the Lord's Table. In this view we should at no point call covenant children to "give their lives to Christ"—they have already been given to Christ and should only be called to repentance and faith like an unbeliever if they have rejected the covenant and left the faith.
- This difference in approach raises the issue of how *ecclesial* we are in our ministry. The criticism of the former approach is that it is individualistic—it undermines the covenantal, communal nature of the church. The criticism of the latter approach is that it makes the sacraments de facto salvific and undermines the centrality of the gospel of grace. It is worth discussing with elders so your own ministry practice is thought-out and consistent with your beliefs!

### Qualifications for Baptism

#### *For infant baptism*

- At least one parent in the covenant—a communing church member.
- The parent must be willing to vow to raise the child in the covenant—to worship with God's people and obey God's laws.

#### *For adult baptism*

- A credible profession of saving faith.
- The person must be willing to vow to live with and for the people of God and to be held accountable to do so.

### Pastoral Issues

Must the parent be a member of your church to baptize him/her? Couldn't parents fly over to have a favorite minister do the baptismal service?

- Baptism isn't *magic*. The grace attached to it is because it grafts a child into a particular covenant community. Now there is no reason why the child, parents, and minister have to be geographically located where the church community is. (It is always best to have the receiving community there to witness the vows, but it is not a requirement.) What is a requirement is that the parents know they are baptizing their child into a church and they know what church that is and the church knows the child has been baptized into it!

What about re-baptism? If a person was baptized as an infant and has recently come to saving faith, can't he or she now be baptized as an adult if he or she asks? This is a thorny and complex subject. Again, the minister and the elders should discuss it and come to a position and stick with it.

- Most Christian churches have read Ephesians 4—*one baptism*—as meaning that one baptism is all any individual is to receive. There is technically, then, no such thing as re-baptism. We may decide (for example) that a man's Mormon baptism isn't a valid Christian baptism and therefore baptize him. But that wouldn't be a re-baptism.
  - o One of the sub-issues is whether we accept Roman Catholic baptism as a valid baptism. We feel pretty strongly that you must treat Roman Catholic baptism as valid. Some refuse to accept Catholic baptism because of its distorted doctrines about the gospel. But if you



preclude that church why not the mainline churches? And of course some mainline churches are orthodox and some are not—so how will you ever know if the person's infant baptism is valid?

- o Another sub-issue has to do with the parents' faith. What if a person says, "My parents presented me for baptism but they weren't Christians!" But how will you as the officiating minister know that?
- o Another sub-issue has to do with the nature of infant baptism. Many say, "You have to baptize me now—I was only baptized as an infant and it wasn't my choice then." But as we have shown above, this is basically a misunderstanding of the meaning of baptism. Baptism is not merely a dramatization of your individual experience, but it is a *sign of the covenant*. If you were brought into a church and raised up with some knowledge of the Bible and Christianity (however incomplete) and now you have come to faith—then your baptism "worked."
- o Another sub-issue has to do with the baptized person's consciousness. There are many who were baptized as adults (though usually as very young ones!) who often complain that they were not really Christians then. A person might say, "I was baptized in a Baptist church at age 8, but I didn't understand the gospel! Now I do—so baptize me," but what if you do so and the person comes back to you 10 years later saying the same thing? Where will it end?
- If a baptism was done with water and in the name of the Triune God, it is a valid baptism. Yes, there may be extreme cases or exceptions, but the Bible doesn't give us an explicit set of Biblical commands and rules on who and how to baptize, so we have freedom. But in general, we should accept Trinitarian water baptism as valid and not continually re-baptize people.
  - o This is a way to show your respect for the rest of the Body of Christ. (If you baptize people who were baptized in some other part of the church you are being sectarian and acting as if no part of the church is true but yours.)
  - o This is a way to be more ecclesial and give less away to the voluntaristic, individualistic spirit of the age.

## Baptism ... So, What Exactly Is It?

### *Sacrament*

Baptism is one of two New Testament sacraments (the other being the Lord's Supper). **A sacrament is both a sign and a seal of the covenant.** Now a sign is something that makes something else known and a seal is something that authenticates something else. Thus baptism both makes something *known*, and it *authenticates* something else. The covenant is what baptism is a sign and seal of. A covenant is basically a relationship under certain sanctions—it is the way the Bible expresses the relationship God has initiated with His people. In the covenant, God pledges to be our God, and He requires us to obey His commands. We can best understand the concept of the covenant if we distinguish between its unconditional and conditional aspects.

With regard to merit, the covenant of God is unconditional. It is totally of God's free grace that we are made partakers of the covenant, that we are brought into relationship with Him. Yet this relationship requires our obedience in order for us to be blessed in it. This is the conditional aspect of the covenant, our obedience is the instrument that God uses to bless His people.

### *Old Testament Background*

In the Old Testament we see that God relates to His people in terms of this covenant. In Genesis 17:7-8, God establishes a covenant with Abraham and his descendants and gives a sign of this covenant to Abraham in the form of circumcision. In Romans 4:11, we find that the seal of *this* covenant made with Abraham is also circumcision. So we see that clearly God's covenant with His people in the Old Testament has both a sign and a seal which is circumcision. And we must notice that this sign and seal of the covenant was to be given to both believers and their children.

In fact, in Exodus 4:24-26, we find out how serious God is about this covenant sign and seal being given to believers' children. The Lord almost kills Moses for failing to apply circumcision to his children! It's often difficult for Christians to understand how seriously God takes His covenant because we are so unfamiliar with the concept of the covenant (and the Old Testament in general.) But let us at least understand one key principle. In the Old Testament, God's relationship with His people is expressed in terms of the covenant and the sign and seal of the covenant is circumcision.

### *New Testament Usage*

In the New Testament we find that Christians are regarded as the true circumcision (Philippians 3:3) because we are partakers of the same covenant as Old Testament believers (and their descendants). But in the New Testament, the sign and seal is different. *Now baptism takes the place of circumcision.* Yet both of them signify the same thing, union with Christ (Colossians 2:11-12).

Baptism signifies union with Christ. This is what it means to be baptized into His name (Matthew 28:19, Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:27, 1 Corinthians 12:13). There are a number of parallels between circumcision and baptism. For example, both are administered only once, and both are a picture of our passiveness in grace (they are both done *to us*, not *by us*). However, there is one huge difference: baptism is for both males and females. Thus we see an expansion of the administration of the sign of the covenant in the New Testament. Those who would restrict the New Testament covenant sign (baptism) to the descendants of believers (as was done in the Old Testament) must account for why when everything else seems to be expanded, we are to restrict who receives the sign of the covenant in the New Testament.

## **Baptism ... What It Is Not**

- A. Baptism in no way saves a person. Though in different ways, some groups like the Lutherans, Catholics, and the Church of Christ teach a type of baptismal regeneration where baptism can save a person (though interestingly all of these groups believe that this salvation can be lost!) Though baptism is commanded (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:38), it does not save us. Only Christ can save us. Baptism does not cause or guarantee saving grace. It is part of Christian obedience, not the means by which we are saved.
- B. Baptism is also not merely an outward sign of an inward change. This is the typical Baptist view. Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant, and thus *it signifies what God does, not what we've done.* We are baptized, we don't do anything in the act of baptism. Baptism signifies that, from our perspective, the person is a recipient of the covenant relationship with God, either because the person has professed faith in Christ or one or both parents have professed faith. Of course,

the profession of faith may not be genuine, and in the case of an infant he or she may prove to be an apostate, but we baptize in the judgment of charity, not because we can make infallible judgments about one's spiritual state. While we believe that professed Christians should be baptized, we believe that God's covenant has always been made with families and not just with individuals. In our extremely individualistic culture, this is a difficult concept for many people to grasp.

## Who Should Be Baptized?

Those who are judged to be partakers of the covenant. This includes:

1. Those who profess faith in Christ
2. The children of one or two believing parents.

Why children? Because God commanded the sign and seal of the covenant to be applied to the children of believers (Genesis 17) and this command has not been revoked in the New Testament. The burden of proof is on those who would deny the covenant sign to children. The New Testament gives no evidence that there is such a restriction. On Pentecost, Peter told his audience of Jews (who had been applying the covenant sign to their children for 6,000 years) that the promise was for them and their children (Acts 2:39). It strains credulity to try to avoid the implication that the baptism of that day would have also been applied to the children of these believers. If the covenant sign was now to be kept from the children of believers (partakers of the covenant) we should expect some sort of explanation. We search the New Testament in vain for such an explanation. It seems clear that God has not changed His program of giving the covenant sign and seal to believers and their children.

## Baptism ... Supporting Evidence

While the main argument is derived from the continuity of the covenant between the Old Testament and the New Testament, there is some supporting evidence for the contention that baptizing infants is the scriptural position.

- **1 Corinthians 7:14:** This passage is a little difficult to understand fully—for instance, what is meant by sanctified—but one thing is clear; Paul takes for granted that the children of one or more believing parents are in a special class, even calling them holy! What's more, Paul assumes that the Corinthians agree with him in this view. While this passage doesn't prove infant baptism, it is best accounted for by the position taken by this study guide.
- **Luke 18:15, cf. Matthew 19:14:** In this passage Jesus says that infants are included in the kingdom. One can legitimately ask, "Then shouldn't they be given the sign (which in the New Testament is baptism)?"
- **Household Baptisms:** While it is not stated in any of the household baptisms mentioned in the New Testament that infants are included, the implication is that children would make up a household. This is an argument from silence, but the burden of proof is on those who would *exclude* children from a household baptism, especially when we see the basic continuity of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

- **Church History:** While this cannot be considered on the same level as scripture, the testimony from church history is helpful in attempting to ascertain the practice of the apostles.
  - Origen was born in 180 AD and was baptized as an infant. He claims that the practice was handed down from the apostles. Now remember he was born only 90 years after John's death, had a great memory, and was very well-read (having one of the greatest libraries of his day.) Yet, he doesn't know of any change in the apostolic practice, which he claims was to baptize infants.
  - There is no record of any debate in the early church with regard to this foundational issue. Tertullian in the early third century is the first to attack the practice of infant baptism that we know of. However he does this not because he doesn't think infant baptism is apostolic but because he thinks it's better to be baptized on your deathbed.
  - Even Pelagius (early fifth century) says he's never heard of anyone so heretical as to deny infant baptism—he's horrified by Augustine's charge that his views will lead to denying infant baptism!
  - Basically, we see the universal practice of infant baptism in the early church. It is very difficult to conceive of this being the case if it was not the apostle's practice. How else did something so important develop in such a short amount of time with no record of controversy about it? If some charismatic individual was able to change the practice of the whole church, and wipe out the memory of believer's-only baptism, why do we have no record of that fact? Again, the burden of proof must be upon those who would deny that infant baptism was the apostolic practice. It is simply not true to claim that this was a practice introduced by the Roman Catholic Church.

## Practical Implications

- A. Take advantage of the blessing available for you and your children. If you haven't been baptized and you're a Christian, then do it. And then avail yourself of the privilege you have to apply the covenant sign to your children, too.
- B. Realize that the covenant calls you to live a life worthy of the gospel. When you witness a baptism in church, use it as a time to recommit yourself in your heart to live a life pleasing to God by His grace. When you vow to help the child being baptized grow in the faith, take it seriously! Do what you can to help—don't just make an empty pledge.
- C. See baptism as God's grace pictured in a visible, non-verbal form. Thank Him for it, and let it overwhelm you with security—remember, it is a seal not just a sign—and joy.

## Additional Resources

- Orthodox Presbyterian Church, "Why Infant Baptism?":
  - <https://opc.org/cce/tracts/WhyInfantBaptism.html>
- *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Chapters 25-26)
- John Murray, *Christian Baptism*
- Francis Schaeffer, "Baptism"
- Robert Booth, *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism*
- Gregg Strawbridge, *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*

# Study Guide 3: Membership Promises Explained

Use this study guide as a way to think more deeply about each vow, and let it help you prepare for your membership interview.

- 1. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure and without hope except through his sovereign mercy?** This vow is an acknowledgement of my sin and the consequences of that sin being that I am under God's just judgment. It is a vow that recognizes I am in need for salvation, which comes solely by God's mercy.
  - Is important for a person to see themselves as one "justly deserving God's displeasure"? Why or why not? What difference does it make to view oneself as such?
- 2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?** As a result of my need for salvation, this vow acknowledges my commitment and belief that this salvation is found only by trusting in the work of Jesus's his life, death, and resurrection.
  - What do you understand as the significance of the word "alone" to be in the phrase "do you receive and rest upon him alone"? Why to the best of your understanding would that be important to include in one's understanding of salvation?
  - The above question also speaks of "resting" on Jesus Christ. Is that an appropriate way of describing the way in which we are to trust in Christ for our salvation? On what basis would you personally see yourself belonging to Christ? When did Jesus become the person that you rest upon for your salvation?
- 3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?** As one who has been redeemed by Christ, this vow acknowledges that I am now to live as a child of God. I commit to pursuing holiness and the ongoing growth in the fruit of the Spirit in my life. We live a life of obedience not to merit God's favor, but rather live a obediently out of God's favor.
  - What is *not* important to us in terms of your membership is whether you are struggling with a particular sin or sins (though we certainly want to be of help if you are since all of us are involved in struggle from time to time and need help). What is important is whether you either: 1) do not have biblical convictions about what God expects from his people in terms of obedience and disobedience or, 2) though having biblical convictions about which sorts of behavior God disapproves, you have given into those areas and ceased fighting against them. With that in mind, are there presently any areas of your life where you are accommodating sin and not fighting against it?
  - Certain issues of our day require critical biblical thinking about what is morally valid for a Christian: issues of race, of gender roles, of economic power, of compassion to the poor, of oppression, about medical and technological innovation, just to name a few. Many of these issues, for example abortion, have become politically charged. While Redeemer is intentionally not political, we urge all Christians to come to *biblically* based (as opposed to culturally traditional) convictions. Members do not have to possess an answer for everything, but they should be willing

to let scripture challenge and change previously held positions. Are you willing to work with others in the Church to reach biblical answers to moral issues?

- One of the phrases used in this promise is “in humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit”, which implies use of the means of grace. These include church attendance and participation in the sacraments, and also regular Bible reading and prayer, and also fellowship. What sort of habits are you in regarding your personal walk with God? If none, what are the chief obstacles you face in establishing private devotions as a regular practice? Are you presently involved in a home group or do you have plans to get involved in one? If not, where are you getting your interaction with other believers?
- In the culture in which we live, (particularly New York City!) we have found that there is a lot of confusion about what it means to live a sexually pure life. Therefore we think it is important to be “up front”, to let people know what we understand the Scriptures teach with regards to this. (We believe that sex is a gift from God by which we declare to a spouse that we belong and are committed completely and exclusively to them. On that basis we believe that sex outside marriage is wrong and that living with someone with whom you are romantically involved and yet to whom you are not married is also wrong). Can you give your assent to those beliefs? (We also believe that practicing a homosexual lifestyle is not an option for a Christian). Can you subscribe to that belief as well?
- For married couples: What is your understanding of what the Bible teaches concerning the permanence of marriage and when divorce is permissible? (We believe that the covenant made in marriage is permanent and that divorce is permissible only after desertion or a fundamental breaking of that covenant by one partner by means of adultery). Do you have convictions other than that?

4. **Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?** As church members, we are more than Sunday morning attendees, but rather active supporters of the work and mission of the church. This vow is a promise to support the work of the church financially, through my time, and by living out the convictions of the church to care for it’s community, both inside and outside of the church.

- What do you understand to be the Christian's biblical responsibility regarding the use of his or her wealth? Do you view the tithe as the Christian standard of giving to God's work?
- What are some ways you are either already involved or areas which you would like to be involved in the ministry of Redeemer? Are there other areas of service with which you are involved outside of the church?

5. **Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?** This vow is a commitment to submitting to the spiritual authority and polity of the church. In doing so, I recognize their particular role of oversight of and care for my life. Further, I commit to work toward the purity and peace of the church, by striving for unity amongst God’s people.

- What do you understand yourself to be doing when you make this promise? What is your understanding of church discipline and biblical conflict resolution? Are you willing to compassionately confront another Christian in order to help: be reconciled in a dispute or be corrected in a particular sin pattern?

## Study Guide 4: Sexuality and the Church

In New York City, individuals take it as a complete given that normal people will have sex if they are in a romantic relationship, or simply desire to do so. Even those who consider themselves “conservative” or “traditional” simply mean that they do not sleep with someone until later in the relationship. The Christian ethic of *abstinence-outside-marriage* is not even on the periphery mental maps. It is considered at best laughably unrealistic, and at worst pathological, a psychological “hang up” and abnormality. Christians that profess the Biblical sex ethic can expect to be met with incredulity, sarcasm, or hostility. Inside a budding relationship, that can be extremely painful.

Basically, the “mainstream” view goes like this: “Adultery is usually wrong (because it hurts the one you made a promise to), but there's nothing wrong with sex between consenting adults.”

### What is the Biblical view of sex?

Sex between persons is an analogy of the joyous self-giving and pleasure of love within the very life of the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who live in a relationship of glorious devotion to each other, pouring love and joy into one another’s “bosom” continually (John 1:18; 17:5, 21, 24-25). Sex between a man and a woman points to the love between the Father and the Son as well as that between Christ and the believer (1 Corinthians 11:3).

In the life of God, intimacy and commitment go together. God wants to give himself to us in intimacy, but that cannot happen outside of a relationship of exclusive commitment to him. Sex outside marriage is a contradiction of this whole principle. Sex outside marriage trains you to seek intimacy without commitment, where you want part of the person, but not the whole person. It says: “I want intimacy but I want to stay in control of my life.”

#### **The Bible everywhere assumes that sex outside of marriage is wrong.**

Perhaps the most illuminating passage about sex is Paul’s case-study with a prostitute in 1 Corinthians 6:17: “Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’”

1. Clearly “one flesh” must mean something different here than mere physical insertion, or Paul would be reciting a mere tautology, “Don’t you know that when you have physical union with a prostitute you are having physical union with a prostitute?” So what does it mean?
2. “Flesh” in the Bible can be a figure of speech (synecdoche), in which a part represents the whole, e.g. “head counting” doesn’t mean counting heads but counting people. When God says, “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh,” he does not mean he is pouring it out only on our bodies, but he means “on all kinds of persons.” The possibility of becoming “one flesh” is, then, a remarkable claim. One commentator notes, “One flesh ... refers to the personal union of man and woman at all levels of their lives.” To become one flesh means to become one new person—a new human unit.

3. Paul decries the monstrosity of physical one-ness without all the other kind of one-ness that every sex act should mirror. Another commentator writes, “Paul ... here displays a psychological insight into human sexuality which is altogether exceptional by first-century standards ... he insists that it is an act which ... engages and expresses the whole personality in such a way as to constitute a unique mode of self-disclosure and self-commitment.”

In short, sex with a prostitute is wrong because every sex act is supposed to reflect an absolute and complete covenant unity. There must be no physical union unless there is also every other kind—a legal, economic, personal, emotional, and spiritual union. There must not be one unity without all the rest. C.S. Lewis likened sex without marriage to tasting without swallowing and digesting.

### **Why no sex outside of marriage?**

Christians believe God created sex as a way for one person to say to another. “I belong completely and exclusively to you in every—socially, spiritually, emotionally, legally.” To be physically naked with someone, without making yourself legally, emotionally, socially naked (by marrying him/her) is inconsistent, selfish, incongruous, and unjust. It is like saying. “I want you but I don’t want to entrust myself to you! I still want to make decisions unilaterally, own my own possessions all to myself, and keep complete control over my own life.” In the long run, Christians believe this creates a more unjust world.

Sexual integrity means you don’t do something with your body you aren’t courageous enough to do with your whole life. Sex was invented as a way to facilitate and enjoy whole life entrustment. If you use it instead only to satisfy yourself instead of to give yourself, you do damage to your ability to do whole life commitment.

Sex is not a consumer good. It’s a way of self-donation. It is not primarily a way that an individual gets fulfillment from another individual, but rather it is a way to help people give themselves to one another wholly in marriage and to create a new life-giving community, a family. It’s a glue that creates a relationship that is long-lasting.

### **“Sex is a private matter. It’s no one’s business but mine.”**

This is not true in general. How you use sex has an enormous impact on society and others. It shapes how you see others, what is good in the world, and the social contracts humans have with one another. As a Christian, your character and witness is a very public matter because your actions always affect others. If you are a Christian, God expects you to witness to the reality of the kingdom. You are contradicting the way God gave himself to you in Christ (unconditionally) and the way he calls you to give himself to him (unconditionally). God does not offer or ask for intimacy without complete whole life commitment and the surrender of your independence.

Can you imagine him giving his love to us if we do not first give ourselves permanently and exclusively to him, as he has given himself totally and exclusively and permanently to us? If you demand intimacy yet keep control of your life, you are a living contradiction of both the way God relates to you and the way we are to relate to each other in the Christian community.



## Christianity & the LGBTQA+ Community

When Redeemer began over 30 years ago, the leadership never worried about how the LGBTQ+ community should be treated. The answer was simply: *just like everyone else*. Historically, Redeemer records reveal that of the first 200 people interviewed for membership, 20% of the men volunteered that they had same sex attraction. They said they were gay (meaning they were attracted to other men), but were converted and celibate.

Many of Redeemer's first ushers were gay. The first children's Sunday School teachers were celibate gay men. One of these children's church leaders died suddenly of AIDS-related pneumonia, and Redeemer had a very moving memorial service for him. The presence of gay people in Redeemer's congregation was routine and unremarkable. They were actively involved in most of the aspects of the early days of Redeemer, and not treated any differently than any other believer or non-believer. One time a man asked after meeting up with church leadership a number of times, "Isn't anyone going to ask me about my homosexuality?" The reply was, "Well, we can talk about it if you want to, but, really, unless Jesus is who he said he was and he rose from the dead, why would you care about what we think about your sex life?"

That about sums up the philosophy at Redeemer East Harlem. People's idols and alternate identities come in many different shapes and sizes, but they all need to hear about, believe in, and trust Jesus for their salvation. Until then, why should they care about what the Bible says about their behavior?

### Diving Deeper

1. **Escaping cultural captivity.** Our culture's view of LGBTQ+ issues depends on a particular doctrine of how identity is formed. We are told we must discover our deepest desires and then express them in order to become our authentic selves. But the reality is that we have contradictory impulses in our heart and we read our feelings through a cultural grid to determine the viability of these feelings. Everyone needs some standard grid to help us determine which ones should be cultivated and which ones should not. Ancient people and modern people alike let their cultures set the standards, and therefore we all get an identity as society tells us. Christianity says don't let tribe or culture control you and give you your valuation. Let the Scriptures, given by God, give you the moral grid to understand your heart. And let his love and grace, through Jesus Christ, give you your deepest validation and identity.
2. **Keeping first things first.** Some say, "I can't be a Christian because I don't agree with the offensive things that the Bible says about homosexuality." But this is the wrong order in which to take the teachings of Christianity. Are you saying that, because you disagree with the biblical teaching on sex, that Jesus couldn't have been raised from the dead? Christianity stands or falls on whether Jesus is the Son of God, risen from the dead. If he is not, who cares what the Bible says? If he is, then there's a lot in the Bible to deal with. You must come to grips with the evidence for Christianity rather than saying, "I don't want it to be true." In other words, deal with the claims of Christianity first, then we can look at the ethics and values that come out of it.
3. **Loving my neighbor—including my LGBTQ+ neighbor.** Christians believe they are saved by grace, not through their moral superiority, and therefore self-righteousness and verbal abusiveness (or worse) is not only absolutely inexcusable, but it also contradicts Christianity's core beliefs. Professing Christians who have been harsh to the LGBTQ+ community have been

so not because they have been too fervent in their beliefs but because they have been untrue to a faith based on man dying for his opponents.

- Christians are called to love their neighbors. If your New York City neighbors, for example, are Hindu, you and they will find you have very different beliefs about God, human nature and purpose, and many other things. On the one hand this means of course that you cannot be a member of a Hindu temple and they cannot be members of your church, because neither of you hold the required beliefs necessary to be in those communities. But Christians are called to love, care for, and work together with their Hindu neighbors for the betterment of the city and to make it a good place for all to live regardless of belief. That is the clear meaning of, for example, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 10:35).

4. **Hearing all voices—a genuine pluralism.** Societies struggle mightily to be genuinely pluralistic, and that goes for America too, despite lip service to the term. Those who have held the reins of cultural power—great academic centers, powerful companies and leaders in business, the media, etc.—have always excluded and silenced unpopular voices and minority views as not simply mistaken or wrong but despicable and beyond the pale.

- People with social power seek to promote their viewpoint as something more than a belief. They find ways to give their beliefs the appearance of being incontrovertible fact. Critical theorist called this “mystification,” a word that means to take a human, contestable opinion and make it mystical, inevitable, a larger than life reality that cannot be questioned.
- For example, a typical move in this common form of “mystification” is to say “we should tolerate everything but intolerance (or bigotry).” But every normal definition of tolerance and bigotry (see any dictionary) is to have a fair, respectful attitude toward those whose views are different than yours. That means the speaker is committing intolerance him or herself by excluding and silencing—rather than respecting—those whose views are different than theirs.
- There will not be a truly open and free society unless everyone can be open about their deepest faith beliefs—be open about who they are, yet in a way that is respectful of others. Gay people should be free to be publicly open about their identity and treated with courtesy and respect. Christians should be free and treated in the same way, because Christians’ beliefs in the gospel and the Bible are the basis for their deepest identity. We are “people of the book.”

5. **Practicing gender diversity—Biblical teaching and vision.** The vast majority of all people who have read the Bible—both those who disagree with its teaching and those who accept it—believe that the Bible clearly forbids homosexual activity, or other non-heterosexual activity not rooted in a marriage between one man and one woman. Only recently, have there been attempts to say the Bible is either silent or does not forbid such activity. This is not just the consensus of ordinary Bible readers, but also by the great majority of historical scholars, both secular and religious.

- The Bible begins (Genesis 1-2) with a heterosexual marriage, with a husband and wife, the unifying of different but complementary beings. The Bible everywhere celebrates sexual difference in marriage—it lifts up and celebrates heterosexual marriage. Even the gospel—our salvation, the reconciliation of two radically different being, God and humanity—is depicted as a heterosexual marriage. In fact the final chapters of the Bible end with that image (Revelation 21-22).
- Every place the Bible mentions homosexuality it is negative or forbids it. It forbids it in both the Old Testament and New Testament.
- Despite the claim that Jesus never spoke about homosexuality, when he forbids “*porneia*” in Matthew 5 and 19, the word (which means “sexual immorality”) was defined by Jews as all the prohibitions of Leviticus 18. So when Jesus forbids sexual immorality, as a first-century Jew, he was certainly prohibiting homosexuality, too.
- The Bible forbids homosexual activity not out of animus toward gay people, but because it falls short of the high vision of the Bible for gendered sexuality. In the biblical understanding, male and female each have unique beauties and strengths to contribute to human life—one gender cannot replace the contributions of the other. The Bible, then, sees sex as the uniting of these strengths and beauties into “one flesh” similar to the union we have in Christ.

Arguably, we have never had a genuinely pluralistic society—one in which all viewpoints are engaged respectfully and minority voices are not marginalized and defamed. In a pluralistic society, people of deeply different beliefs should be free to express who they are and practice what they believe. The requirement for being admitted to the public conversation is not to share the viewpoint of the culturally dominant and powerful—that has been the requirement up until now. Rather, the only requirement should be this: If they treat others with respect they will be treated with that same respect.

If you accept Christian beliefs about sex, happiness, identity, and freedom, then there is an “alternative script” for identity formation. Same-sex attraction, transgender identity, and the like are just a few of many things in human life that is “not the way things are supposed to be.” All human hearts are disordered in such a way that we have strong desires that we cannot fulfill at all or that cannot be fulfilled in alignment with God’s design of our nature. No experience or personal attribute has to be the central defining element of your identity. You decide, based on a set of faith beliefs of one kind or another, what to accept and prioritize as the center of your identity.

We must be champions of all people having a right to their place in our culture, without aggressiveness, compromise, or retreat from the Gospel and the scripture. Christians who silence or oppress the LGBTQ community must be held accountable.

**Above all, we must ramp up our commitment to and involvement in warm, nurturing friendships between brothers and sisters, building up the body of Christ at its deepest level, that of the love between those who have been adopted into God’s family.**

If individuals say, “This is simply bigotry. It’s wrong to show you respect or make space for you. The only thing to not tolerate is intolerance” what is the response?

Bigotry, according to one dictionary definition, is “a lack of respect for or an effort to silence contrary opinions.” A free society needs safety to express unpopular opinions without being “demonized” or browbeaten. So before we go farther we should agree not to do that to each other. Christians are particularly called to “live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18)

Since bigotry means disdain, disrespecting, or silencing people simply on the basis of their race, class, sexual orientation, gender, or religion, that must mean we must move to treating people of *deep difference—with deeply different views—with respect and (yes) love*. That means being open to having a relationship and to listening and to a) engaging their views at the strongest and b) not attributing to them a view that they don’t actually hold, even if you think it’s an implication (which you are allowed to say.) I would hope this is a two way street.

“Our message to the homosexual community is, ‘We are followers of Jesus. You are our neighbors. Please forgive us for not loving you the way we should have,’” said Joe Coffey, lead pastor at Christ Community Chapel, “But please don’t think we cannot love you unless we agree with you. We can and we do.”

**Some might respond, “If you don’t accept my sexual identity then you are rejecting me, you are not letting me be myself.”**

However, what if a Muslim friend came to you and said, “You can’t be my friend unless you accept my Muslim beliefs about God and right and wrong and how human beings should live. If you reject my deepest feelings and beliefs about how we should live, then you are rejecting me.” What would you say?

I think you would probably say something like this: “How would you like it if I said the same to you, that you have to accept all my deepest feelings and beliefs or you are rejecting me? I can’t accept all your feelings and beliefs, but that doesn’t mean we can’t be friends. Let’s try!”

Now if you wouldn’t accept a Muslim friend making that demand of you, you shouldn’t make that demand of me. You have not only feelings but beliefs about those feelings and I don’t have to agree with them all (nor you with mine) for us to be friends.”

**“But, my sexual identity isn’t a matter of different beliefs. This is simply who I am.”**

The sub-narrative at greater length: “My behavior and my views are part of my identity, so if you criticize the behavior or counter my views, you are not letting me be myself. You are intolerant, creating an unsafe environment, leading to suicide and hate. My views are neither like your views nor my behavior like your behavior—which are subject to criticism. Mine are not. Mine are what they are—because it is inborn.”

This idea—that our identity is based simply on expressing inward feelings without the imposition of “external” moral beliefs—is an illusion.

A thought experiment:--Imagine an Anglo-Saxon warrior in Britain in 800 AD. He knows that he has two very strong inner impulses and feelings. One is aggression. He loves to smash and kill people of other races. Living in a shame-and-honor culture with its warrior ethic, he will identify with that feeling. He will say, “That’s me! That’s who I am! I will express that.” The other feeling he senses is same sex attraction. To that he will say, “That’s not me. I will control and suppress that impulse.”

Now imagine a young person walking around Manhattan today. He has the same two inward impulses, both equally strong, both difficult to control. What will he say? He will look at the racial aggression and think that “this is not who I want to be” and will seek deliverance in therapy and anger management programs. He will look at his sexual desire, however, and conclude, “That is who I am.”

What does this thought experiment show us? Primarily, that we do *not* get our identity simply from within, from our feelings. Rather we take some interpretive moral grid given to us by our culture and we lay it down over our various feelings and impulses and use it to sift them through it. This grid helps us decide which feelings are “me” and should be expressed—and which are not and should not be. So this grid, this set of interpretive beliefs, is what gives us our identity rather than an innate, unadulterated expression of our feelings.

Despite protests to the contrary, then, we instinctively know our inner depths are insufficient to guide us. We need some standard or rule from outside of us to help us sort out the warring impulses of our interior life. The person who today says “I’m just being myself” is no more free than the Anglo-Saxon warrior. They are both getting their identity *the way their society tells them to*.

Christianity says: “We have to have some outside help to get an identity. We need someone we love and respect from outside us saying “you are great!” *The praise of the praiseworthy is above all rewards*. Both the ancient and modern person is rightly looking for this validation from the outside. So don’t let this or that tribe, this or that culture tell you who you are. Don’t let them control you and give you their validation. Let God help you. Let him give you the moral grid to understand your heart—from his Word. And let his love and grace, through Jesus Christ, give you your deepest validation and identity.”

## A Testimony from Redeemer Member

My journey with Christ began as a young child. I couldn’t tell you exactly when I became a Christian but my understanding of who Jesus is and what he means for me has been slowly grown and shaped.

Without being able to pinpoint a certain time, I was around 12 years old that I began to gain an attraction to men. And it wasn’t until I had finished high school that I realized these feelings weren’t going to go away. Just a few years ago I finally mustered the courage to tell my parents about my attractions. For me, this was only possible because God had placed a few key Christian brothers and sisters in my life who were committed to encouraging me through it.

I cannot not tell you that I have never forsaken the great love of my Savior and kept myself sexually pure. I cannot tell you that I have never forgotten His immense beauty and kept myself from pornography. I cannot tell you that I have never run from His comforting embrace to be embraced and known by another man. And yet, every single time I hide in shame of what I’ve done, God, in his unfathomable wisdom and love draws me back. As hard as I fight, run, and try to hide, I simply cannot escape Him.

Being a Christian and being gay has forced me to challenge my identity. I have found that anything I place my value and identity in will ultimately fail. But in Christ, I gain value, and through faith in Christ, I became a child of God (Galatians 3:26). I could say so much more about this, but I find that my true identity in Christ transcends my sexuality, and is infinitely more beautiful, meaningful, and rewarding than any

identity based in sexuality. If, then, my sexuality is not my identity, I can remain single and know that I am just as loved and valued as the one who is married.

In a city such as New York, it is offensive to suggest that we do not create our own identity. The world would look at me, reject me, and tell me that I am denying my true self by rejecting a gay lifestyle and identity. And you know, they might be right—to some extent at least. Jesus did call us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23). Could God really be God of the universe without also being Lord over sexuality? Is He really my first love if I cannot even submit my sexuality to Him?

Though I may never have an earthly family of my own, God has welcomed me into His family, and in doing so, I may now have spiritual brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters from all walks of life, and many right here at Redeemer. God is faithful. The expression of family found in the church has the capacity to be so much richer and rewarding than we often think. My journey in this life often seems lonely, but only because I so easily fail to recognize that in all and through all, Christ is beside me.

I've often rejected the thought of sharing my story to a broader audience. I begin to realize that by doing so, I begin to feed my own fear of being known. My life, and the lifestyle I have chosen puts me in a dangerous position. Living as an artist in New York, I risk losing career opportunities by being honest about my life experience. But I must ask myself: If Jesus is who He says He is, then can I trust him with my whole life? If I am known by Christ, from whom do I have to hide? Whom must I fear?

I am all too aware how helpless I am to change my attraction. No person, group, or conference wields the power to change my attraction. But does God have the power and authority to make me attracted to women? Yes. Is he obligated to? Not in the least. Even still, he promises to restore all things. If God chooses to restore my sexuality while I am on this earth, then may He be praised. If He chooses not to, may He still be praised! Whether I experience restoration now or in the life to come, I trust that God truly has good plans for me, and that He is a God who keeps His word.

To my Christian brothers and sisters: Will you love me, and let me love you as Christ loves His creation? And will you be willing to not ignore your own crosses to bear? To my friends not in the Church: Will you allow me to remain in your friendship? To my friends in the LGBTQ etc. community: Will you graciously extend to me the same respect for my life and for my story that you want for yours? To my dear gay Christian brothers and sisters: I stand alongside you, and want you to know that you are loved far more than you can even begin to imagine. I want to share my story with you, because stories like mine also need to be heard in the public sphere. For those who share a similar life story, know that you are most certainly not alone, and that for you, too, there is a beautiful hope and a future.

# Study Guide 5: Gentrification, Privilege, & Faithful Presence<sup>1</sup>

## “WHITE FLIGHT”, GENTRIFICATION, + THE CHURCH: The Context of Urban Church Planting

By Justin Adour

### Introduction

In modern times, there is much debate around the renewed vision for urban church planting. There are some who criticize the movement as being (1) inadequate and (2) a result of gentrification in many areas that are historically made up of poor minorities. For them, urban church planting ultimately becomes a matter of justice because of the deep-seated issues that stem back generations.

Let me first begin by noting, I (Justin Adour) too have been wrestling with this issue. As a pastor who lives in a neighborhood that is gentrifying and in which I did not grow up, I have struggled to understand all the issues at hand. The issue of gentrification is complicated, as there are racial and socioeconomic implications that must be considered. Specifically, in order to best understand context, we must consider *the historic abandonment of the city, the issue of gentrification itself, and the implications for urban church planting.*

### The Historic Abandonment of the City

First, in order to understand the current issue of evangelical church planting in cities today, we must begin with understanding the evangelical relationship to the city in the past. Most pressingly, the complicated issue of evangelicals leaving the city post World War II was quite consequential for how cities like New York City evolved. Namely, there was a mass exodus of white Christians, which ultimately impacted neighborhoods in the 1940's, 50's, and 60's.

#### Post World War II Exodus

Post World War II, there was a mass exodus of mostly white city dwellers, which coincided with the mass migration, known as the Great Migration, of many African Americans from the rural south. Many of them moved as a result of Jim Crow laws and its effects. While this migration had taken place for many years after the Civil War, between 1940 and 1970 nearly four million African Americans moved into cities in the North and West, while at the same time, the number of white metropolitan city dwellers plummeted to comprising only a third of city households.<sup>2</sup> In sum, seven million white Americans would leave the cities during this time.<sup>3</sup> This was known as “white flight” and would have a significant impact on many cities. In fact, this exodus radically changed the dynamics of numerous neighborhoods and, in many ways, was racially motivated.

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this article are part of an ongoing research project by Justin Adour and gives context for some of the challenges of planting Redeemer East Harlem

<sup>2</sup> See Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History, Vol. 2* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 939; Leah Boustan, “The Culprits Behind White Flight”, *The New York Times*. [www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/opinion/white-flight.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/15/opinion/white-flight.html) (Accessed May 17, 2017)

<sup>3</sup> Foner, *Give Me Liberty*, 940

During this time period, many whites left the city in order to move into suburban neighborhoods that intentionally barred mixed communities, especially the mixing of African Americans and whites. As the post-World War II era saw a sharp increase of homeownership due to government assistance like the GI Bill, many African Americans were not able to take advantage of such programs. One historian notes, “The law was deliberately designed to accommodate Jim Crow.”<sup>4</sup> Most African Americans were systematically barred from homeownership, as mortgage companies believed the presence of African Americans would drive down home prices in suburban neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> This was not only the case in the South, but was also taking place in the North as well. As an example, in New York and New Jersey, of the 67,000 mortgages insured by the GI Bill, less than 100 were given to non-white applicants.<sup>6</sup> This, in effect, created white suburban neighborhoods and enclaves of black communities in the city, as this was the only option for many.

Furthermore, these enclaves of black communities are crucial for understanding the main issue at hand. The Housing Act of 1945 authorized the construction of 800,000 units of public housing in order to provide a “decent home for every American.” However, private contractors demanded the law set the income limits extremely low in order that these housing units would not become competition for their middle-class housing construction, most of which were in neighborhoods that gave preference to whites.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, due to much opposition from those of influence, the Housing Act homes were catered only to the very poor, “reinforcing the concentration of poverty in urban non-white neighborhoods”<sup>8</sup> and, in a sense, “forcing” middle-class whites to purchase homes in the suburbs. Even if middle-class whites wanted to take advantage of the Housing Act homes with a vision to create mixed communities, they could not due to the income ceiling being so low. This intentional concentration of the poor will become a significant issue when we get to gentrification, as many of these neighborhoods will be the focus of future development.

Now, to be fair, not all “white flight” was directly motivated by racial segregation. However, even in cases when it was not directly motivated by race, there were still undertones of racial inequality. For example, even if whites did not live near predominantly black communities, as the New York Times reported, City voters were more racially diverse and poorer than the suburban electorate, and thus less able to offer low property taxes or high-quality public services. If border residents also fled the city as black migrants arrived, even though black enclaves were miles away, these departures signaled a concern about broader city finances rather than a dislike of immediate black neighbors.

That is to say, even if a person left on the grounds of economics, the reality remains that black communities, which were largely economically challenged, were seen as economically draining on broader city finances. Thus, many whites left for the suburbs.

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<sup>4</sup> Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 114

<sup>5</sup> Forner *Give Me Liberty*, 941

<sup>6</sup> Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*, 140

<sup>7</sup> Forner, *Give Me Liberty*, 940

<sup>8</sup> Forner, *Give Me Liberty*, 940. Furthermore, Forner describes the result of “urban renewal”, which demolished poor neighborhoods in city centers that were viewed as potentially valuable real estate. In that demolish, all-white middle-income housing and retail centers were created.



## Evangelical Exodus

However, how then does this impact the evangelical church today? To answer that question, we must consider that many of the whites that left were in fact evangelical. Understanding the abandonment of the city by evangelicals is a necessary and warranted observation for the contemporary issue at hand. To make the point, William Myatt argues,

The growth in evangelical prominence corresponded with the post-World War II flight of white Americans from the cooperative location of city life. In droves, evangelicals left the city for the comfort and predictability of suburbia. Suburban churches grew along with this migration, but urban communities suffered in the newly created vacuums. What remained of city life, now increasingly ghettoized, was the 'inner city', a euphemism for neighborhoods marked by poverty, racial imbalance, and minimal access to economic and social resources.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in order to understand the current contention with regard to urban church planting, recognizing the evangelical church's relationship to cities is paramount, as there was a time when many evangelicals, particularly white evangelicals, left. In so doing, these communities were left marked by "poverty, racial imbalance, and minimal access to economic and social resources." When understood on a large scale, "white flight" created economic issues for many who remained, as those with the greatest resources and ability to invest in the city through taxes and resources left the city. Unfortunately, the church was no different. In fact, researchers have noted that in some cities, "congregations were conspirators in the racial transition that left a legacy of deeply entrenched segregation."<sup>10</sup> For example, evangelicalism flourished in the suburbs. Yet, it flourished in communities deeply segregated as a result of the white flight exodus. In fact, as late as the 1990s, nearly 90 percent of suburban whites lived in communities with non-white populations of less than 1 percent.<sup>11</sup> It is in these communities where evangelical churches grew in strength and number. In short, churches were directly, even if implicitly, involved in segregation, which resulted in the marginalization of minority communities, particularly those abandoned in the cities.

Furthermore, as urban cities were evacuated and suburban churches grew, a new type of church culture developed. The suburbs gave opportunities for churches to expand in ways the city would not typically allow. Specifically, the circumstances surrounding white flight gave rise to the mega-church culture with nearly all mega-churches being founded after 1955.<sup>12</sup> With the rise of mega-churches has also come a more consumerist form of church, which will play into the issue of church planting when we get to it, as the suburban mentality of convenience and consumerism will impact the current church planting mentality.

## The Issue of Gentrification

Second, what then about today? Given the above background information on what took place since World War II, the issue of gentrification becomes particularly pressing. While there are several definitions of gentrification that have developed since British sociologist Ruth Glass coined the phrase in the 1960's, the typical understanding of gentrification is "a process in which more affluent individuals move into a working-class or low-income urban neighborhood that often has a history of disinvestment and neglect by the city or state, triggering the displacement of current residents."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See William Myatt, 2016. "God in Gotham: Tim Keller's theology of the city." *Missiology* 44, no. 2: 180-193.

<sup>10</sup> See Mark T. Mulder, *Shades of White Flight: Evangelical Congregations and Urban Departure* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Press, 2015), 73

<sup>11</sup> Forner *Give Me Liberty*, 939

<sup>12</sup> See Scott Thumma, "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their Characteristics and Cultural Context" *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*. [www.hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma\\_article2.html](http://www.hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article2.html) (Accessed July 15, 2017)

<sup>13</sup> See Maya M Singhal, "Bushwick is Over: The Contradictions of Gentrification for the Creative Middle Class", *NYU Journal of Social and Cultural Analysis*.

To be fair, gentrification is a complicated issue with many dynamics involved. For instance, in New York City, since 2009 there have been 500,000+ new jobs created, with only 100,000 new housing units, with rent increases of 24%, but with wage stagnation.<sup>14</sup> In other words, housing is a problem, and in a city like New York City, there are only so many places where new housing units can be developed. Additionally, there are many who point out that it is overly simplified to suggest that gentrification is simply the destruction of a neighborhood's historical culture. Rather, there are instances when communities are stabilized by the influx of resources. With these resources come local services, new businesses, better schools, cleaner parks, and other amenities. Of course, the counterargument is the resources should have been a priority all along and not just a result of a gentrifying presence in the neighborhood.

### **Privileged Mobility**

Yet, while the nature, benefits/detriments, and results of gentrification are an entire issue unto themselves, as a New York Times article postulates,

Arguments over gentrification are really arguments over who deserves to live in a city, and the the notion of a right to stay put is sometimes at odds with another, perhaps more fundamental right: the right to move.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, one of the central issues of gentrification is who can lay claim to certain neighborhoods and who has the ability, resources, and potential for moving?

When considering what has already been said about the advantages historically given to whites in the area of housing preference, I do believe there is a justice issue at hand. Specifically, during white flight, many whites had the decision to move out of the city in order to craft the type of life they desired. This resulted in largely homogenous communities and all the conveniences of suburban life. As noted earlier, in many ways, the government supported this shift out of the city and effectively solidified many communities in cities as communities made up of mostly poor minorities, which left many communities without proper infrastructures due to the economic issues created by a mass exodus from cities.

However, today, gentrification punctuates a new form of this historical privilege of mobility, specifically, the historic precedent has been that whites get to decide when they want to move and where they desire to live. As stated, the fundamental issue is who has the right to move and, more specifically, who has the right to move to the city? Based on what has been stated, and given the realities of gentrification, this has largely remained a white prerogative. This has been evidenced in both urban communities and suburban communities.<sup>16</sup> While not our main focus, I should also point out that housing disparity is not only a city issue. These disparities are being seen more and more in suburban communities as well. That is to say, there is much to still be done to ensure equality, especially between white and black communities.<sup>17</sup>

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<https://wp.nyu.edu/as-journalofscsca/2016/05/02/bushwick-is-over-the-contradictions-of-gentrification-for-the-creative-middle-class/> (Accessed July 11, 2017)

<sup>14</sup> "NYC For All: The Housing We Need" <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/nyc-for-all-the-housing-we-need> (accessed Nov. 29, 2018)

<sup>15</sup> See Kelefa Sanneh, "Is Gentrification Really a Problem?" *The New York Times*.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/07/11/is-gentrification-really-a-problem> (Accessed May 21, 2017)

<sup>16</sup> See American Sociological Association (ASA). "With racial segregation declining between neighborhoods, segregation now taking new form." [www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/ASR\\_August\\_2015\\_Lichter\\_News\\_Release.pdf](http://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/ASR_August_2015_Lichter_News_Release.pdf) (accessed July 7, 2017). The report notes in the past decade there are some communities that have become diverse, for the time being, "as whites have moved out to other growing suburbs farther from the city or have moved back to the city as part of the gentrification process".

<sup>17</sup> See American Sociological Association. Not only was segregation intentional in the first wave of urbanites to the suburbs, but those trends have continued even today. Suburban communities are becoming more and homogenous. As city suburbs become more diverse. The study found, "While segregation from neighborhood to neighborhood is decreasing (micro-segregation) within metropolitan areas, segregation from suburban communities (e.g., towns, villages, and cities) to other suburban communities within

However, as an example of current white mobility in cities like New York City, between 1990 and 2010, despite citywide decreases in white population, in gentrifying neighborhoods, the white populations have increased as black populations have significantly decreased in those same neighborhoods.<sup>18</sup> To put it simply, whites have again made decisions about where they desire to live (whatever those reasons might be), and the demographic shifts in former minority enclaves have shown this to be the case.

Furthermore, gentrification is not only about housing, but also about cultural shifts. As Neil Smith, a professor of anthropology and geography at the City University of New York Graduate Center has argued, gentrification is “really a systematic class-remaking of city neighborhoods...it’s about creating entire environments: employment, recreation, environmental conditions.”<sup>19</sup> That is to say, gentrification has become another opportunity to create a new culture, which is shaped by those with the most amount of influence and resources to achieve their desired ends. While certainly different than the white flight of the mid-twentieth century, the ability to shape a desired culture through asserting privilege and dominance is evident. Again, this privilege and dominance has been objectively shown to be a white prerogative.

## Implications for Church Planting

Lastly, how are those that are Christian “gentrifiers” to think about their place in the community? How does gentrification impact church planting and the evangelical church’s return to the city? Why do some view this as a social justice issue? There are several things to consider with regards to contemporary church planting, namely, *the renewed focus on cities*, *importing of suburbia*, and *the way forward*.

### The Renewed Focus on Cities

First, the data is clear, evangelicals have made significant strides to again lay claim to cities in recent years. In fact, for example, in Manhattan, the number of evangelical churches has tripled in the last ten years.<sup>20</sup> In some ways, this increase is appropriate given the widely known reality that global populations have radically shifted toward city-dwelling, as more people now live in cities than do not live in cities.<sup>21</sup> Yet, while some pastors and congregants who are from the city have planted some of the churches, broader urbanization trends have resulted in suburban interest in re-urbanization.<sup>22</sup>

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the same metropolitan areas and from major metropolitan cities to their suburban communities is increasing (macro-segregation)”. And it concludes, “If segregation is our measure, we have a long way to go before we are truly a post-racial society”.

<sup>18</sup> See New York University Furman Center. “Report Analyzes New York City’s Gentrifying Neighborhoods and Finds Dramatic Demographic Shifts”

<http://furmancenter.org/thestoop/entry/new-report-analyzes-new-york-citys-gentrifying-neighborhoods-and-finds-dram> (Accessed July 20, 2017)

<sup>19</sup> See Alessandra Ram, “In Changing Neighborhoods, Black Churches Face an Identity Crisis”. *The Atlantic*, 2016.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/10/in-changing-neighborhoods-black-churches-face-an-identity-crisis/263305/> (Accessed July 20, 2017)

<sup>20</sup> See Tony Carnes, “The Making of the Postsecular City”. *NYC Religion*.

<http://www.nycreligion.info/making-postsecular-city-manhattan-evangelicals-part-1/>, 2010 (Accessed July 17, 2017).; Michael Luo, “In New York, Billy Graham Will Find an Evangelical Force”. *The New York Times*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/21/nyregion/in-new-york-billy-graham-will-find-an-evangelical-force.html>, 2016 (Accessed July 17, 2017). While this is not indicative of the broader trends in NYC, as outer boroughs such as the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island have churches that have remained throughout the years, the resurgence of evangelical churches in Manhattan punctuates the renewed interest in the city.

<sup>21</sup> See the United Nations, “World Urbanization Prospects”, 2014.

<https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/publications/files/wup2014-highlights.Pdf>. Currently 54% of the global population lives in cities with the number likely to be 66% by 2050

<sup>22</sup> Also, massive numbers of immigrants are flocking to cities as well. While beyond the scope of this paper, non-white immigrants to many U.S. cities will be one of the defining markers of the broader Western church’s growth.

This renewed interest has largely come through a renewed city-centric theology of influential evangelical leaders like Tim Keller who have argued that the church must be growing in cities. As he notes, if there are five million new people moving into cities, which is roughly the size of the metropolitan areas of Philadelphia or San Francisco, “how many churches ought there to be in a city the size of Philadelphia?”<sup>23</sup> This seems like a fair and correct question to consider, as Christian missions, by its nature, focus attention on areas in most need of the Gospel. Furthermore, as Keller argues, cities give the great opportunity for influence, not just in the city, but also in the broader culture.<sup>24</sup> Cities like New York City are hubs for finance, entertainment, the arts, news media, and other highly influential shapers of culture. Thus, rightly so, the church ought to be there.

Yet, the tension is not whether churches should be in the city, but rather the extent to which such city vision is executed ethically and responsibly. The evangelical church must not forget that one of the reasons for such a significant need to come to the city is because, 60 years ago, there was a mass exodus of evangelicals. As a result, many communities were either left without evangelical churches, or neighborhoods were left socioeconomically crippled.

The reason many have made church planting in these types of neighborhoods a justice issue is that church plants in gentrifying neighborhoods, with pastors and congregants who are not from the city or who have not lived there long-term, implicitly affirm the aforementioned reality – they are there as a result of privileged mobility. The evangelical church chose to leave when it was losing its cultural distinctive, and now that the city has become culturally appealing again, they have returned.

However, what of the churches that remained after the exodus who have many years vested in communities that were once abandoned or marginalized? What of the residents whose cultural identities are being lost as the neighborhoods in which they reside receive new developments, for new residents, who draw new churches?<sup>25</sup> This is why, in some ways, this is a justice issue, especially if churches implicitly communicate to the neighborhood that they have only returned now that there seems to be a critical mass of change. The question must be asked, why was there not a large-scale focused effort in many neighborhoods before the gentrification started?

### **Importing the Suburbs**

Additionally, consider the cultural shift that took place as people moved from urban lifestyles to suburban lifestyles during white flight. The mega-church, suburban mentality is significantly different than that of urban dwelling. For example, homes in the suburbs are largely marked by space, ability to expand, and the modern conveniences of multiple cars, in-home laundry, personal space, storage garages, living and dining rooms large enough for hosting, schools with amenities such as gymnasiums and science labs, and one-stop shopping at malls and Wal-Mart. In many ways, suburban life allows individuals to tailor their lives around convenience and preference. Of course, I exaggerate it slightly, as I am aware this is not the entirety of the suburban experience. However, I do not believe this is a completely wrong assessment of suburbs. Consequently, these expectations of conveniences have ramifications.

For the evangelical church, these ramifications come in that the church mimics said realities. Many churches became accustomed to such conveniences, while most punctuated in mega-churches, which is

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<sup>23</sup> Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 158

<sup>24</sup> For a fuller treatment, see the entirety of Keller’s argument in chapter 13 of *Center Church*

<sup>25</sup> See Ram, “In Changing Neighborhoods, Black Churches Face an Identity Crisis”. As reported by *The Atlantic*, there is concern that many black churches are facing identity crises as the neighborhood demographics change

certainly the case in smaller churches as well.<sup>26</sup> A consumerist church model that produces convenience tailors to personal preference, and centralizes all ministries to a particular building is a direct result of suburban culture. Yet, in the city, many of the conveniences of the suburbs are not feasible without massive amounts of resources. Space and convenience in the city take a debilitating amount of money to achieve. While this is certainly the case for individuals, this is especially the case for churches.

With this in mind, my concern rests in the manner in which church planting takes place and the mentality with which one comes into the city. To come into the city, especially into gentrifying neighborhoods with a desire for the conveniences of the suburbs, immediately alienates the church planter and church from the residents of that community. The net result, especially in gentrifying neighborhoods, is that one most connects to others with the same mentality. This inevitability punctuates all that has already been said about privileged mobility.

More anecdotally, I have witnessed numerous churches come into the city with pastors who were more suburban-minded and who attempted to model their church after suburban models only to find that these methods were not culturally transferable. This has sadly resulted in closures. The tension and pressure to have suburban conveniences and create a suburban church ethos in the city will ultimately be too much to bear emotionally, physically, and financially.

## A Way Forward - Faithful Presence

How then should we move forward in ways that take seriously the problems of the past, but strives for a hopeful future? Returning to privileged mobility, it is often tied to gentrifying neighborhoods because those neighborhoods often become hotspots for those with privileged mobility, as the cost of living is usually far less (often the result of historic enclaves of poverty in these communities). As a result, the neighborhood is treated like (1) a stepping stone or holdover until one can get that promotion or pay raise that will allow them to live in a “better” neighborhood or (2) a place to try out the city to see if urban living will work out.

Again, while privileged mobility is a problem in gentrifying neighborhoods, there are consequences regardless of the neighborhood. Why? Because no matter the neighborhood, privileged mobility often leads to using a neighborhood or city only to the extent it benefits me. Privileged mobility can lead to treating a neighborhood and community, a community with deep and rich history, like temporary housing. The consequences, to varying degrees, is disembodiment from our context. That context never really becomes home, a home where we can establish roots and embrace and love as our own. This inevitably means we never fully identify or empathize with the experiences, joys, and sorrows. We never fully embrace the beauty or the brokenness of our community.

Have conversations with people who have lived in a neighborhood for one year, five years, ten years, thirty years. Those conversations are radically different. To state the obvious, the longer we live in a neighborhood, the more we experience the joys and sorrows of a neighborhood, and as a result, prove our commitment to the neighborhood. Those who struggled through hard times with their neighbors or communities have a completely different bond with those neighbors.

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<sup>26</sup> While it is not the purpose of this paper to critique suburban churches, the mentality of the suburban culture matters to the renewed vision for church planting in the cities. For example, suburban churches grow accustomed to building ownership, expandable worship/music teams, storage, permanent children’s ministry rooms, offices (and amenities like copiers, coffee machines, permanent desks), parking lots, and used property for church picnics or outreaches. Again, I understand this is not the case for all churches, but it does seem safe to assume this is a desired goal for many churches.

In recent times, in New York City, talk with those who bonded after 9/11 or struggled through Hurricane Sandy. Their relationship is far different than the relationship one has with a person who just arrived and will likely leave soon. I am drawing on this reality because privileged mobility does not allow one to become embedded in the life of a community. It goes against what ought to be every Christian's relationship to their community, that of faithful presence.

Though many have written about the concept of faithful presence, James D. Hunter unpacks the concept in his book, *To Change the World*, and does so with the conviction that faithful presence is how Christians make the most lasting and significant changes in society (I should note there are good critiques of Hunter's postulations in this book, especially as they relate to exceptionalism, privilege, and elitism). While not everything he argues I'd affirm, his theological foundation of faithful presence is worth considering. He notes that faithful presence is rooted in the fact that "God...does not speak through empty abstractions or endless circumlocutions. Rather, in every instance, God's word was enacted and enacted in a particular place and time in history...nowhere is this more evident than in the incarnation." He goes on to say,

For the Christian, if there is a possibility for human flourishing in a world such as ours, it begins when God's word of love becomes flesh in us, is embodied in us, is enacted through us and in doing so, a trust is forged between the word spoken and the reality to which it speaks; to the words we speak and the realities to which we, the church, point. In all, presence and place matter decisively.

David E. Fitch, in his book, *Faithful Presence*, builds on (and critiques) the work of Hunter and contends, Faithful presence...must be a communal reality before it can infect the world. It must take shape as a whole way of life in a people. From this social space, we infect the world for change. Here we give witness to the kingdom breaking in and invite the world to join in. For this to happen, however, we need a set of disciplines that shape Christians into such communities in the world<sup>27</sup>

While that ought to result in many consequences for the church, one necessary effect is how local church communities treat and interact with their neighborhoods. We cannot treat neighborhoods like others might because we are called to be something more. Jesus, the one with ultimate privileged mobility, modeled for us what it means to be faithfully present in a "neighborhood." He does so by experiencing the joys and sorrows of that "neighborhood" and taking upon himself the burdens of that "neighborhood" in order to be in solidarity with the residents of that "neighborhood," all while doing so in community.

How can a Christian (albeit in an imperfect way) reflect Christ's faithful presence? Resist privileged mobility. Resist using a neighborhood or city only for what can be taken without considering what can be given. Resist coming and going when staying is an option. Resist leaving when things get tough and returning when things get better. If coming from outside the city, resist assuming a previous definition of the "good life" should also be the standard of a "good life" in the city. For example, the good life in the suburbs is not the good life in the city. For most, attempts at longevity will be undermined if one assumes the comforts and amenities of the suburbs ought to be feasible in the city. For most people, this will not be the case. So, redefine the good life.

One of the most striking examples of privilege mobility was the recent COVID-19 outbreak in NYC—an outbreak that has again revealed the racial and socioeconomic disparities in cities (and elsewhere as

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<sup>27</sup> Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 15

well). Of course, there will be a disproportionate impact on poor and minority communities for many of the same reasons. Varying levels of privilege are on display, as some people have (1) jobs that allow them to work at home, (2) food and other provisions readily accessible, and (3) health insurance and basic security (though no one is fully secure) if things go wrong. Those are the kinds of inequities that always exist among us.

However, to my main point, one area of privilege uniquely on full display—privileged mobility. When the beginnings of the crisis became evident, many people left for their second homes, while others fled to “go home” to ride the crisis out there. While I do not want to make a value judgment on those decisions, as those decisions I realize are unique to each person and family, I wonder what such decisions do and say to specific neighborhoods. That is, when, at the first sign of crisis, one leaves, what does that communicate to neighbors, small businesses, and others in the community who cannot leave? When we utilize privilege mobility in this way, what does it implicitly state? At a minimum, it could communicate, “This is not my home. I am just here for a specific purpose, and since I cannot engage that purpose, I am leaving until I can re-engage.” However, at worst, and even more problematic for Christians and the church, it could communicate, “I am not that committed to you. When things go bad, I’m sorry, but I am probably not going to be in it with you.”

Again, I realize there are various reasons why one might not stay through a difficult season like a city ravished by a pandemic. Yet, considering my previous statements on faithful presence being the antidote to problematic church planting strategies in cities, I wonder what faithful presence might mean for Christians in all places and times.

With that said, this is not a call for Christians to resist moving into the city or even particular neighborhoods. This is not a call for Christians to commit to decades, as I realize that is not always possible. This is not a call for Christians to never come and go as their privilege affords them. This is, however, a call for Christians to aspire to more than privilege mobility. This is a call to faithful presence, a presence that embraces the joys, the sorrows, the brokenness, and the beauty of a community. It is a presence that knits our hearts to our neighborhood and our neighbors, which prayerfully leads to us not wanting to leave, whatever might come, but instead do what we can to stay because it is home.

## Implications for REH

In many ways, REH was planted with the above realities in mind. As a church plant sent by a dominate culture mega-church rooted in affluent neighborhoods with a planting pastor who is not originally from NYC, but has spent many years serving the city, REH had to approach ministry differently than many might have otherwise assumed. Even today, given our ties to historic Redeemer Presbyterian Church, many not from the city are drawn to the name “Redeemer” without much consideration about the community in which REH resides. While this is not initially problematic, all who call REH home, especially if not from the city or have not been present long-term, must experience the confrontation of privilege mobility and the need for a faithful presence.

Further, given REH’s relatively new presence in the neighborhood, the church must prove itself committed to being *for* East Harlem, not just *in* East Harlem. This means our leadership, public persona, and most importantly—ministry emphasis—must reflect the community and a commitment to its good.

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# Study Guide 6: Social Justice

The following is a summary that mostly aligns with our general position on the controversial term and approach to social engagement known as “social justice.” For more theological reflection on and practical application of our commitment to justice, go to [UntilZion.com](http://UntilZion.com) where pastors Justin Adour and Abe Cho write articles on the subject.

## The FAQs: What Christians Should Know About Social Justice<sup>1</sup>

By Joe Carter

What is social justice? Should Christians advocate for social justice? Is it even a term that Christians should use?

Over the past few years the rise of the term “social justice” among Christians has coincided with a growing level of misunderstanding, misuse, and misapplication of the term. Here are a few things Christians should know about social justice.

### Where did the term “social justice” originate?

Jesuit priest Luigi Taparelli D’Azeglio coined the term in the 1840s and based the concept on the teachings of Thomas Aquinas. Taparelli used the term<sup>29</sup> to refer to the ordinary and traditional conception of justice applied to the constitutional arrangements of society. At the time, Taparelli’s concept was considered a significant contribution to conservative political philosophy.

Taparelli has a good claim, the religious historian Thomas Patrick Burke says, to being the “father of Catholic social teaching.” As Burke notes, one of Taparelli’s students wrote the first draft of Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (*On the Condition of the Working Classes*), the first papal statement on “the social question.” Pope Leo and Pope Pius XI were also students of Taparelli’s work. Another student wrote Pius XI’s 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which officially adopted “social justice” as part of Catholic doctrine.

According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, “a large part of the Church’s social teaching is solicited and determined by important social questions, to which social justice is the proper answer.”<sup>30</sup> Social justice is even given a section in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which defines it as:

*Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.*

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<sup>28</sup>Originally posted by at *The Gospel Coalition*. 2018. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/faqs-christians-know-social-justice/>

<sup>29</sup>“The Origins Of Social Justice: Taparelli D’azeglio”  
<https://isi.org/intercollegiate-review/the-origins-of-social-justice-taparelli-dazeglio/>

<sup>30</sup>“The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church”  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)

It wasn't until the 1970s and the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* that the term became widely associated with liberal secular political philosophy, particularly with changing social institutions. As Rawls wrote, "Our concern is solely with the basic structure of society and its major institutions and therefore with the standard cases of social justice."

### What exactly is social justice?

Because of the fluid nature of the English language, words take on meaning not only through their primary or literal meaning (denotation) but also through their emotional association (connotation). The connotation of "social justice" has often overwhelmed the denotation, making it difficult to understand how the term is being used. As the political journalist Jonah Goldberg has said, social justice has become code for "'good things' no one needs to argue for and no one dare be against."<sup>31</sup>

Part of the problem is that the root word—"justice"—is also misunderstood or used by different groups in different ways. The Oxford English Dictionary defines social justice as "justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society" but vaguely defines justice as the "quality of being fair and reasonable."

A more useful definition comes from the *Institutes of Justinian*, part of the sixth-century codification of Roman law ordered by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I. In the *Institutes* justice is defined as "the set and constant purpose which gives to every man his due."<sup>32</sup> The philosopher Michael Sandel similarly defines justice as "giving people what they deserve, where what they deserve depends on their virtue and depends on sorting out hard questions about the good life."<sup>33</sup>

From a Christian perspective justice can be defined, as philosopher Gideon Strauss says, as "when all God's creatures receive what is due them and contribute out of their uniqueness to our common existence."<sup>34</sup> From this Strauss identifies two broad streams of justice—public justice and social justice. "Public justice is the political aspect—the work of citizens and political office bearers shaping a public life for the common good," Strauss says. "Social justice is the civil society counterpart—nonpolitical organizations that promote justice."

### What is biblical justice?

The biblical conception of justice is primarily captured in two Hebrew words, *mishpat* and *tzadeqah*. As Tim Keller explains<sup>35</sup>,

*The Hebrew word for "justice," mishpat, occurs in its various forms more than 200 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. Its most basic meaning is to treat people equitably. It means acquitting or punishing every person on the merits of the case, regardless of race or social status. Anyone who does the same wrong should be given the same penalty.*

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<sup>31</sup> "What is Social Justice?" [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=77&v=rtBvQj2k6xo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=77&v=rtBvQj2k6xo)

<sup>32</sup> "Institutes", <http://amesfoundation.law.harvard.edu/digital/CJCiv/JInst.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> "Interview with Michael Sandels"

<https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/interview-michael-sandel-on-justice-bbc4-justice-citizens-guide>

<sup>34</sup> "Graceful Justice" <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/june/21.64.html>

<sup>35</sup> "What is Biblical Justice?" <https://relevantmagazine.com/god/practical-faith/what-biblical-justice>

*But mishpat means more than just the punishment of wrongdoing. It also means giving people their rights. Deuteronomy 18 directs that the priests of the tabernacle should be supported by a certain percentage of the people's income. This support is described as "the priests' mishpat," which means their due or their right. Mishpat, then, is giving people what they are due, whether punishment or protection or care.*

But to understand the biblical idea of justice, Keller says, we must also consider *tzadeqah*:

*We get more insight when we consider a second Hebrew word that can be translated as "being just," though it usually translated as "being righteous." The word is tzadeqah, and it refers to a life of right relationships.*

*When most modern people see the word "righteousness" in the Bible, they tend to think of it in terms of private morality, such as sexual chastity or diligence in prayer and Bible study. But in the Bible, tzadeqah refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts all relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity and equity. It is not surprising, then, to discover that tzadeqah and mishpat are brought together scores of times in the Bible.*

*These two words roughly correspond to what some have called "primary" and "rectifying justice." Rectifying justice is mishpat. It means punishing wrongdoers and caring for the victims of unjust treatment. Primary justice, or tzadeqah, is behavior that, if it was prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else. Therefore, though tzadeqah is primarily about being in a right relationship with God, the righteous life that results is profoundly social.*

*Note:* The *tzadeqah* word-group sometimes refers to declaring a person just, i.e., it is a judicial decision. (See some of the writings of Mark Seifrid or Stephen Westerholm.) That notion stands behind the Greek *dikaosyne*—which, in various shadings, can mean, depending on context, justice (righteousness) or justification.

### **How does social justice relate to biblical justice?**

As Keller says, when the two Hebrew words *tzadeqah* and *mishpat* are tied together—as they are more than three dozen times—the English expression that best conveys the meaning is "social justice." Social justice, then, would be not only a biblical concept, but also a subset of biblical justice.

Claiming that we need only "biblical justice" and not "social justice" is a category error (i.e., a semantic or ontological error in which things belonging to a particular category are presented as if they belong to a different category). Biblical justice includes all forms of God-ordained justice, including the rectifying justice that belongs to the government (what we'd call public or legal justice) as well as justice between individuals (what could be called inter-individual justice) and justice involving organizations and groups (what we'd call social justice).

## How does social justice relate to the gospel?

In the early 20th century, various liberal Christian groups began to conflate the gospel with social justice. This so-called social gospel became particularly influential within Protestant mainline denominations and in progressive Catholic circles. Over time, as progressive social causes became more foundational to the social gospel movement, the good of justice overtook the greater good of evangelism.

A true understanding of the gospel, though, allows Christians to work for justice in the world in way that does not undermine the centrality of the gospel. As Don Carson explains<sup>36</sup>,

*The gospel is the good news of what God has done, especially in Christ Jesus, especially in his cross and resurrection; it is not what we do. Because it is news, it is to be proclaimed. But because it is powerful, it not only reconciles us to God, but transforms us, and that necessarily shapes our behavior, priorities, values, relationships with people, and much more. These are not optional extras for the extremely sanctified, but entailments of the gospel. To preach moral duty without the underlying power of the gospel is moralism that is both pathetic and powerless; to preach a watered-down gospel as that which tips us into the kingdom, to be followed by discipleship and deeds of mercy, is an anemic shadow of the robust gospel of the Bible; to preach the gospel and social justice as equivalent demands is to misunderstand how the Bible hangs together.*

[ . . . ]

*Christians interested in alleviating only eternal suffering implicitly deny the place of love here and now; Christians who by their failure to proclaim the Christ of the gospel of the kingdom while they treat AIDS victims in their suffering here and now show themselves not really to believe all that the Bible says about fleeing the wrath to come. In the end, it is a practical atheism and a failure in love.*

## How should Christians engage in social justice?

Whether we use the term or not, Christians are engaged in social justice when we advocate for issues such as abortion, racial reconciliation, religious liberty, and sex trafficking. We engage in social justice whenever we seek moral reform of our society in a way that ensures every person is treated with dignity and given their due. As Mark Tooley says<sup>37</sup>,

*Christians and churches definitely should advocate social justice in the sense that ever sinful society needs constant moral reform. The church's chief tool in this advocacy is the gospel itself. Redeemed humanity is likelier to care about justice than unregenerate humanity. But even the redeemed need an ethical framework for social renewal. And even the non-redeemed can be enlisted in good causes with appeals to conscience, natural law and self-interest.*

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<sup>36</sup> "TGC Asks Don Carson: How Do We Work for Justice and Not Undermine Evangelism?"  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/asks-carson-justice-evangelism/>

<sup>37</sup> "Unveiling IRD's Symposium on Social Justice"  
<https://juicyecumenism.com/2014/08/01/unveiling-irds-symposium-on-social-justice/>

[ . . . ]

*A valid Christian political witness for social justice starts with the premise that all persons are created in God's image. It also understands that the state is not the church but has a very different vocation, having been divinely ordained primarily to uphold order and restrain the wicked. Social justice should not equate all societal improvement with legislation, regulation and other coercive state action.*

*Instead, Christian social justice understands that most of society is not the state and includes a wide assortment of important actors, including the family, the church, other religions, businesses, philanthropies and charities, trade associations, civic groups and other human groupings, each of which ideally contributes to human order and happiness.*

*Social justice seeks especially to protect the vulnerable, including the very young, the very old, the unborn, the terminally ill, the disabled, the poor and the unpopular. Social justice also seeks to energize the able and the powerful towards virtue, thrift and industry. It shouldn't seek to deconstruct but to build. Social justice must also safeguard essential liberties rooted in human dignity and God's character such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and protection of property.*

### **What is a “social justice warrior”?**

Over the past five years, the term social justice warrior (commonly abbreviated SJW) has become a pejorative term for an individual who promotes social justice issues from a socially progressive perspective, especially one rooted in identity politics.

More recently, the term has been used in broader sense to refer to anyone—whether liberal, libertarian, or conservative—who advocates for social justice, especially on issues of racial reconciliation.

### **Shouldn't conservative Christians abandon the term ‘social justice’?**

In the early 1900s a conservative movement sprung up within Protestantism in reaction to liberal theology and the form of biblical interpretation known as higher criticism. A series of articles was written and collected into a four-volume work called *The Fundamentals* that was intended to outline the key doctrines—the fundamentals—of the Christian faith. These works gave rise to the term “fundamentalist.”

“Fundamentalism’ is really akin to [C. S.] Lewis’s ‘mere Christianity’ . . . it means adherence to the fundamental facts—in this case, the fundamental facts of Christianity,” Charles Colson said. “Everyone who believes in the orthodox truths about Jesus Christ—in short, every Christian—is a fundamentalist. And we should not shrink from the term nor allow the secular world to distort its meaning.”<sup>38</sup>

But because secularists such as H. L. Mencken began to use the term in a disparaging way, evangelicals began to avoid the label. That lesson taught secularists that it was possible to get evangelicals to stop

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Colson. *The Body*. 1994

associating with just about any term—even the word “evangelical”—if it could be given a negative connotation.

Social justice, as a biblical concept, is not a term we should abandon without a fight. To paraphrase Colson, we should not shrink from the term nor allow the secular world to distort its biblical meaning.

## Study Guide 7: Gender Roles + Ministry

As I think about the ways God orchestrated my life and the life of my family in order to bring Redeemer East Harlem into existence, I cannot help but be extraordinarily grateful. That gratitude, though for many things, is gratitude especially for those God has brought together to be part of his work through Redeemer East Harlem. God has brought together people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, all of whom have committed to seeing his glory and love made known in East Harlem. For this and much more, I give him praise!

Yet, as we prayed, strategized, and executed our plan to launch Redeemer East Harlem, one element I knew might need special care and implementation was our leadership structure, particularly as it relates to our position of male-eldership. While I will get to our position, a position held by our denomination (Presbyterian Church in America), and of course the church leadership, I wanted to first make a few framing statements that give context for this pastoral letter and the manner in which we hold our position.

First, I want to acknowledge the hurt that some carry as a result of those who claimed to hold a similar position. In a time when the abuses of leadership are more and more being brought to light, I want to name that many who claim a similar position have not held that position in a way that honors Christ or his image bearers. While I do not presume to be perfect, I assure you, concerns associated with our position are valid, must be considered, and will be heard.

Second, within my own history, this issue has been one of tension, as I did not grow up in, nor pastored in, churches that held this position for most of my life. I grew up in a denomination, and was later ordained in that denomination, that ordained women into the role of pastor/elder. I too held this position for many years and still have female family members who are currently ordained and serve as pastors and elders. I note this to say, there has been much personal processing that took place over the years.

Third, while I will give my biblical rationale for this position, I also recognize there are many people I highly respect that understand the same texts I will reference differently. In fact, I have close friends, colleagues, and partners, men and women I love and respect deeply, who disagree with our position. While I am of course most convinced of my position, they will remain friends and partners, as the message of the Gospel and the work of ministry transcend differences of opinion on this issue.

Lastly, as will be seen, our position is not related to “women in ministry.” That is to say, if asked about my position concerning “women in ministry”, I enthusiastically say, “yes and amen.” The church needs women (1) using the fullness of their gifts, (2) providing wisdom and insight to all leaders, and (3) speaking truth to power to ensure the name of Christ is honored in the church. A church that does not have women doing these things is a church that gravely limits its ability to serve God or his people well. So, the issue is not women in ministry, but rather the biblical criteria for the office of elder/pastor. This is our singular focus and concern. However, in order to best understand our position on elder/pastor, we must start with a high-level view of the Bible’s teaching on headship and submission, as this informs church governance.

The structure of this position paper will first address the Scriptural basis for our position. Second, we will address the practical realities of what ministry looks like for both men and women in REH. Some of this thinking will apply in the immediate and some of it will apply aspirationally.

Justin Adour, *Pastor*

### AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE



Before we consider the *content* of Scripture on this issue, we must assert the *authority* of Scripture on these issues. As a church, we believe first and foremost that Scripture is our ultimate authority and holds all that is needed for us to know about God's intentions for his church to function, as it is his word to us (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

## HEADSHIP + SUBMISSION

At the heart of the debate around male-eldership, and also headship in the home, is the issue of headship and submission. Wrongly conceived, headship and submission lead to oppression and marginalization, which proves itself to not be biblical headship and submission. Rightly conceived, headship and submission reflect the nature and character of God himself, which is then reflected in his creation.

With that in mind, a brief understanding of headship and submission helps frame our understanding of eldership.

### **Headship, Submission, + The Nature of God**

First, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our exemplar in understanding headship and submission. In fact, no articulation of headship and submission can be understood without seeing how Jesus fully embodied both. Consider, the following, which is a summary of Christ's headship and submission:

*"Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman man, and the head of Christ is God."—1 Corinthians 11:3*

**Headship:** While there will be more to say about headship as it relates to men and women, let us first note that Jesus shows us what it means to be both an authoritative head, while willingly submitting. Christ is the head of man, yet it must be noted that he uses his head not for *his* benefit, but for the benefit of those over whom he has authority. Ephesians 5 tells us that Christ used his authority to lay his life down for the church (v. 25-26). Romans 15 says we are told to imitate Christ, as he did not seek to please himself (v. 2,3). That is to say, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, shows us that headship is primarily a role of servanthood—servanthood that seeks the good of others.

**Submission:** However, though Christ is the head of man, he was also submissive to the Father. This is an important relationship to consider, as Christ, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6-7). In other words, submission between the Father and Son was not about superiority/inferiority, but rather a willing submission to a role.

In her book, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles*, Kathy Keller puts it this way,

The glory of gender roles, for me, is that everyone gets to reveal an aspect of Jesus' life. Jesus in his servant authority, dying in order to bring his bride to spotless purity (Ephesians 5:22-33), has redefined authority and has demanded that his followers do the same (Matthew 23:11; John 13:13-17).

Jesus in his submissive servanthood, taking on the role of a servant in order to secure our salvation (Philippians 2:5-11), shows that his submission to the Father was a gift, not something compelled from him. At no time is his equality with the Father ever called into question; read through John 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. Everywhere Jesus is claiming to be God ("Before Abraham was born, I am!" 8:58), and yet "the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing" (5:19). Nevertheless, he willingly assumed the role of a servant for the purpose of accomplishing our justification.

The Son's ontological (related to being) equality with the Father, and yet his economic (related to function/role) submission for the purpose of salvation in taking on the role of a servant, lead us into the heart of the mystery of the Trinity.<sup>39</sup>

In summary, headship, as it relates to Christ, is authority used for the good of those he came to serve. Submission, within the Trinity is willingly embraced by the Son, not because of inferiority, as those involved are equal in dignity and worth, but rather for the purpose of fulfilling a function.

With this Trinitarian framework in mind, God reflects his nature in two areas - the home and the church.

### **Headship, Submission, + The Home**

In the home, God has determined the headship and submission of Christ is to be reflected in marriage. Consider Ephesians 5:21-25:

*<sup>21</sup> Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup> Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"*

What does this headship and submission look like in the home? Consider these five ideas<sup>40</sup>:

**1. A head may never use authority to please self:** In marriage, wives are told to give headship to their husbands (Ephesians 5:21 ff.) This does not mean that the man simply can make all the decisions nor does it mean that he gets his way whenever there is a difference of opinion. Why? A "head" may never overrule his spouse simply to get his way or please himself (Romans.15:2-3). A head sacrifices his wants and needs to please and build up his partner (Ephesians 5:2ff.).

**2. Headship is "tie-breaking" authority:** Well, since this is also true of the wife (Ephesians 5:21 - "submit to one another") then what is the difference? A head only exercises authority to overrule when he believes his spouse is doing something destructive to her or the family. In a marriage, where there are only two "votes," how will the stalemate be broken in cases where there is not just a difference in taste or preference, but in cases where both parties believe the other is seriously mistaken? There can be no unity unless one person has the right to cast the deciding "vote." That person knows that, along with this "right" comes the greatest accountability and responsibility.

The Bible directs that a wife, when she marries, give that "right/responsibility" freely to her husband. The husband realizes that ordinarily, his authority does not take the form of "overruling"—in fact, the servant-model directs the "head" to usually put aside his own tastes and preferences in deference to pleasing his spouse. But when there is a "hung jury" and it is critical for one person to take both leadership and responsibility, the "head's" service takes the form of initiation. He leads by overruling.

**3. Why do men and women have these callings?:** It is fairly obvious that the need for "tie-breaking authority" is necessary in a marriage partnership as to maintain unity. But why does God direct in his Word that it go to the man? Many people struggle the most with this very point. If they cannot see a practical reason for a command of God, they hesitate to commit to it.

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<sup>39</sup> Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles*, pg. 47

<sup>40</sup> Tim Keller, "Women in Ministry", <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/scotty-smith/titleitems/>

*We must reject the traditional rationale.*

The traditionalist says: "Women must submit because women aren't fit for making decisions, for leadership." But many couples will admit that the wife is more decisive and has better judgement than the husband. Besides, the Bible nowhere gives that as a reason.

*Our likeness to the Trinity.*

The "reason" given by the Bible is simply that man-and-woman were made in the image of the Triune God. Women are called to follow Christ, who voluntarily subordinated himself in response to the Father's call. To put this in perspective, let's ask this question: "Why was Christ the one who gave up authority to become subordinate? Why did Christ answer the call from the Father to give away authority?" We don't know, but if anything, it is a mark of his greatness, not his weakness! A case could be made, then, that women have this calling because they are greater than men!

**4. The Biblical pattern calls both parties to submit:** Many godly couples have come to realize, then, that the Biblical pattern is equally difficult for both parties. The woman and the man both must submit, first of all, to their roles: their call from God.

Society traditionally gave to men the authority to overrule their spouses for their own pleasure. But the Bible's "headship" authority is quite different, we have seen. As a result, many Christian men would gladly give up "tie-breaking", servant authority to their wives. They don't like the heavy responsibility for service and self-denial that "headship" brings.

On the other hand, many women would gladly take the authority themselves, because they see how men abuse it, just as God predicted (Gen. 3:16). But both must struggle to submit to God's call.

**5. Tapping into the mystery:** When a Christian couple does so submit, however, they do so because God's Word directs them to. And after years of practice, they begin to see that this pattern somehow gets them in touch with something deep within them. Neither is demanding submission from one another, but after first submitting to God they are enabled to submit to one another's needs. It makes them both strong and tender, bringing them to serve one another yet in different ways.

Woman was created as a "helper" (Genesis 2). This word indicates no weakness at all, but complementary strength. In the Bible, God is our Help. A helper is someone who can help because he or she is stronger than the one being helped. For example, I can help my son with his homework because I know more than him. On the other hand, if I do his homework for him, I have stopped using my strength as a helper. In the same way, women have inherent strengths, insight and endurance and adaptability that men do not generally have. Women "help" their husbands through a willing submission through strength.

Mysterious it is! Real "masculinity" is full of tenderness and real "femininity" is full of strength. But they are still different from one another in many indefinable ways. Submission to God's pattern for marriage gradually gets you back in touch with these deep truths and you begin to discover your true self.

### **Final Considerations**

The husband's headship in the home is a role of servant leadership that reflects the way Christ loves his church. Any headship that does not reflect this kind of love, whether through self-service, encouragement of sin, or unloving attitudes and actions, is not biblical headship. The husband's headship rightly used is deferential to the needs, concerns, wisdom, and insights of his wife and is used to lead his family in how

they will trust the Lord and the Spirit's leading. And lest this is not clear, the husband and wife submit to these roles as it relates to one another only. This headship and submission is not owed to anyone else.

### **Headship, Submission, + The Church**

In the church, Scripture is clear God has determined the headship and submission of Christ to be reflected in male-eldership.

### **Women in Ministry**

We must begin by noting we are not speaking about "women in ministry." We believe women are to use their God given gifts to the full expression of God's design. All through the Scriptures we see women who were vital to the health, vibrancy, and growth of the church. In many ways, the Christian church upended cultural assumptions about women in both the Jewish and Gentile world of the day, as they were full participants in the life and worship of the church.

Kathy Keller notes,

...There are many New Testament examples of women being commended rather than condemned for speaking in public. Women prophesy in 1 Corinthians 11 :5 ( and note that in 1 Corinthians 12 :2 8 the gift of prophecy is rated above the gift of teaching), Priscilla and Aquila clarify the gospel to a man (Apollos) in Acts 18:26, and in Romans 16:3 Paul refers to Priscilla as a "fellow worker" (*synergos*), a designation also applied to Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4:3, who participated in the work of evangelism alongside Paul. There are also Old Testament examples of women leaders and prophets, such as Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah. And, of course, the first witnesses to the resurrection, all women, were given the command by the angel at the tomb to "go, tell his [Jesus'] disciples" (Mark 16:7).<sup>41</sup>

In other words, women were and must continue to be full participants in the life of the church. Anything less than this participation is a rejection of the Spirit's work in the life of the congregation.

### **Male-Eldership**

There is, however, one role that is limited to men—the role of elder. Consider two key passages, which are the only times women are told to remain silent. Understanding these passages is crucial, since these passages cannot mean women ought to literally be silent in the church. We know this because in 1 Corinthians 11:5 women spoke and prayed in public worship.

*1 Corinthians 14:34*

<sup>34</sup> *Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission*

The context of 1 Corinthians 14 is that of orderly worship. In the worship gathering, Paul wanted to ensure that the practices and teaching of the worship service were orderly and sound doctrinally. Prophets and teachers would come to the churches, and if there were not trained and knowledgeable leaders to determine the validity of these teachers and prophets, doctrinal error could become pervasive.

Consider Kathy Keller's statements:

The early church adopted this same practice as the Jewish synagogue—and for the same reasons. Without a resident, trained clergy and an authoritative compilation of the "deposit of

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<sup>41</sup> Keller, 15

truth" left by Jesus, traveling apostles, messengers of apostles, and apostle-wannabes could show up at any worship event and speak. Depending on the forcefulness of the speaker, they might win a hearing for their interpretation of Jesus' teaching. False doctrine was the biggest enemy of the infant church, and the counter to it was to have a group of local elders, chosen for their maturity in the faith, whose job it was to judge truth from heresy, whether from the mouths of their own local congregation or from a traveling speaker. It appears likely that these elders may have been the first paid clergy in the young church, their function was so critical and their training so extensive that it was appropriate to remunerate them so they could be free to pursue it (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

It is at this point, when the prophets are being judged (1 Corinthians 14:2, 9-33a), that women are told to be silent (14:33b-38).<sup>42</sup>

In other words, determining whether a teacher was doctrinally sound was a role given to qualified men in the church.

### *1 Timothy 2:11-12*

*<sup>11</sup> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.*

In context, Paul immediately follows up these statements with one of two lists of qualifications for elder/pastor/overseer. Again, we know Paul is not prohibiting women from speaking (1 Corinthians 11) teaching (Acts 18), or leading (Romans 16:2, Acts 9:30, Philippians 4:2,3) in a general sense, rather he is prohibiting one *form* of teaching. Namely, the teaching that determines and preserves the doctrinal purity of the church, which is a role given to elders. Paul's statement, refers to the authoritative function of leadership carried out by the elders of the church. It is this office of elder that Paul is limiting to qualified men.

When 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 are taken together, elders are men who admit and dismiss people from the church, are responsible to protect the doctrinal purity of the church, and teach the authoritative doctrine of the church. These are the *only* exclusive functions of elders. All other forms of teaching and serving are open to everyone, women and non-elder men.

Additionally, while this is outside the scope of our current discussion, there are several other important clarifications needed:

1. There are far more qualifications to being an elder than simply being a man. Not all men are qualified to serve as elders.
2. Both men and women of the church willingly submit to the headship of the elders in the church. Women do not submit to all men in the church, but rather only to elders and with limited scope. That is, women are to submit the elders as spiritual leaders of the church, but not in the same way as they submit to their husbands.

### **Objection - A Cultural/Contextual Argument?**

While we cannot fully tackle the objections to these arguments, there is one worth noting. Namely, *aren't Paul's prohibitions to women in authority specific instructions just for those local church situations?*

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<sup>42</sup> Keller, 19

It is fair to say that Paul's words are given and received in a particular context, and as a result, speak to particular situations. However, to flatten Paul's statements, without properly considering (1) his actual words and arguments and (2) the actual situation, leads to misrepresenting his position.

One of the more important examples of this in relation to male eldership is 1 Timothy 2:12-15. There could be arguments that Paul's words, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man", could be speaking to a particular issue in a particular church (i.e. there were women in the church who were disruptive or teaching false doctrine) and as a result is not broadly applicable. However, if Paul's words are taken in full context, one sees that he does not root his argument in anything cultural. Rather, his argument is rooted in creation. That is, he says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. *For Adam was formed first, then Eve...*" (v. 12-13) In other words, Paul makes his case that men are to have authority because, in the creation of humanity, before sin entered the world, God intended that men have headship in marriage and in the church.

## **THE EXPRESSION AT REDEEMER EAST HARLEM**

On the basis of the above position paper, how will women function in ministry at Redeemer East Harlem (REH) church?

### **Leadership structure at Redeemer Presbyterian.**

We hope to have two boards of officers: elders and shepherdesses and deacons/deaconesses.

#### **The Shepherdess**

Shepherdesses are women with a gift and track record of caring for others, knowledgeable in the Word, and mature in faith. They pray with people in need and teach them to live in accordance with the Word of God. Shepherdesses serve with and support the work of our session (body of elders) and are involved in all decisions related to the church.

#### **The Deaconesses themselves.**

The Deaconesses will be women elected by the congregation who will do discipling, counseling, and shepherding in the church, particularly among the women. Spiritual maturity is the qualification. They will probably also exercise a teaching ministry in the church, depending on their gifts.

#### **The Deaconesses and the Deacons.**

Together with the deacons, they will equip and guide people into ministry in the church. At Redeemer we want to help lay people begin and conduct ministries. Deacons and Deaconesses will do this together.

#### **The Deaconesses and the Elders.**

The church will continue to have broad-based planning and strategizing. Deaconesses will serve on planning/oversight committees (e.g. evangelism, education, worship) with other officers and non-officers. Deaconesses could chair such a committee if the group so elects. Also, the Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses will meet regularly for strategy and oversight of the church. In matters of discipline and doctrine, the elders have the final say—they have "tie-breaking authority." Also, the elders represent the church at denominational meetings. But deaconesses will sit in positions of influence and will have regular part (along with many women on program committees) into the strategizing and decision-making process of the church.

### **Leadership: Staff and Non-staff**

As has been stated, we believe in a limited scope of exclusively male-elder responsibilities. As a result, non-ordained men and women can serve in all roles and functions that sit outside of that limited scope. Men and women can teach, disciple, train, lead, and serve in all appropriate settings, all of which occurs under the authority and leadership of REH elders.

### **CONCLUSION**

We realize that for some, our position is either far too conservative and for others far too liberal. However, our position is our best attempt at faithfulness to God's word and his intentions for his people. As stated, we recognize differences of opinion on this issue and desire to remain in close partnership and relationship with those who disagree.

For more on this issue, we highly recommend Kathy Keller's booklet, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles*.

## Study Guide 8: Abortion + Faithful Presence

There might not be a more polarizing and contentious issue in our modern day than the issue of abortion. There are complexities and nuances that must be considered in order to rightly, justly, and lovingly address the issue.

### Our Position on Abortion

Concerning abortion, there are several biblical teachings and principles that shape how we as a church approach the issue:

1. We are all (1) created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), (2) known by him even before conception (Jeremiah 1:5), and (3) intentionally formed in our mother's womb (Psalm 139:13-16).
2. All children, regardless of the circumstances of their conception, are a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127:3).
3. Conception, though a human act, does not occur without the sovereign intervention of God (Genesis 21:1-2; 30:1-2, 22; 1 Samuel 1:19; Job 31:15, 33:4)
4. Life is to be protected at all stages (Exodus 20:13), including in the womb (Exodus 21:22-25)

With those basic biblical principles in mind, abortion then must be viewed as against the will and law of God. However, though we believe abortion to be sin and a consequence of the sin-filled and broken world in which we live, we also believe the promises of God that:

1. "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more" Romans 5:20
2. "But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." 2 Corinthians 12:9
3. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9
4. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:1-2

There is forgiveness, grace, and mercy for all of us who fall short of God's standard of righteousness and justice. As we hope and trust in the work of Jesus, we can have confidence in knowing we are accepted, loved, forgiven, and welcomed by him. This too should be the posture of the church that we might love, support, and care for one another and our neighbors.

### Comprehensively Pro-Life

Though we as a church affirm the above and hold to a "pro-life" position, we also wrestle with what it means to be truly pro-life. We believe that being anti-abortion is not the same as being pro-life. That is to say, we are anti-abortion in the sense that we believe it to be against God's law and will, but being pro-life means we care about the well-being of others from womb to tomb. We care not only about the life of the unborn but also the life of the mother and father, especially as it relates to circumstances that might cause them to seek an abortion. The choice to have an abortion is rarely a decision that is made flippantly, but rather often comes as a result of circumstances that seem to necessitate such a decision.

Though he was a polarizing and contentious figure, even the incredibly conservative Jerry Falwell Sr. once said, in relation to how Christians approach women seeking abortions, "if Bible believing Christians do not demonstrate through our gifts that we are willing to give to, and to sacrifice for, and to support these young women then we have no rights to stand by self-righteously and point to them saying, "Sorry. Tough Luck, Abortion is a sin. It is your problem."



In other words, Christians who hold to an anti-abortion position must also demonstrate their care for more than just the life of the unborn. If there is no genuine concern for the families in which these children will be born, Christians lose all moral credibility when they stand against abortion.

For example, poverty and its effects are often directly tied to abortion rates, with women of color often most impacted by that [poverty](#). The reasons for the higher rates among the poor are almost entirely economic, as access to quality healthcare is disproportionate, most effective contraceptives are expensive/require certain insurance plans, and the lack of resources to raise the child. Additionally, on average, Black and Hispanic adolescents receive less thorough education on reproductive health and birth control than their white counterparts within the same income bracket. In many poor communities, communities with the highest rates of abortion, it is a *consequence* issue, a consequence of quality of life issues (housing, healthcare, access to education and substantial job opportunities, mass incarceration splitting up families, etc.).

How then should Christians respond? Do the economic realities surrounding abortion rates mean that Christians ought to loosen their conviction about the dignity of life in the womb? No. Does the conviction about the dignity of life in the womb mean that Christians need not worry about the economic realities into which the child will be born? No.

Rather, Christians must be willing to advocate for the child in the womb on a personal, local, and national level. At the same time, Christian must also advocate for the parents who feel abortion is their only option, as a result of any system, structure, or policy that produces an environment conducive for abortions. All the while, Christians must be the safest, warmest, and most loving people for a woman to turn to if she's chosen to have an abortion. This is what it means to be comprehensively pro-life.

### **Abortion, Politics, + Faithful Presence**

As mentioned, the contentiousness, lack of nuance, and politicization of abortion makes it difficult to navigate the most effective ways to respond. For some, the *only* avenue for change is through political and legislative action. For sure, there must be legal advocacy. However, is this a Christian's only course of action? We propose, no. Rather, Christians should advocate for national change, but at the same time, ought to focus energy on local change as well.

God has called his people to serve specific neighborhoods and communities. As a result, as Christians, do we understand underlying reasons for abortion in our community and city? Are we advocating for policies that promote life, at all stages of life, to ensure local and national changes are made? That is, solely advocating for anti-abortion/pro-life policies at the national level or protesting national organizations like Planned Parenthood are often insufficient ways to actually see change and save lives. This national focus often mostly serves to further politicize the issue (e.g. Insisting on voting only for anti-abortion/pro-life candidates, pursuing only conservative Supreme Court judges, or defunding Planned Parenthood).

We need a new way to think about and approach the issue. We need to have a more holistic approach that emphasizes *faithful presence* in our communities. Faithful presence actually saves lives. If we are pro-life, how can we get our main focus off national elections and turn our vision locally? What are we doing locally to undermine the rates in your own city?

The South Bronx is one of the poorest congressional districts in the nation. It also has the highest rates of abortion. Do we see how those issues are intertwined? Meanwhile, the Upper East Side, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the world which at one time boasted the highest concentration of billionaires in the world, is a 15-minute train ride or 5-minute cab trip to the South Bronx. Being pro-life/anti-abortion is not about just voting for pro-life candidates, it is equally about being faithfully present in our own city. What could the resources and influence of privileged and powerful New Yorkers (powerful in comparison

to people in the South Bronx, for example) do to directly impact specific communities like the South Bronx and her residents?

That is the case for everyone, everywhere. Can we really claim to be sincerely pro-life if we are not both trying to (1) advocate for changing abortion laws while at the same time (2) doing all we can to change the life circumstances that coerce many people into an abortion decision?

Though idealistic and aspirational, consider these questions:

- What would happen to abortion if Christians who advocate for pro-life policy also said, we will ensure that every baby that *would* have been aborted will now be adopted into a stable home or do all we can to make sure the mother is supported so she has all she needs for bringing her child into the world?
- What if theologically conservative Christians said, “we are pro-life from womb-to-tomb and as a result will advocate for accessible and affordable healthcare, wage increases, housing equity, education reform, restorative justice pathways for those incarcerated, and a host of other quality of life issues”?
- What would happen to our moral credibility at the national level if Christians proved their care on a local level?

If we have no credibility for caring for those *outside* the womb, we lose all credibility in advocating for those *inside* the womb.

As a church, and as Christians called to a particular context, we pray God gives us wisdom, opportunity, courage, and resources to be the change we want to see in our neighborhoods.

#### Additional Resources

- For an robust theological perspective on abortion, see our denomination’s [position paper](#)
- To learn more about how to engage the topic of abortion with those who disagree, see this talk given at google called, “[Abortion: From Controversy to Civility](#)”
- Support the work of our East Harlem Ministry Hub partners: [YoungLives NYC](#) + [Avail NYC](#)
- Find pro-life candidates who are also advocates of pro-life policies (e.g. healthcare advocacy, humane immigration policies, housing security, job and education access) beyond the womb (See below: AND Campaign).

## Study Guide 9: Giving & Generosity

### REH Perspective on Giving<sup>43</sup>

- Giving is an act of worship in response to the grace of God (Acts 4:33). As a result, giving ought to be done through an attitude of joy and gratitude, not reluctantly or out of compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Christians are not bound by the Old Testament command to give 10% of their income. Rather, the New Testament sets a new standard: the standard is not a set percentage, but instead a posture of *sacrificial giving* (Acts 2, 4:2 Corinthians 8-9).
- In the Old Testament, we learned that God's people gave their 10% in response to God's goodness, even though they had not yet experienced the work of Christ. However, we *have* experienced that work! Therefore, we should not think God ought to require *less* of his people now when he has given far *more*. As a result, giving 10% of our income as an offering to God is a good starting point.
- With all that in mind, how much then *should* we give? In order to answer that question well, consider these G.I.V.E. principles:
  - **Generous + Sacrificial:** Being generous and sacrificial *always* requires some kind of *lifestyle change*, otherwise it is not generous or sacrificial (Luke 21:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8:2). For some, 10% is literally a financial impossibility (e.g. temporary times of joblessness, severe underemployment, unexpected healthcare bills, etc.); those who cannot commit to 10% in the present *can still commit to growing into* an offering of (at least) 10%, as the Lord enables. For others, 10% is exactly the right percentage for them to be generous and sacrificial. For others, 10% is not nearly enough as it doesn't fulfill the New Testament imperative of "sacrificial giving" as 10% for them would be "just a drop in the bucket of what they *could* give."
  - **Intentional + Prayerful:** Believers should not be haphazard with giving but instead should intentionally sit down with their budget and prayerfully consider how they spend the resources with which God has entrusted them. Then, they will be prepared to determine the amount/percentage they will give.
  - **Voluntary First Fruits:** When a believer has committed to sacrificial generosity, they also commit to giving their gift first, not last. That means, not making the gift the last thing given as though it is a "leftover," but instead making it a first priority: automatic. This is the OT concept of the First Fruits, which meant giving God one's "best of the best" gift. One way to do that in modern day is to commit to automatic, first-fruit offerings. Practically, this could mean setting up a recurring gift that gets automatically sent at the beginning of each month.
  - **Expectation from God:** When we've committed to honor God in our finances, we can expect God will lead us in that commitment. While we do not believe Scripture binds one's conscience to give 100% of one's entire *tithe*/offering to the local church, Scripture does present a precedent and priority for financially supporting one's own local church. While God is certainly at work outside of the local church, the New Testament teaches the primary way Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) is accomplished is through the establishment and support of the local church (1 Corinthians 9:9-14). A believer is part of God's Kingdom work and one's church is where one worships, receives spiritual feeding, and participates in God's Kingdom work by ministering to others. As a

<sup>43</sup> For more on our perspective on giving, listen to Pastor Justin's sermon, "Extraordinary Generosity."

result, believers should invest financially in their local church's work. After ensuring one's church has been supported, a believer should then give elsewhere, as God leads. A popular rule of thumb—though not an obligation—is to give at least 10% to one's own church and then give above and beyond to other ministries as God leads.

### Answers to Objections

Giving is an act of worship *in response* to the goodness and grace of God. Period. If we cannot give cheerfully, as opposed to reluctantly or out of compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7), then we must ask God for his Holy Spirit to change our hearts to honor His will in that area of our lives.

The practice of giving is just like any other spiritual discipline/practice necessary for growth as a Christian. For example, we should prod our hearts if we find ourselves without desires to know the Word of God, spend time in prayer, or be part of Christian community or gathered, public worship. Giving, much like these other practices, is a way that we worship God: by trusting he will conform us to the image of His Son. And yes, God makes us more like His sacrificial loving Son, as we strive to be sacrificial, cheerful givers.

There are several common objections from those who do not give. Let us briefly address several of them: (1) "the church seems fine without my giving", (2) "I cannot afford to give," or (3) "I do not trust the church to use my money well."

**"The church seems fine without my giving":** This assumes that giving is *primarily* for the purpose of supporting the church. It is not. While financial gifts are the way God determined His Church be supported, the primary reason believers give is that it is an act of worship; giving is a believer's response to God's provision. Whether the church is "fine" with or without your support is irrelevant to the primary purpose of one's giving.

**"I cannot afford to give":** Over the course of life, most of us will experience seasons of abundance and seasons of lack. This is why, as a church, we do not teach concrete percentage rules for one's giving and generosity. Excluding extreme circumstances like joblessness, giving and generosity can still always be part of our lives, even if the amount of giving changes (Mark 12:41-44).

As we've said, we do not approach tithing 10% of our income legalistically. Christians are not bound by the Old Testament command. However, the New Testament's standard of sacrificial giving could not possibly require less of us.

For myself (Pastor Justin), there have been seasons of real financial struggle for my wife and I. Yet, we determined that no matter how bad things were for us, we would never allow our giving to dip below 10%, and in some seasons, we definitely felt that squeeze as it meant not eating out, maintaining tighter grocery trips, choosing a smaller, more affordable apartment, keeping our travel to a minimum, etc. Our decision to tithe 10% over living "more comfortably" was not out of legalistic obligation, but because we knew everything we have in life *is God's*. And since generosity is God's command, we know God will not command from us that which he will not provide. God gave us grace to trust he would always provide us *at least* the 10% to be able to give to our church—and God always did!

Those seasons of keeping our budget tight so we could be generous to our church required lifestyle changes that were part of what it meant to be sacrificial. And truthfully, it was through those seasons we

saw tangible evidence of what Matthew 25 teaches: “that if we are faithful with the ‘little,’ God will entrust us with more.” God has been faithful to us as we chose to be faithful to him throughout the years. And as a result, we have been able to maintain our 10% minimum giving that helps grow our church while also giving to other missions and ministries we have felt led to support.

I do not write this as a way of *pressuring anyone* to trust God to do the same in their lives, but I do wonder, why not? Why not give generously trusting that God will honor those gifts, and if he so desires, entrust you with more? Why not consider how to make personal budget cuts to that which might be superfluous spending to ensure an additional measure of generosity in tithes and offerings? Though *not always* the case, I have found at times, “I cannot afford to give” might mean instead that one does not want to consider lifestyle changes that would make it possible to give generously to God.

**“I do not trust the church to use my money well”**: This is a valid concern. As Christians, we all have a responsibility to be wise stewards of what God has given to us by ensuring we invest those resources well. As a church, we go to great lengths to ensure our resources are used well and honor Christ (for more on our church structure, take *Intro to Redeemer East Harlem*).

With that said, here are a couple of important giving considerations:

- (1) Giving is not primarily about supporting the church. It is an act of worship. So, to not give, is withholding worship from God.
- (2) Being part of the church means you are part of supporting the Kingdom work being done in that church. Of course, we do not *require* people to give to be part of our church. We will never do so because we are called to love and care for all whom God draws to us. However, if one decides to be part of a church, partakes in the ministry of that church, and claims to be part of what God is doing in that church, why would one not feel led to support their church financially?
- (3) Ultimately, if one is not willing to support the work of the church because they do not believe in the mission of that church or they do not trust the church, then maybe it is time to find a church that they do trust and want to support. We do not desire for that to come off harsh, but rather **loving**. We want everyone to be a part of a church they believe in and therefore want to support in order that life-giving Kingdom work might be accomplished.