

# ON THE BOOKSHELF

## “The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege”

by Ken Wytsma (IVP)

What does “white privilege” mean? How do we learn to celebrate our diversity without racial barriers? As the author states, “The central thesis of this book is that a misunderstanding of the gospel leads to a false dichotomy: we prioritize the spiritual and personal aspects of faith and devalue or nullify the material and communal dimensions that bind us to God’s creation and to our brothers & sisters made in the image of God. This twisting of faith has resulted in historic injustices that have terrorized and handicapped generations of minorities. Racism in the US is worse than worse than we (whites) thought, its lasting consequences are more significant than we think, and our responsibility is greater than we’ve been taught.”

For example, The Naturalization Act of 1790 institutionalized racial preference in legal immigration. The naturalization Act of 1870 opened things for blacks but excluded Chinese. Racial exclusion was a staple of US immigration policy until 1952’s McCarran-Walter Act, which eliminated race as a basis for exclusion.

What about “White privilege”? “It doesn’t mean that your life isn’t hard. It means that if you are a person of color, simply by that, your life might be harder.” In the same way, racism is about power. It really isn’t found in human history until about the 17th century. “As with racism itself, the concept of slavery was deeply affected by the Age of Exploration and subsequent colonial exploitation of newly-discovered lands.” Slavery and its Jim Crow cousin, convict leasing, were ways to steal someone’s labor.

We can’t eliminate racism until we discover its origin and its pervasive nature, then take steps to change things. As Christians, we know that in Christ all are equal. Americans proudly proclaim that all men (people) are created equal. But we often have not lived up to either goal, and we have celebrated individualism too much. Remember, “Jesus did not strive for or cling to privilege, and because we are called to be like Him, neither should we.”

The author states, “If the center of our faith doesn’t speak to justice, then it becomes easy to ignore or lose sight of it amid life’s day-to-day challenges. Justice isn’t just a good thing but a necessary thing.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and martyr, was profoundly affected during his time in America by worshipping in Harlem. He was the only prominent white 20th century theologian to speak about racism as a Christian problem. Christians who are white can’t get defensive about racism in America without cutting off honest dialogue; we need to communicate if we are to overcome racism.