

*The Myth of Equality:
Uncovering the Roots of Injustice
and Privilege*

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Why Privilege Now?

What does it mean to have privilege? Is it real or imagined? Why is it something the church should care about?

Ken Wytsma, in his new book *The Myth of Equality*, explores these questions, going beyond the concept of privilege to show why it's important that Christians grasp it, and quickly. Wytsma sees this as one of the most important needs the church has today, unpacking what readers need to know to be grounded in conversations about today's race-related issues.

"There is a lot of confusion around issues of race and privilege," says Wytsma, who brings his own history with justice work to this particular project. "Far too often, people in the dominant culture or evangelicals either don't understand the complexity of race, their complicity in the systems and structures that have oppressed others, or their biblical responsibility with regard to their neighbors."

Across the country the story of race and privilege in America is only picking up speed. Wytsma's guide is not only a missional necessity, but is one that will have growing relevance as more and more people are anxious and desirous to go deeper and understand more specifically why America is the way she is and, more importantly, what we can do to more intentionally promote unity and equality, starting with the church.

"It is impossible to deny that Christ is moving his church today toward racial reconciliation," says Paul J. Pastor, author of *The Face of the Deep*. "It is likewise impossible to deny that many white Christians like me are not as comfortable with that movement as we say we are. In *The Myth of Equality*, Ken engages a visceral topic with clarity, compassion, and inspiring conviction. He prompts us to engage the deep and bitter roots of racial bias and privilege in American faith."

Some of the points *The Myth of Equality* addresses include

- Race isn't just a good cause, but a necessary one.
- Race isn't just a deeply troubling issue from our past, but a very complicated issue in the present.
- Racism is much more complex and subtle than we think and it involves all of us.
- There are ways we can start moving forward on reconciliation immediately by listening, lamenting, and learning. The voice of others will help us see more broadly and understand how to walk more constructively.

Wytsma adds, "I'm hoping that this book can serve as an introduction for people who feel that something is wrong, are looking for a way to understand some of the roots, or are looking for language to make sense of their experience."

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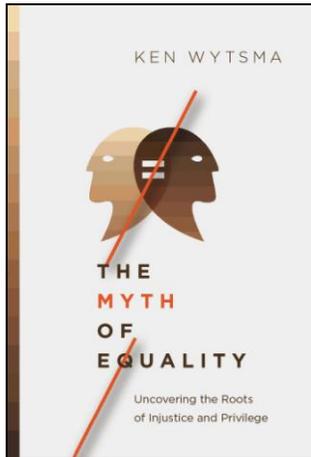


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"I respect this man – not just the public person but also when he's not on a platform. While Ken doesn't have all the answers, one of the reasons why I really respect Ken is that he's asking the important questions and helping the wider Church to do so as well. But it's not just merely asking questions for the sake of having a more robust theology about justice, leadership, and justice. . . but to ultimately, help us more thoughtfully, prayerfully, and passionately follow Christ."

– Rev. Eugene Cho, author and lead pastor of Quest Church

Losing Privilege Is Not Oppression

I was attending a Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) conference in New Orleans when a friend of mine, who was beginning an urban church plant in South Central Los Angeles, asked if we could meet with his leadership team.

This friend from Los Angeles is African American with a long history of community development work, so I was surprised when he asked for the meeting. He asked specifically that I talk about justice with the younger white co-pastors helping him with the church plant in South Central Los Angeles.

"Surely there's nothing I could add to that conversation that he wouldn't already know," I thought.

We met the second day of the conference for lunch in the large atrium restaurant on the first floor. The midday sun was shining through to our table and hundreds of conference goers were milling about the atrium. For quite a while, our little group just caught up, discussed ministry, and enjoyed our food.

After some time, one of the young white pastors began to get animated as he told the story of a new relationship he was developing in the urban neighborhood of the church plant. He had befriended a young black man in his twenties. They had been spending a lot of time together and the young pastor was excited about their growing friendship, but really frustrated at something the young man had recently said.

"You'll never fully get it," the young African American stated bluntly on matters of race. "No matter how hard you try, it *won't* be the same for you and you *can't* fully understand."

This comment didn't surprise me, but the pastor's reaction did.

"I can't stand this reverse-racism stuff," he declared with an air of indignation. "It's so not fair for him to put me in a box and say just because I'm white that I'll never get it and can't fully understand what he does."

It was then I realized why my friend had asked me to lunch. There were things I could say as a white educated man about white privilege and blind spots in a way he never could.

We spent the next half hour explaining that the experiences of not being treated preferentially and having someone say you'll never truly understand the first-person experience of being discriminated against, as being "less than" or profiled because of color, is far different than experiencing racism.

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BOOK EXCERPT



Ken Wytsma is a leader, innovator, and social entrepreneur. He is the author of *Pursuing Justice*, *The Grand Paradox*, and *Create vs. Copy*, and he is the president of Kilns College, where he teaches courses on philosophy and justice. He is also the founder of The Justice Conference, an annual international conference that introduces men and women to a wide range of organizations and conversations relating to biblical justice and God's call to give our lives away. A church planter and the lead pastor at Antioch Church, Ken is also a consultant to nonprofits and a sought after speaker on justice, church, and culture. He and his wife, Tamara, have four daughters and live in Bend, Oregon.

Racism is the diminishment of worth in men and women in and through bias, systems, and power structures that *disadvantage* them in tangible ways based on skin color.

This pastor, just because he has noble intentions ministering in an urban neighborhood, isn't entitled to thinking he can truly know someone else's experience. The white pastor also isn't being marginalized or disadvantaged – not economically, not physically, not structurally – by a young black man telling him his efforts aren't enough to fully understand the effects of racism.

Reverse-racism is a phrase thrown around when white people are singled out or described in terms of their whiteness. It is often, however, a gross misapplication of the idea of racism. This is important as many people, not fully comprehending the nature of true racism, want to push back by asserting reverse-racism or prejudice against whites.

Regard is something we all crave. In fact, preferential treatment is something most humans prefer and enjoy. For many whites in America, this has been their reality and legacy. In many respects, however, the preferential treatment of whites is in decline. America is increasingly becoming multicultural and by the year 2050 will be, for the first time, over fifty percent black and brown.

Losing preferential treatment or letting go of privilege, as the young pastor above was struggling with, is not the same as experiencing oppression when racist systems and structures of power are erected against someone on the basis of the color of their skin.

Not having as much of a voice as one is used to can be jarring, but it's not suffering racism.

—Taken from the introduction

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