

## THE CHILDREN'S TEETH

For various reasons, and in various ways, some people in the world have advantages, and some are at a disadvantage. In Pakistan, for example, Christians are at a distinct disadvantage. The constitution of Pakistan does not allow Christians to be president, or prime minister, not federal judges. Two percent of the population in Pakistan are Christian, but Christians occupy eighty percent of the jobs cleaning sewers. Last year, the military advertised for sewer jobs, but stated that only Christians need apply. Some people are born into families with money; some into poor families. Some people are in good health; others suffer disease. Some advantages come by luck, others by design.

In recent days there has been much talk of 'white privilege.' Oxford University Press defines 'white privilege' as "Inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice." (Oxford University Press. white privilege. In Lexico.com, Available at [https://www.lexico.com/definition/white\\_privilege](https://www.lexico.com/definition/white_privilege) [Accessed 26/09/2020]) Frances E. Kendall, in her essay, "Understanding White Privilege, writes:

White privilege is an institutional (rather than personal) set of benefits granted to those of us who, by race, resemble the people who dominate the powerful positions in our institutions. One of the primary privileges is that of having greater access to power and resources than people of color do; in other words, purely on the basis of our skin color doors are open to us that are not open to other people. For example, given the exact financial history, white people in the United States are two to ten times more likely to get a housing loan than people of color – access to resources.

Kendall misleads the reader, however. It is true that the mortgage approval rate is higher for whites than it is for blacks. White liberals like Kendall blame this fact on white racist bankers. However, black bankers turn down black applicants at a greater rate than do white bankers. Moreover, the mortgage approval rate is much higher for Asian Americans than it is for whites. Mortgage approval is, in the end, simply a matter of economics, and not of race. Some say that the primary cause of black poverty and social problems is racism, but Thomas Sowell, senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, disagrees. He writes in his book, *Discrimination and Disparities*:

Yet some incontrovertible facts undermine that conclusion. For example, despite the high poverty rate among black Americans in general, the poverty rate among black married couples has been less than 10 percent every year since 1994. The poverty rate of married blacks is not only lower than that of blacks as a whole, but in some years has also been lower than that of whites as a whole. In 2016, for example, the poverty rate for blacks was 22 percent, for whites was 11 percent, and for black married couples was 7.5 percent. Do racists care whether someone black is married or unmarried?

Seventeen years ago, Ron Haskins and Isabell Sawhill wrote an essay in which they argued that the way to avoid poverty is to work, to marry, and to complete a high school education. ("Work and Marriage: the Way to End Poverty and Welfare," in The Brookings Institution Policy Brief, September 2003). Walter E. Williams, John M.

Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics at George Mason University, gives this advice to them that would rise above poverty:

No one can blame a person if he starts out in life poor, because how one starts out is not his fault. If he stays poor, he is to blame because it is his fault. Avoiding long-term poverty is not rocket science. First, graduate from high school. Second, get married before you have children, and stay married. Third, work at any kind of job, even one that starts out paying the minimum wage. And finally, avoid engaging in criminal behavior.” (“Dependency, Not Poverty,” February 12, 2014)

This method has come to be known as the “Success Sequence,” but one might say that it is simply Christian virtue and wisdom. More than any other reason, a man is disadvantaged because of his sins, or because of the sins of his parents. No sinner’s circumstance is hopeless, however. God will forgive the penitent sinner his sins, and will cause the righteous to prosper.

God is just, and he gives to every man what he deserves. In the book of Psalms, David wrote of God, “Thou renderest to every man according to his work.” (Psalm 62:12) Solomon wrote of God in the book of Proverbs, “Will He not render to man according to his work?” (Proverbs 24:12) Through Jeremiah the prophet, God said, “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jeremiah 17:10) Jesus said of Judgment Day:

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:28, 29)

He also said, “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” (Matthew 16:27) Saint Paul wrote to the Romans of God, “Who will render to every man according to his deeds.” (Romans 2:6)

There will be a final judgement, when God condemns the wicked to eternal punishment, and rewards the righteous with eternal life. Nevertheless, God also rewards and punishes in this life. Because the ancient world was so wicked, God destroyed it with great flood. (Genesis 6-9) God destroyed the Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness. (Genesis 18, 19) At Babel, God confused the languages of the people because of their defiance. (Genesis 11) God takes vengeance upon them that do evil unto others. In the Song of Moses, God says, “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence.” (Deuteronomy 32:25) Saint Paul teaches that the Christian ought not to take revenge upon an enemy, but to leave vengeance to God. He wrote to the Romans, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Romans 12:19) God not only punishes the wicked, but He also rewards the righteous. When God gave David opportunity to kill King Saul, who was persecuting him, David spared him, and said to him, “The LORD render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the LORD delivered thee into my hand to day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD’S anointed.” (1 Samuel 26:23) After God delivered David from all his enemies, and from King Saul, David praised God, saying:

The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me: and as for his statutes, I did not

depart from them. I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eye sight. (2 Samuel 22:21-25; see also Psalm 18:20-24)

If a man takes his own revenge, then he sins, and God will punish him for his sin. If, however, a man loves his enemy, and leaves vengeance to God, then God will reward him by avenging him. It says in the Book of Proverbs, “If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee. (Proverbs 25:21, 22; see Romans 12:19, 20) In this life, God punishes the wicked, and rewards the righteous.

God at Mount Sinai gave the children of Israel the Ten Commandments, and the Second Commandment is:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:4-6)

God is a jealous God, which is to say, He will defend His good name and His honour, and He will not tolerate a people that are unfaithful to Him. If any rebel against Him, then He will punish them for their rebellion. Wicked people rear wicked children, and so God’s judgment falls also upon them. God’s judgment is upon all of them that hate Him. Yet, God is merciful, and forgives all who repent of their sins.

When Moses descended Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, and found the people rebelling against God. Moses interceded for the people, asking God to be forgive their sins. God heard Moses’s intercession, and He plagued the people, buty He did not destroy them. God renewed the covenant with His people, but, before He did, He revealed His glory to Moses, saying:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

God is just, and gives men what they deserve for their sins. However, He is also merciful, and ready to forgive the sins of any that repent.

In God’s covenantal relation to His people, He promises rewards for obedience, and punishment for disobedience. (Leviticus 26:1-33) In the Old Covenant, the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, God promised that, if the people obeyed Him, then He would give them peace and prosperity. He threatened that, if they did not obey Him, then he would destroy them and ruin their land, and send the survivors into exile into the land of their enemies. He said, “And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.” (Leviticus 26:33) They that survived judgment would rot in exile because they rebelled against him just like their forefathers. God said to them, “And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall

they pine away with them.” (Leviticus 26:39) He also said, however, that, when they were in exile, if they would repent of their sins, then He would not destroy them all. (Leviticus 26:40-45)

When Israel were poised to enter into the promised land, Moses exhorted the people to keep covenant with God, and he warned them that, should they break the covenant, God would destroy their land, and drive them away into the lands of their enemies. Moses also gave them hope, however. He told them that, if they, being in exile, repented with their whole hearts, then God would forgive them, and restore them to their land, and make them prosperous once again. (Deuteronomy 29, 30)

After King Solomon finally completed the building of the temple, he prayed a prayer of dedication. He foresaw, not only the rebellion of the people, but also their exile, and he prayed that God would forgive the people if they would repent. (1 Kings 8:46-53; 2 Chronicles 6:36-39)

In the days of the divided monarchy of Israel and Judah, the people were rebellious, and God sent prophets to them to warn them of coming judgment, and to call them to repentance. The people did not repent, however, and so God sent the army of Assyria to invade the kingdom of Israel in the north, and to carry the people away into exile. God raised up Jeremiah to prophesy to the people of the kingdom of Judah that the Babylonians would invade their land, destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple, and carry the people away into exile. A proverb had become common in Israel: The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. (Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18:2) The meaning is that God punishes people for the sins of their fathers. It was an impious proverb for an impious people, and God would rebuke them for it. The people were rebellious, breaking covenant with God, so God would punish them for their sins. The people sinfully deceived themselves, however, denying that they were sinful, every one blaming his forefathers for the divine judgment. God would judge the people for their sins, but He would later restore them. Through Jeremiah the prophet God said to the people, “In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.” (Jeremiah 31:29, 30) Through Ezekiel the prophet God said:

What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. (Ezekiel 18:32-34)

God through both Jeremiah and Ezekiel rebuked the people for citing this blasphemous proverb that impugns the character of God. God is just, and everything He does is right. Moses sang of Him, “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4) God gives every man what he deserves, and He would never punish a man for the sins of His father. God says that all souls belong to Him, and every soul that sins shall die. God punishes every man for his own sins, never for the sins of another. Through the prophet God said that, if a man does right, and does not sin, then that man will live. (Ezekiel 18:5-9) If a man has a son who sins, and does wrong, then that man's son shall die for his sins. (Ezekiel 18:10-13) However, if a man has a son who does right and does not sin, then that man's son shall live. The sinful Israelites would place blame on their fathers, even place blame on God, before they would place it on themselves. God, being perfectly just punishes a man for his own sins, and never for the sins of another. God said, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” (Ezekiel 18:20) He says that He takes no pleasure in the

death of the wicked, however, and is quick to forgive. The Israelites sinfully charged God with being unjust, but He said they were the unjust ones. Because God is just, and gives every man his due, He will punish the wicked. Nevertheless, He forgives any man that repents. He said:

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye. (Ezekiel 18:30-32)

The army of Babylon invaded the kingdom of Judah, and carried away the people into captivity. Daniel the prophet believed that Israel had been taken captive for their sins, just as Moses had warned. In exile, Daniel prayed to God for the people, and he began his prayer by appealing to God's mercy. He prayed, "O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments." (Daniel 9:4) He acknowledged that the people were captive because of the sins of their fathers, and their own sins. (Daniel 9:16) They were all guilty. Daniel pleaded with God to forgive them because of His great mercy, and God would forgive them when they repented. (Daniel 9:18)

God is just, and gives every man what he deserves. He punishes a man for his own sins, and not for the sins of another. Nevertheless, a man may suffer because of the sins of his father. He may suffer because of the punishment his father receives for his sins. He may be disadvantaged because of his father's sins, because his father is a sluggard, or a drunkard, or a criminal. He may have no father at all, because his father has abandoned him. There is always hope, however; hope in Jesus Christ, who forgives sin, and in the Spirit of Christ who gives power to do right, and in God who is father to the fatherless. (Psalm 68:5)

Let us understand that God is just, and gives to every man what he deserves. Let us take comfort in the knowledge that God is merciful, and forgives sin. Let us rejoice that in Christ there is hope for every man to do right, and to be blessed by God.

Now unto the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen