

One of the signs of maturity is to recognize that we all have blind spots. Some of these are because we grow up or have friends that we learn from. Some of these are places we don't go in our thinking to keep our friends and family. Some blind spots are we use religion to justify our viewpoints. Some are simply we just don't see. For example – I never recognized Ford Focuses, until I bought one. Then I saw them everywhere! Didn't even know they existed! And there are other reasons for blind spots. Truth doesn't fit our world view and / or our economics – like occurred with slavery and Christianity.

An illustration: Masha Gesser, in writing about politics and the death of truth in the former Soviet Union and the United States, and the development of totalitarian ideology, shares this: I was talking to somebody the other day whose entire family has had Covid, and yet they don't believe in Covid. And that is, like, a perfect example of totalitarian ideology. Even if they had said that it wasn't that bad and not a lot of people are getting it, or something that acknowledged their personal experience — that would be one thing. But they literally do not think that the thing exists. They think that it's a conspiracy. It is frightening when truth is impervious to any input from outside reality.

The Danger of Blind Spots: How Could Christians Ever Support Slavery?

By J. D. Greear - August 8, 2017

Maybe you can't relate to the charge of "selling the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals." You've probably never "trampled the head of the poor into the dust of the earth."

The prophet Amos' charges against Israel in the Old Testament seem pretty serious. Not only were the Israelites twisting the justice system and cheating the poor, they also remained zealous in their religious piety. In other words, they came to church regularly and lived in comfort and ease while ignoring the plight of the people who were suffering around them.

Is this starting to sound a little more familiar?

We Are Slow Learners

Let me give you a sad and uncomfortable fact of history: In the days of slavery and segregation, many conservative, Bible-believing Christians were complicit with the status quo.

The first decriers of racism and slavery were the Quakers and Anabaptists—who were marginalized groups on the fringe, far from the cultural and political power centers of the day. But majority Christian culture was mostly silent on it, at least at first.

Now, thank God, the reason the reforms worked was because the church eventually repented, realized how inconsistent these things were with what they believed, and got involved. Christians have always fueled and driven these reforms. But we often seem to be slow learners.

The denomination we do a lot of our mission work through—the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)—has been one of the dominant religious groups in the South for more than 150 years. Many of its leaders spoke up in defense of slavery (in the 1850s) and dug their heels in about segregation (in the 1960s).

Why?

The answer many people want to give is that the SBC (specifically) and Christians (generally) are just racist, bigoted folks. That answer both skews the situation and too quickly lets us off the hook. After all, it wasn't that their fundamental *belief structure* was bad. Unquestionably, our belief system is perhaps best equipped to undo racism: one blood, one Father, one problem, one solution. And that creed has been the stimulus of racial reforms throughout history.

Was it that it was just really difficult to resist cultural pressures of the day? Sure, that's part of it. Culture has an enormously shaping influence on us, even today. But that's not the full explanation.

Power Corrupts and Privilege Blinds

The central reason that many of our Christian ancestors overlooked heinous evil wasn't just that the cultural pressure was strong. It was that their seats of power blinded them to reality and made them disposed to ignore injustice.

The same was true in Amos' day. The prophet Amos, in fact, was not the only one preaching in his day. There was another man—Amaziah, the “TV preacher” of his day—who, claiming to speak for God, rose up to oppose Amos. Amaziah told King Jeroboam that Amos was a radical and a trouble-maker and convinced the king to banish Amos: “Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, ‘Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words’” (Amos 7:10 ESV).

Amaziah had a position before the king. He had power, he had privilege and—most importantly—he had something to lose if people started listening to Amos. So he did what we all instinctively do: He acted to consolidate his power. He ignored the evils around him, probably not out of maliciousness so much as blindness.

It can seem staggering to us that many of our theological heroes not only failed to speak out against slavery but even went along with it in their day. In their works, we read the most beautiful descriptions of the Fatherhood of God, the unity of the human race and our adoption in Jesus Christ. And yet, at the same time, they were blind to the slaves being traded and sold right outside their window.

Were they just really bad people? No. They didn't think about it because, in their places of privilege and power, it didn't affect them. They ignored it.

You—Yes, You—Have Blind Spots

The nature of a blind spot is that *you don't see it*. It's easy for us to look back and condemn the Christians of previous eras for swimming along with the stream of their culture. And it's true: Those men and women *should* have opposed injustice, even if every other citizens ignored it.

But the warning of the prophet Amos isn't primarily intended to help us judge the past. Amos intends to judge our present.

You see, our Christian forebears were fallible men and women, but so are we. And we fool ourselves to simply assume that we would have had the courage to act differently when every societal pressure was pushing one direction. They had blind spots which we see clearly now. But we too have blind spots that our children and grandchildren will speak of with shame.

Had I lived in a previous time, I wish that I'd be one of the courageous ones. But I know me. The more I get to know myself, the less impressed with me I am. I'm not some bastion of courageous virtue. I tend to be blind to things that don't affect me, either. The only difference is the context.

We need to have hearts open to the Holy Spirit. We need to be filled with humility, committed to God's Word and open to other believers, especially those who will help us see our blind spots. More fundamentally, *we need to openly acknowledge that we have blind spots.*

The nature (and danger) of a blind spot is that you don't know about it. It's not just that you don't *know* but that *you don't know what you don't know.*

This should lead us to humble and desperate prayer. Our culture's "prophets" will continue to fashion lies that are sweet to our sinful souls. They will tell us exactly what we want to hear. *Don't fall for it.* Open your eyes to the injustice around you and what God wants you to do about it. Pray daily for the courage to conform not to culture but to Jesus Christ and the gospel—the popular parts and the unpopular, both the comforting and the offensive, the parts that fill us with hope and the ones that fill us with anger, that affirm the better angels of our culture but also confront our demons.

Only when we are filled with this gospel will we be enlightened to see injustice and empowered to oppose it.