

VICPP Book Study

The Color of Compromise

By: Jemar Tisby

One way to understand racial equity and social justice is to learn about the history. This book focuses on various Christian denominations, and how they compromised with oppression to gain power. Framing the conversation in terms of faith is helpful in determining how to move forward.

Chapter One: The Color of Compromise

1. How does indifference, as defined on page 19, personally impact your civic engagement?
2. On page 23 Tisby writes, “Christians deliberately chose complicity with racism in the past, but the choice to confront racism remains a possibility today.” How do you believe we can empower ourselves in modern society to confront racism rather than compromise?
3. Tisby calls out to the reader on page 26 writing, “you may have trouble reading *The Color of Compromise* for different reasons.” What are some reasons *The Color of Compromise* may be a difficult read for you?

Chapter Two: Making Race in the Colonial Era

1. Do you believe a “paternalistic view of evangelism” still pervades the American church (p. 28)?
2. How do you reconcile with the history of Christianity being a means for colonization and enslavement as discussed throughout this chapter? How much of this history is new to you?
3. How do we avoid spreading “versions” of Christianity rather than the entire truth? How does knowing that “race was constructed” assist us in this endeavor (p. 39)?

Chapter Three: Understanding Liberty in the Age of Revolution and Revival

1. On page 45, Tisby discusses why enslaved Africans were so attracted to Christianity, writing “Christianity also held out the hope of freedom. Enslaved people connected spiritual salvation with earthly liberation.” How do you interpret this likening between religion and freedom?
2. What do you find the most interesting in the stories of George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards featured in this chapter?
3. Why do you think being moderate harms one’s efforts for justice and equality? How can we protect ourselves from becoming moderate?

4. Tisby mentions the “divide between white and black Christians” leading to the creation of the first historically Black Christian congregation (p. 52). Can you still see this divide today? In what ways?

Chapter Four: Institutionalizing Race in the Antebellum Era

1. Tisby in this chapter discusses the “compromises at critical junctures” the Church made to preserve the institution of slavery. Are there any areas in our society today where the Church is still making these kinds of compromises?
2. How do you turn your conviction into action (p. 62)?
3. On page 68, Tisby writes, “A majority of white Christians refused to take a definitive stance against race-based chattel slavery, and this complicity plagued the church and created stark contradictions.” In what ways does complicity contradict and plague our values today?

Chapter Five: Defending Slavery at the Onset of the Civil War

1. Tisby discusses “splits” in various religious denominations over slaveholding in this chapter. How should congregations navigate divides in fundamental issues?
2. On pages 80-81, Tisby describes how the Bible was misused by southern Christians to justify slavery. In what areas of life do you think we are still misusing the Bible to justify evil?
3. Tisby compares the biblical arguments expressed by abolitionists and southern theologians on page 84, saying that southern theologians “appealed to a ‘plain reading’ of Scripture” to represent “godly people who enslaved people with apparently no rebuke.” Why is ‘plain reading’ of scripture as represented dangerous?
4. In the final pages of this chapter, Tisby considers how the spirituality of church doctrine has been selectively applied to social, political and ethical issues throughout American history. What does it mean to apply spiritual doctrine to non spiritual issues? Do you think the church should get involved in policy issues? What should the extent of the church’s involvement in policy look like?

Chapter Six: Reconstructing White Supremacy in the Jim Crow Era

1. Prior to reading this chapter, what did you know about the Reconstruction era? Were there any misconceptions that were revealed after the reading?
2. How can we prevent and combat religion converging with hateful ideologies as represented in the formation of the KKK (p. 100)?
3. As people of faith, how should we navigate violence when it occurs?

Chapter Seven: Remembering the Complicity in the North

1. What does “interracial Christian unity” mean to you, as modeled on page 114?

2. How does religious reconciliation play a role in bridging “racial splits” (p. 115)? What does religious reconciliation mean to you?
3. How can biblical interpretation contribute or suppress racial progress?
4. Tisby writes on page 129, “Compromised Christianity transcends regions. Bigotry obeys no boundaries.” Which historical moments examined in this chapter most resemble Tisby’s idea to you? How are bigotry and religion tied? In what ways do you model a “compromised” faith?

Chapter Eight: Compromising with Racism During the Civil Rights Movement

1. Tisby argues on page 134 that Billy Graham was, “a racial moderate when it came to segregation.” Why does he say this? Do you agree with his assessment?
2. What does “courageous confrontation” (p. 137) look like to you in the context of this chapter? How do we avoid “complicity over advocacy” (p. 138)?
3. In the section titled, “Black Power Movement and Black Alternatives to Christianity” Tisby concludes, “Ali and many other black people still saw Christianity as the religion of the enslavers, the belief system of those who oppressed black people” (p.144). How do you reconcile with this sentiment that still prevails today?
4. How may you model the behavior of the “Christian moderates” discussed in this chapter? How can we oppose racism rather than reinforce it as people of faith?

Chapter Nine: Organizing the Religious Right at the End of the Twentieth Century

1. Tisby writes, “racism never goes away; it adapts,” on page 155. Have you observed this idea in your own life?
2. Do you align your politics with your faith? Why do you think the two inform each other?
3. How do you interpret the role of racism in politics as explored through Tisby’s examination of the “Religious Right” in this chapter? Where presently might you discern the American church is compromising by cooperating with, “already established and racially unequal social systems,” (p.160)?
4. Tisby discusses Bob Jones University and other Christian schools’ history of upholding segregationist policies for decades despite their Christian foundation. Could these institutions still be called Christian while promoting racism?

Chapter 10: Reconsidering Racial Reconciliation in the Age of Black Lives Matter

1. Tisby explains on page 179 what it means to lament and why, in the context of the longstanding suffering inflicted on black people because of racism, it’s a necessary practice. What does lament mean to you? How should we lament events that happened in our past?
2. Tisby writes, “Ultimately, the organizations with which one chooses to affiliate in the cause of antiracism is a matter of choice. The only wrong action is inaction” (p.

184). How can people of faith exercise discernment in choosing ways to get involved in social justice issues not directly faith-related?

3. Tisby analyzes Donald Trump's history of controversy and prejudice while still maintaining the support of many white evangelicals. Are there other modern examples that may represent this idea of Christian complicity with racism? What are some of the rationalizations for racism you make?

Chapter 11: The Fierce Urgency of Now

1. In this chapter, Tisby introduces the ARC (Awareness, Relationships, Commitment) of racial justice to encourage readers into anti-racist actions and attitudes (p. 194). Out of these categories, which pursuit most resonates with you? Why? Are there any other ways you could see yourself enacting it?
2. What did you know about reparations prior to reading *The Color of Compromise*? Tisby writes that, "Reparation is not a matter of vengeance or charity; it's a matter of justice" (p. 198). How does this resonate with you and your own understanding of reparations?
3. How does Tisby describe Black theology? Why is Black theology and the Black church important to the entire Church body? How might one who is outside the Black church, engage with Black theology more?
4. Tisby argues that Juneteenth should be a national holiday (p. 206). In 2021, Juneteenth obtained federal holiday status during President Joe Biden's first year in office. Do you think this recent act has brought about the changes Tisby insists? What do efforts such as the ones Tisby suggests in this chapter represent to you?

Conclusion: Be Strong and Courageous

1. Tisby writes on page 213, "When it comes to racism, the American church does not have a 'how to' problem but a 'want to' problem." Why does he say this? Do you agree?
2. How might you go forth in faith rather than fear in the fight against racism and compromise?