

**Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.**

Amen.



Greetings!

Please Read: [Luke 11:2-4](#) and [Matthew 6:9-14](#)

Biblical Accountability

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accountability is defined as taking responsibility as required to explain actions or decisions to someone. The Rev. Rebekah Simon Peter clarifies this notion from a biblical perspective suggesting that, "taking responsibility for your own giftedness... just as Jesus lived in to his call to God – we are called to live fully into the gifts we have received."¹ For her this fullness is being accountable. We are accountable to each other for the free giving of our giftedness to each other or when we withhold it from community. See *Faith of a Mustard Seed* and *Sending the 72 (Luke 10)* and the *Father who brings his son (Mark 9)*.

Biblical Justice

Paul Louis Metzger writes in *Christianity Today*, that "biblical justice involves making individuals, communities, and the cosmos whole, by upholding both goodness and impartiality. It stands at the center of true religion, according to James, who says that the kind of 'religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world' (James 1:27). Earlier Scripture says, 'The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern (Proverbs 29:7).'"²

I have been reading a large number of posts on social media regarding the words *Justice* and *Accountability* this week. These two words dominate in posts relative to the recent trial and conviction of Derrick Chauvin in Minneapolis, a former police officer responsible for the death of George Floyd. So what is accountability and justice



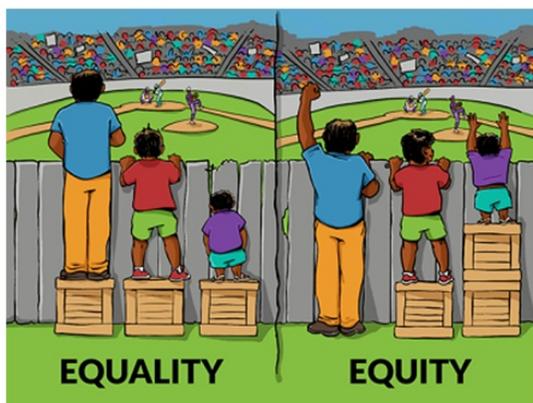
Richard Levins Morales, *We Feel You: The Ancestors*, 2020.

from a Biblical perspective? We get a beginning notion in the definitions above.

A perusal of the scriptures relative to accountability from a large volume of texts in both Hebrew and Christian tradition scripture focuses in on the notion of care and responsibility to each other and to God. As members of the community, if we step outside of the bounds of these important relationships, we are subject to being called out for our behavior. Both Hebrew and Christian tradition scripture have deep concern for the marginalized in culture. The 8th century BCE, prophets based their theology on the relationship between God and the marginalized. Jesus picked up on these themes and preached and taught upon them during his ministry. This theology is the basis for the miracle narratives and the center of his public ministry. God cares. God is gracious. We are subject to being held accountable for using our giftedness to serve God and those in our communities.

Accountability in scripture is an act of love, although it should be noted that texts like Matthew 25 point to a final accounting of one's life. Known as the "Judgment," this accounting has eternal consequences. These themes also get picked up in apocalyptic literature from the biblical narrative. That is not what's being addressed here, however. What is being addressed is the difference between *transactional* and *transformational* accountability.

Accountability calls out racism in all its forms, including systemic racism, the most insidious type - which even catches the most well-meaning, culturally competent people. The very notion that "certain" races of people are better than others is evil, and when backed up by "cherry picked" holy texts, is the very nuance of a system of oppression. The human condition cannot escape it. Humanity must hold itself accountable to a higher vision and a greater call that considers the creative tapestry created by God. Our very giftedness is called into question. And giftedness is never involved in the transactional. Using our giftedness is transformational.



Angus Maguire, *Illustrating Equality vs Equity*, Interaction Institute of Social Change, Chicago, IL, 2016.

So let's consider transformational accountability. When we apply accountability to a civil trial in a nation that pretends it is Christian, we should pause and ask ourselves, are we using the biblical definition, or did we kick it out of the way in favor of a political definition? If the latter and not the former is true, then we have transactional accountability. Holding any authority accountable for their actions using the notions of the biblical narrative rather

than the political is an act of love. Such accountability leads towards justice.

By its very nature justice is transformational in the biblical sense. Name a text from either testament that talks about justice and you will see some notion of repentance. Repentance at its very core transforms a person from a solitary self-centered journey towards a relationship with the God of love and justice and

community. This transformational relationship happens with all the people God has created. The goal of love and justice is to develop and build the Beloved Community. There is no justice without community. And in the biblical sense there is no community without love and justice at its core. Justice is used pejoratively in a transactional way when the marginalization of others is called justice. Some examples you ask? Try Jim Crow. Try voter suppression. Try gentrification. Try affordable housing. Try separate but equal. Try white supremacy and nationalism. All of these examples have been hailed as *justice* – but the makers of the laws and the systems are thinking about *just us* and not the whole tapestry of God’s creation. In the 1960’s the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. shared a quote from a sermon by 19th century abolitionist and pastor, the Rev. Theodore Parker in which he said, ***“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”***³ If this is true, then ultimately accountability, love and justice will prevail.

Secular culture steals the words accountability and justice too often and turns them into retribution. But the church must be careful because we also fall into the trap of using the secular definitions! Too often we use them to demonize the other instead of seeing the God Image in which they were created. Be on guard! “Vengeance is mine,” says the Lord (Romans 12:19). We must engage in these conversations around the notion of biblical accountability if we are ever to live into biblical justice. And without biblical accountability rooted in love and justice the Beloved Community will never happen. And the “thin place” that Jesus, in Luke calls the ***Kingdom of Heaven*** and in Matthew calls the ***Kingdom of God*** will elude us. And by the way, keep praying the ***Lord’s Prayer*** so that, perhaps, one day it will rub off on us.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN,
HALLOWED BE THY NAME.
THY KINGDOM COME.
THY WILL BE DONE
ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD,
AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES,
AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US,
AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM,
AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY,
FOR EVER AND EVER
AMEN

(UMH #895, Nashville, TN United Methodist Publishing House, 1989)

COURAGE TO DO JUSTICE

“O LORD, OPEN MY EYES THAT I MAY SEE THE NEEDS OF OTHERS.
OPEN MY EARS THAT I MAY HEAR THEIR CRIES;
OPEN MY HEART SO THAT THEY NEED NOT BE WITHOUT SUCCOR;
LET ME NOT BE AFRAID TO DEFEND THE WEAK BECAUSE OF THE ANGER OF THE

STRONG,
NOR AFRAID TO DEFEND THE POOR BECAUSE OF THE ANGER OF THE RICH.
SHOW ME WHERE LOVE AND HOPE AND FAITH ARE NEEDED,
AND USE ME TO BRING THEM TO THOSE PLACES.
AND SO OPEN MY EYES AND EARS
THAT I MAY THIS COMING DAY BE ABLE TO DO SOME WORK OF PEACE FOR THEE."
(Alan Paton, South Africa, UMH #456, Nashville, TN United Methodist Publishing
House, 1989)

¹ Rebekah Simon Peter, *Creating a Culture of Renewal*, 2021.

² Paul Louis Metzger, "What is Biblical Justice", *Christianity Today/Leadership Journal* © 2010.
Metzger is professor of Christian Theology & Theology of Culture at Multnomah Biblical Seminary
in Portland, Oregon.

³ John Haynes Holmes, Harvey Dee Brown, Helen Edmunds Redding, and Theodora Goldsmith,
Readings from Great Authors, Section - Justice: Theodore Parker, start pg. 17, quote pg. 18. Dodd,
Mead and Company, New York. 1918.

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

