

Corporate Social Responsibility as Redemption: A Biblical Approach to Restorative Justice in Supply Chains

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ABSTRACT

Modern supply chains often hide low-wage workers, unsafe conditions, and environmental harm, even when companies say they are doing corporate social responsibility (CSR). New human-rights due-diligence laws show that traditional CSR reports and audits are not enough to prevent abuse in complex value chains. This paper explores CSR as redemption, using biblical texts such as Micah 6:8, Isaiah 58, and Luke 19:8 to imagine business as part of God's work of justice and restoration. We link this vision with recent research on faith-driven CSR, supply-chain due diligence, worker-driven social responsibility programmes, and restorative justice in corporate settings. We then propose a simple conceptual framework that connects biblical redemption, ethical leadership, and practical steps like fair contracts, worker voice, and reparations. The aim is to help firms, churches, and civil society pursue supply chains that protect dignity and repair harm.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, Redemption, Biblical Principles, Restorative Justice, Supply Chains, Ethical Leadership, Workplace Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Global supply chains have delivered economic growth while simultaneously sustaining environmental degradation, labour exploitation, and modern slavery, particularly in low-cost production contexts. Although new human-rights and environmental due-diligence regulations aim to address these harms, empirical research shows that corporate responses remain largely procedural, privileging disclosure and audit compliance over substantive improvements in workers' lives (Strand et al., 2024; Schilling-Vacaflor & Gustafsson, 2024). CSR initiatives thus often function as reputational risk management rather than as mechanisms of accountability and repair. Biblical ethics offers a contrasting moral horizon. Scripture consistently links faithfulness to justice, mercy, and restoration in economic relationships (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 58:6–7; Luke 19:8–10). Redemption, in this tradition, encompasses liberation from oppression, restitution for wrongdoing, and the reordering of unjust systems. While existing religion-and-CSR scholarship shows that religiosity can influence corporate behaviour, it rarely examines how theological concepts such as repentance, restitution, and reconciliation might reshape supply-chain governance itself. At the same time, restorative justice and worker-driven social responsibility research emphasises harm, relationships, and remedy, offering practical alternatives to audit-centred CSR. Yet these approaches remain weakly connected to theological ethics and underdeveloped in mainstream supply-chain governance. This paper addresses that gap by conceptualising CSR as redemption and integrating biblical ethics with contemporary CSR, business-and-human-rights, and restorative justice debates.

The central problem addressed in this study is that much of contemporary CSR in supply chains remains managerial and reputation-driven, while theological and restorative justice resources that could deepen accountability and repair are under-utilised and weakly connected to supply-chain governance. Empirical research documents persistent gaps between corporate claims and workers' lived realities, even under new due diligence regimes (Strand et al., 2024; Kunz et al., 2023; Schilling-Vacaflor & Gustafsson, 2024). At the same time, religiosity-based CSR may be co-opted into existing corporate logics, while restorative justice approaches remain marginal in corporate contexts (Dimic et al., 2024; Wood, 2024).

Research Objectives

1. To conceptualise redemptive CSR as a biblically grounded approach centred on justice, restitution, and restored relationships in supply chains.
2. To synthesise insights from CSR, modern slavery, due diligence, religion-and-business, and restorative justice literatures.
3. To develop a concise conceptual framework and propositions linking redemption to ethical leadership and worker-centred governance mechanisms.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to CSR scholarship by reframing responsibility as a justice-oriented process of repair rather than symbolic compliance. It extends religion-CSR research by treating redemption as an organising ethical principle rather than a background value, and it links biblical ethics to contemporary debates on modern slavery governance and human-rights due diligence. By integrating restorative justice insights, the study offers a coherent framework relevant to scholars, policymakers, faith-based organisations, and businesses seeking supply chains that better reflect justice, dignity, and repair.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

The framework positions redemption as a normative organising principle for CSR rather than a metaphorical add-on. Biblically, redemption entails confession, restitution, and restored relationships (Numbers 5:5–7; Luke 19:8–10). Applied to supply chains, it demands acknowledgement of harm, restructuring of exploitative practices, and participatory remedy.

Ethical Leadership as a Mediator

Ethical and faith-shaped leadership translates redemptive commitments into organisational routines. Leadership research demonstrates that ethical and servant leadership strengthens CSR quality and stakeholder trust, particularly when aligned with transparent governance and worker voice (Zhu et al., 2025).

Restorative Justice as Governance Practice

Restorative justice bridges theology and practice by centring harm, relationships, and repair. In supply chains, this implies moving beyond audits toward worker-driven mechanisms that address root causes of exploitation and co-create remedies.

Conceptual Model

Figure 1: Conceptual Model integrating biblical redemption, ethical leadership, redemptive CSR strategies, and restorative justice outcomes, highlighting feedback loops between learning, accountability, and governance reform.

Research Propositions

Guided by the conceptual model, the study advances four propositions:

- **P1:** Integration of biblical redemption principles into CSR is positively associated with stakeholder trust and moral legitimacy.
- **P2:** Firms adopting worker-driven restorative mechanisms within a redemptive CSR framework achieve stronger justice outcomes than audit-centred CSR approaches.
- **P3:** Ethical leadership mediates the relationship between leader religiosity and the adoption of redemptive CSR strategies.
- **P4:** A redemptive framing of CSR is positively associated with organisational learning and structural change in supply-chain governance.

Note: These propositions are discussed once in the discussion section to avoid repetition.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to integrate research on CSR and supply chains, modern slavery, human-rights due diligence, religion and CSR, and restorative justice. Consistent with established guidance for theory-building reviews (Sauer, 2023; Paul & Menzies, 2023), the review prioritises conceptual clarity and synthesis over exhaustive enumeration.

Review Design

Peer-reviewed English-language journal articles (2015–2025) were identified through Web of Science, Scopus, ScienceDirect, JSTOR, Emerald, and Wiley, supplemented by Google Scholar for citation tracking. Inclusion criteria required explicit engagement with organisational or supply-chain responsibility. Purely theological sources were used normatively to inform the conceptual framework rather than as part of the empirical corpus.

Synthesis Approach

Findings were synthesised into four thematic streams:

1. CSR and supply-chain governance
2. Modern slavery and due diligence
3. Religion and faith-based CSR
4. Restorative justice and organisational repair

Inclusion/Exclusion and Quality Appraisal

Peer-reviewed journal articles with identifiable DOIs, addressing CSR, modern slavery, due diligence, faith-based CSR, or restorative justice, were retained. Purely theological studies were included normatively; legal commentaries without explicit governance analysis were excluded.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

A structured coding template captured study details, methods, theoretical lens, CSR conceptualisation, and reported outcomes. Studies were grouped into the four consolidated thematic streams listed above.

Figure 1: PRISMA-aligned flow diagram

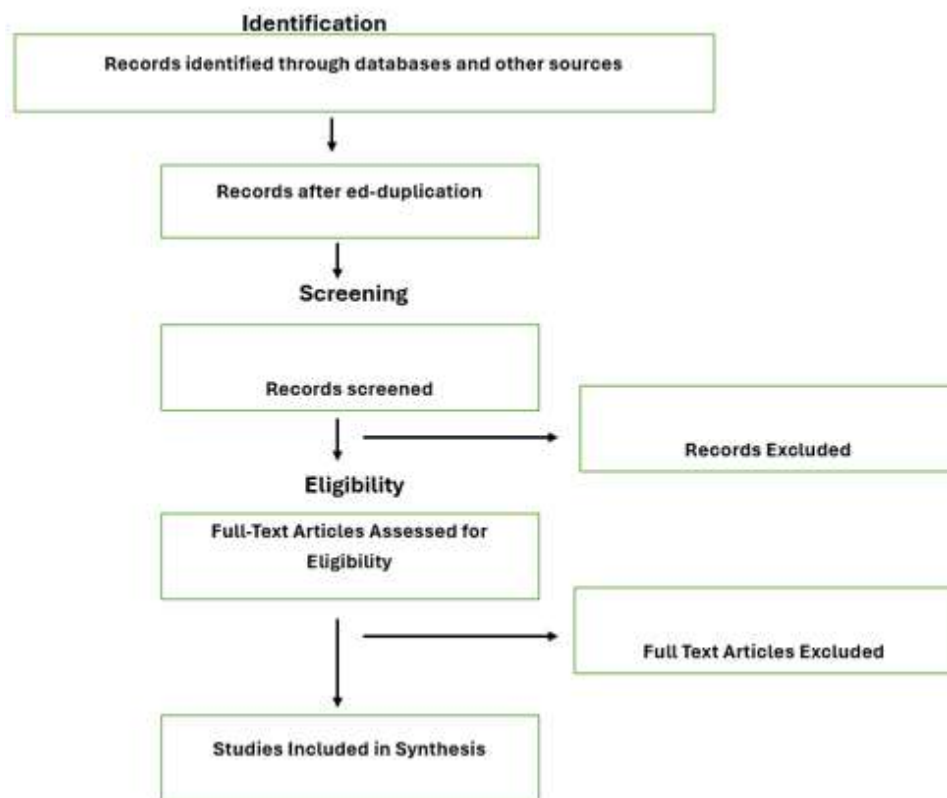


Table 1: Summary of Reviewed Studies

Author(s)	Year	Focus / Theme	Method	Sample / Region	Key Findings	Relevance to CSR / Redemption
Strand et al.	2024	Modern slavery in supply chains	Systematic Review	Global	Audit-based CSR often fails to improve workers' lives	Highlights need for worker-centred and restorative approaches
Schilling-Vacaflor & Gustafsson	2024	Human rights & environmental due diligence	Empirical	Europe	Compliance-oriented CSR dominates; limited substantive impact	Shows procedural compliance alone is insufficient
Dimic et al.	2024	Religiosity and CSR	Quantitative	USA	Christian values influence corporate social responsibility adoption	Supports faith-informed CSR frameworks
Wood	2024	Restorative justice in organisations	Conceptual	UK / US	Emphasizes harm, relationships, and repair	Connects restorative justice to CSR practice
Amer	2024	Religion & CSR systematic review	Systematic Review	Global	Religiosity affects CSR implementation and ethical decision-making	Provides theoretical basis for redemption-informed CSR

Dillard et al.	2024	Audit-based governance limitations	Critical Analysis	Global	Human-rights due diligence often insufficient	Justifies need for redemptive CSR beyond compliance
Rothchild	2024	Worker-driven social responsibility	Conceptual	Global	Worker-driven models improve accountability	Directly supports P2 (restorative mechanisms)
Fudge & LeBaron	2024	Regulatory design in CSR	Case Study	India	Regulatory regimes effective only with worker participation	Shows importance of participatory governance
Kimbrell et al.	2023	Restorative justice programs	Systematic Review	Juvenile justice / Generalizable	Restorative programs reduce harm and support repair	Provides conceptual transfer to workplace CSR
Karikari et al.	2025	Biblical ethics in corporate governance	Conceptual	Ghana	Biblical principles combat corruption and guide ethical practices	Supports moral and ethical foundations of redemptive CS

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Proposition 1: Redemption-informed CSR enhances stakeholder trust and legitimacy when harm is acknowledged, restitution provided, and affected workers involved. While rooted in ethical principles, this approach is also applicable to secular CSR and human-rights due diligence frameworks.

Proposition 2: Worker-driven restorative mechanisms are more effective than audit-centred CSR in delivering tangible improvements in safety, wages, and voice. Co-created grievance mechanisms and participatory governance support durable outcomes.

Proposition 3: Ethical leadership mediates the adoption of redemptive CSR strategies, shaping organisational culture, accountability, and learning. Leaders must embed moral and ethical values into governance systems to avoid insularity or moral self-satisfaction.

Proposition 4: Redemptive framing promotes organisational learning and structural change. Due-diligence systems succeed when aligned with workers' lived realities, translating intention into measurable outcomes.

Policy Implications:

Regulatory frameworks are strengthened when they empower worker organisations, social intermediaries, and affected communities. Faith-based networks can complement secular governance by embedding principles of justice, reconciliation, and restitution into procurement and leadership formation.

CONCLUSION

This study reframes CSR as a redemptive practice oriented toward justice, restitution, and restored relationships in global supply chains. By integrating biblical ethics with CSR, business-and-human-rights, and restorative justice scholarship, it advances a concise conceptual model that shifts evaluation of CSR from disclosure to genuine repair. The contribution is primarily theoretical, offering redemption as a justice-centred organising principle applicable beyond faith-based contexts. Ethical leadership, worker-centred governance, and restorative mechanisms are central mediators of CSR effectiveness. Future research should empirically test the proposed propositions through comparative studies across religious and secular organisations, evaluating

CSR by its capacity to repair harm and restore dignity. This provides a more demanding, ethically grounded standard for responsible business in global supply chains.

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