

Do Christians have a role in seeking Justice?

These are speaking notes from one of three presentations on Biblical Justice and do not address the topic comprehensively. In addition, due to time constraints in preparing the presentation I did not have time to review it with others or vet the contents. Consult your bible to test that the materials or concepts we present are accurate.

In Luke 4:17-21 Jesus read from the book of Isaiah and stated – the Lord had anointed him to

- Proclaim good news to the poor.
- freedom for prisoners
- recovery of sight for the blind,
- set the oppressed free,

Justice is the order that God seeks to establish in His creation (kingdom) where all people receive the benefits of life with Him. *It is about what God values and not what we think.*

Biblical Justice has several aspects. Our focus is on two.

- The standard by which penalties are assigned for breaking the obligations of the society.
- The standard that the advantages of social life are handed out, including material goods, rights of participation, opportunities and liberties.

What are the current day attitudes and definition of justice?

We are shaped by our culture, our history and cannot escape its influences without knowledge, wisdom, and personal effort to increase our understanding. It also involves abandonment of some personal beliefs and opinion.

In America, we have been greatly influenced by Puritan teachings and some Christian circles to downplay broader justice while highlighting personal morality.

Timothy Keller said:

Modern people tend to see the word “righteousness” in the Bible, they tend to think of righteousness in terms of private morality, such as sexual chastity or diligence in Prayer and Bible study.

However, in the Bible, the Hebrew tzadeqah (su da' ka) refers to day-to-day living in which a person conducts all relationships in family and society with fairness, generosity and equity.

Another aspect of Justice that I am just now becoming more fully aware --- biblical justice requires restoration to wholeness in community. Restoration is a key element of justice and provided to us in our salvation.

Justice Holman bible dictionary (source Logos bible software)

Justice does not merely relieve the immediate needs of those in a crisis (Psalm 76:9; Isaiah 45:8; Isaiah 58:11; Isaiah 62:1-2). I.e. welfare, food stamps.

Justice calls for restoration.

Helping the needy means setting them back on their feet, restoration, ending the oppression (Psalm 68:5-10 ; Psalm 10:15-16 ; compare 107; Psalm 113:7-9). Enabling those who are vulnerable (both by outside forces and made vulnerable because of their behavior) to become a member of the community.

Timothy Keller – In what is Biblical Justice said:

The word “charity” conveys a good but optional activity.
Charity cannot be a requirement, for then it would not be charity.

Gifts to the poor are called “acts of righteousness,” in Matthew 6:1-2.

In the book of Job, Job calls failure to help the poor a sin.

Who are those in need in our community and nation?

When our bible stories were written most cultures were agrarian -- The bible describes taking up the care and cause of widows, orphans, immigrants and the Poor—these have been referred to as “the quartet of the vulnerable.”

In our modern world, this quartet has expanded to include the refugee, the migrant worker, the homeless, those who served time for crimes and many others.

Those in

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• poverty• Disabled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Those considering or have had abortions
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • without sufficient work • those jailed and are prisoners • gang members • individuals addicted to drugs or alcohol • sex workers and those who enslave them • individuals suffering from poor mental health • migrant workers, aliens, • homeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • those impacted by drought, economic upheavals • victims of violence and those committing violence • Sexual deviants. Rapist, child molesters. • those without hope • those impacted and displaced by war • Those that cause and profit from war, economic turmoil, and the suffering of others.
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and though there are more – just for fun lets add leaders of our government, institutions and business without wisdom and a sense of justice

Over these past months, I have been contemplating Grace and its meaning. It revolved around – How do I think about others and myself – is the Mexican peasant who entered this country illegally and picks food from our fields a human with a soul, or a soul in a human body. If they are – a soul in a human body, what are the implications for the gospel and grace.

.... Pause

How Justice or Injustice played out in our past and current time in our nation?

I found the next part of this exploration of Justice challenging and difficult.

If America has been greatly influenced by Puritan teachings and some Christian sects in our views of Justice, then history and culture shapes us in ways we might not recognize.

Our history filled with strong individualism and personal independence, marvelous opportunity, abundance, and freedoms. It also has a darker side that is seldom discussed or acknowledged.

Defining, discussing, understanding or pursuing Justice is messy when justice collides with history and current practices of a nation.

As we explore and dip our toes into issues of Justice in America the purpose of this reflection is not to berate or beat down ourselves, our culture, nation or institutions but to begin to look closer -- is there a gap between God's desire for us and our nation and world and what might be our role as Christians.

God provides authorities to governments.

- Rulers and governments hold power because God has granted them authority
- God has placed limits on this granted authority -
 - God grants and takes away power.
 - Justice is commanded by God of rulers
 - Governments are to act as God's agents of justice. They are worldly arbitrators of justice and God warns them about injustice.
 - Governments are to act protect people from evil and promote the good of all people.
- To fail to do so breaks the bond between God and nations.

We live in a democracy with civic responsibilities to elect and monitor the policies and actions of government. Government has the power to usher in justice or allow injustice.

Governments should provide a check on powerful people, institutions, and interests in the society that, if left unchecked, might run over their fellow citizens, the economy, and certainly the poor.

As Christians living in a democracy some say it is a Christians responsibility to seek to influence governments to assure they operate justly and that they protect society's weakest members, including the poor ([Ex. 23:6](#)), foreigners ([Ex. 22:21](#); [Deut. 27:19](#); [Zech. 7:10](#)), and the helpless ([Ps. 82:3-4](#)).

Ephesians 6:12 says we struggle against rulers, authorities, and the dark powers of this world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.

We all could name World leaders past and present and the injustices they brought to humanity - the Pharaoh, Herod, Nero, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Lo Pot, a host of dictators and even some leaders in America's past and present, have facilitated and carried out injustice.

Government and Politics – a subject we all loathe to discuss.

Politics is simply the art of determining public policy, actions, laws, budgets, etc.

William Booth 1829 - 1912) a British [Methodist](#) preacher who founded [The Salvation Army](#) and became its first [General](#). Said a 100 years ago, that the chief danger of the 20 th Century is that the day will arrive when there will be politics without God.

What would happen if a majority of Christians in America sought to influence government policies and actions with a strong understanding and commitment to biblical justice and Gods will for this world and us? If not a majority, what if 50% made a commitment to biblical justice. If not 50%, if 10%.

What happens if we fail to advocate justice? Will we as individuals and the church be as Jesus described -- your salt has lost its savour leaving ... the result might be leaving the world to powers of darkness? The Greek meaning gets more to the point – become foolish.

It has been said that a person must wisely understand the bible and ones time in order to influence ones time.

A contributors to Sojourners wrote -Because of so much spiritualization we have forgotten that the people who Rejoiced at Jesus' coming were the poor, the victims of a corrupt and abusive social System imposed by the Roman Empire and its native collaborators. (Sojourners)

John Hart in Christianity Today wrote -- English culture in 1787, the time of Wilberforce 1 efforts to eliminate the slavery, was similar to postmodern America in its callousness, indifference, and hedonism. The Empire's cultural elite had made great strides in normalizing debauchery.

If you were asked to reflect on what you have observed in your lifetime of what has occurred in our nations – its past and what is occurring today, what would you identify as justice issues in our culture and nation?

How did these issues come to being?

In Exodus 20 the scriptures tell us -- God punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

¹ William Wilberforce (24 August 1759 – 29 July 1833) was an English politician and who headed the English parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade for twenty years until the passage of the [Slave Trade Act of 1807](#).

I was a bit confused and troubled about this passage and notion until I dug deeper into its meaning. God does not punish children for what their parents or grandparents do -- children imitate their parents and are infected with their sins.

A lighter hearted example -- Michele and I have two young grandsons Mathis and Bennett. At about age, 7 months there were two things they wanted most pause Their parent's iPhone and TV channel changer. They saw how important these instruments were.

It is sad and a bit scary that following the example of parents and grandparents, can results in racism, anger, violence, greed, drug and alcohol abuse, sexism and sexual molestation, nationalism, and the list goes on. These infections can span generations and centuries.

We are not predestined to follow injustice or sin.

Sins imprinted upon us by ancestors, culture or nation - are our responsibility to explore and address, reject, and can be overcome by our relationship with Jesus.

Intergenerational injustice is a whole study in its self. I have a few articles if you are interested -- let me know.

Last week I commented to Pastor Eric that the pairing of Job with the Gospel was delicious. Yes, I am a bit strange. Is pairing of scripture similar to the pairing of a French dip sandwich with ajus sauce.

To fuller understand the intergeneration's sin - I believe it is best paired with the biblical reality of we reap what we sow.

(Galatians 6:7-8) paraphrased

A person, institution, nation -- reaps what they sow. There is no escape from that law. If you sow carrots, you get carrots. If you sow strawberries, you get strawberries. If you sow

Good things in your life, you reap good things. If you sow sin in your life, you reap the Consequences of that sin as do others.

Is racism an intergenerational injustice --?

- First two Slaves arrived in 1624, then soon after 20.
- Black slaves were not treated like white indentured servants from Europe.
- The slide towards the sin of racism began in America.

- 3.9 million slaves by 1860
- You've heard the stories of how slaves were treated.
- Civil War
- Reconstruction,
- In no time, gains won as a result of the Civil War were eliminated by congressional action and failure to enforce those gains in southern states. Then the cancer was fed by other injustices. It began to spread and infect the whole nation.
- Jim Crow, denial of rights and opportunities that most white Americans take for granted.
- Racial slurs, KKK, hangings, murders, bombings, churches bombed and burned, and more.

While the worst outrages have ceased, many things have not changed. While racism is most evident against blacks, it impacts all non-pink skinned people.

Racism is perhaps America's most noticeable intergenerational injustice and sin.

One more racism story – do you know the story of how civil war statues, monuments, and placards were placed across the south. The daughters of the confederacy – wealthy socialites. successfully carried out a campaign to portray Confederate leaders and soldiers as heroic, slavery as a benevolent institution, the Civil war an attempt to repel northern aggression, etc. When the word Yankee is used in the south, it is a slur word. Their ideology was also targeted at children making its way into classroom in the south and books negative about the south were defaced or removed.

Those who write the history and with the loudest mouths win – intergenerational justice – reaping what is sown. Does this example occur elsewhere? I am afraid it does.

Short video on Daughters of Confederacy and other materials ---

<https://www.vox.com/videos/2017/10/25/16545362/southern-socialites-civil-war-history>

I would like to explore three other areas, that perhaps are worthy of being described as intergenerational injustice in America. I'm pretty confident there are more.

Economic Injustice – Poverty Greed Growing Wealth Inequity.

Could our economic structure fall into the category of injustice?

Poverty and inequality in the United States is rapidly growing...again. 43 million live in poverty, of which 15 million are children. Top 1% controls most of wealth. Only 43% of Americans could weather an emergency requiring \$1,000. Most have nothing saved for retirement, no stocks, bonds, or pensions. They live paycheck to paycheck. A Dow Jones stock level on January 26 of 26,616 is immaterial when a single mom and her child live in their car.

How do we deal with the growing inequality in the U.S.? In addition, how can we find innovative ways of providing jobs and ensuring fairness to ensure family economic success here at home? What will happen in our future as Artificial Intelligence and further use of robots starts to replace middle class jobs (computers now write some sports page articles, computers do a better job in stock investments, and one day in writing computer code. They might replace or diminish the need for Lawyers, physicians and mine and your jobs could be next. Some of your or our children or grandchildren could be in the unemployment and food bank line.

Do Christians have obligations in regard to economic policy and directions and in domestic and global poverty?

Keller in *Generous Justice* - outlines what Old Testament prophets listed as causes of *poverty*.

- oppression,
- a judicial system weighted in favor of the powerful (Leviticus 19:15), o (Exodus 22:25-27),
- Unjustly low wages (Jeremiah 22:13; James 5:1-6).
- whenever great disparities arose, the prophets assumed that to some degree it was the result of selfish individualism and greed rather than concern with the common good
- Ultimately, the prophets blame the rich when extremes of wealth and poverty in society appear (Amos 5:11-12; Ezekiel 22:29; Micah 2:2; Isaiah 5:8).
- Principle of restoration - poverty or any issue results at least in part from larger structural or societal problems beyond an individual's control that we must address those larger issues in order to be just

Poverty, underemployment, no employment, rigging of the economy and the price of goods and services by powerful monopolies and systems, economic theories and ideologies that warp our economy impacting great numbers of this nations people, runaway greed, loudest voices drowning out voices of justice. Money is power.

Lucky they did not have lobbyist back them with large campaign funding, special treats, or job offers from rich and powerful interest they were expected to oversee - when their

terms ended or they stopped working at a federal oversight agency or the pentagon, or jobs for their aides or family members and friends, but perhaps they did with the bible verses speaking out about taking bribes.

Criminal Justice – and Criminal injustice?

Tim ably presented a glimpse into our broken criminal justice system –

Refresher points.

- America's justice system is broken.
- The United States has the largest prison population in the world -
- 2.2 million adults were incarcerated in US federal and state [prisons](#), and county [jails](#) in 2013
- In total, 6,899,000 adults were under correctional supervision (probation, parole, jail, or prison) in 2013

Felons are barred in most states from voting, in some cases receiving benefits, and find it difficult to find jobs.

Post prisons support for an individuals to get back on their feet is dismal and inadequate.

Biblical justice requires Restoration. We are failing.

["Is militarism one of America's intergenerational sins, as some have proposed?"](#)

We become uncomfortable when discussions are raised of our personal or national idolatries. I know it hits a raw nerve when my Idols are the point of discussion. So I will use the words of a national military hero to probe the accusation of Militarism.

Eisenhower – Allied Commander for WW2 and president had these things to say:

- A vital element in keeping the peace is our military establishment. Our arms must be mighty, ready for instant action, so that no potential aggressor may be tempted to risk his own destruction... I think we all can support that position.
- Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications to our economy, political systems even our spiritual wellbeing.
- We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military–industrial complex.

- Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.
This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, and the hopes of its children.
- *Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.*

The issues Eisenhower warned us about have grown geometrically worse in every way since Eisenhower said these things in the early 1960's. There are countless examples in which we do not have time to identify or discuss. I fear we all would be dismayed to know the truth of what has and is being done in the name of ourselves and our country.

"When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered." - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "Revolution of Values," 1967

In great humility and a sense of urgency - I fear that with these issue it has become an Ephesians 6:12 issue - we struggle against rulers, authorities, and the dark powers of this world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realm.

Read history, books, news and articles broadly and connect the dots.

Alistair Begg, a pastor from Cleveland with a wide following of his podcast, commented that he often reads several newspapers – NY Times, Wall Street Journal and other current events publications. He said it is necessary that we hold the newspaper and all we hear see or think -- in one hand and the bible in the other.

What about the Church – People of God

One of the videos the Justice Seekers watched pointed out the silence of the church on Issues of Justice.

Timothy Keller in an article Kingdom Centered prayer –

- Throughout the Old Testament, the people of God continually fall into periods of spiritual stagnation and then cultural accommodation to the idol worship and practices of surrounding pagan societies.

- Then there is a turning to God, the raising up of new leaders, and a restoration of spiritual vision and vitality.

Keller makes the statement that the church has accommodated and enabled cultural and nationalism to infect and diminish God, introducing secular (pagan) ideology and theism into the church. I fear he is correct.

Pastor Keller says church renewal occurs with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and only then will sleepy, stagnant Christians wake up, repent not just from behavioral sins but attitudes of the heart and, When those who claim Christ recognize they are not in alignment with Christ and his values.

When Jesus appeared in Israel they were looking for a political campaign, and Jesus tells them about the nature of the kingdom, Jesus was crucified.

As we prepare to close.

In summary – what is injustice?

The forces that deprive people of what is basic for community life are condemned as oppression (Mic. 2:2; Eccles. 4:1). What do you consider basics?

To oppress is to use power for one's own advantage in depriving others of their basic rights in the community (Mark 12:40). Injustice is either a sin of commission or of omission.

Isaiah 1:17 --- To do justice is to correct abuse and to meet the needs of those deprived of life and the benefits of community.

From Bethany H. Hoang and things we learned from Wilberforce—

Christians often think of their own problems and personal sin as paramount seems to focus less on community or national sins.

Could it be that our journey towards justice begins when our eyes are open to suffering and injustice and it breaks our hearts?

How do we escape from understanding justice as a niche ministry to be done by the brave and marginal few and bring it into our whole heads, our whole hearts, our whole lives?

Hoang goes on to say:

The pursuit of justice involves first a constant intent to “learn to do right.” We learn first by reading scripture with new eyes, absorbing its continual call to justice.

That in the midst of the unbearableness of the pain, we are not to shrink back but rather rise up. We are called to rise up, engage injustice, take “the pain of man’s inhumanity to man,” and bring it to the foot of the cross. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for another. John 15:13

Back to the Mark Twain -- It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.

Biblical scripture on false weights and balances, applies to more than determining the fair cost of a quart of grain. but I found wrestling with the scales and balances in its application to justice to be confusing. I wrestled with this over the course of several weeks.

Then it came to me:

In Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus was asked --

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And He said to him, “(A) YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ ³⁸ This is the great and [a]foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, ‘(B) YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ ⁴⁰ (C) On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Honor God

Show love for my neighbor as for myself

Timothy Keller in How God's Grace Makes us Just --- said ---

“Grace is the key to it all. What procures our salvation is God’s lavish love and mercy.

It is the generosity of God, the freeness of his salvation that lays the foundation for the society of justice for all.

I cannot think of many situations, in my own life or the world that Honoring God, Loving other as ourselves, and fully applying grace would not work. So many of our pains could have been avoided.

Some will immediately say this is too simple and it will not work in complex situation of relationships, economics, issues of war and peace, in community, internationally and we don't understand how bad my sister, aunt or brother are or how bad are those drug addicted criminals, Russians, Iranians, North Koreans and radical Muslims are ... suggestions from the bible just does not work in these situations.

Did Jesus tell the truth? Is he the truth, life and the way?

Biblical scripture warns us to not follow the princes of this world, to not follow the crowd in wrongdoing or to not listen to false prophets.

Thorough justice can be uncomfortable as it challenges our personal beliefs, and will be socially disruptive, in its initial stages.

What holds us back – Keller said it is difficult spiritually: our hearts are small and reluctant to make sacrifices for others, and our hearts are susceptible to legalistic and misplaced guilt.

Deutonomy 31, prior to crossing of the river Jordan to the Promised Land -⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Jesus Himself promises that He will redeem all things, that He will make all things new. He will be with us to the ends of the earth.