

Voices: Souls, Bodies & Strangers: On Social Justice & the Gospel

September 26, 2018

In [the last installment](#), we saw even secularized versions of social justice can aid Christians in seeing what is already within Scripture: God's concern for a rightly ordered world.

Here, we will consider the heart of the [Social Justice & The Gospel](#) statement that concerns for justice in the world are at odds with a Christian vision of discipleship.

[Others have explored this at length](#), and so what I want to state here is a broad outline of a Christian vision of a rightly ordered world consistent with the Scriptures and which does not divorce our lives in the world from our call to be disciples.

Individual justice: God's relationship to me

Justice, according to Scripture, consists at one level of a right relationship between God and the person. When Paul talks about "righteousness," what he means is not some kind of abstracted debt, but the making right of a real and fractured communion between God and the person.

To be right before God is to join oneself with the person of Jesus Christ and to follow Jesus in a life of discipleship. For the New Testament, there is no divide between one's confession of faith and one's discipleship; the two confirm one another.

And so, justice is at one level you and I being restored to fellowship with God by the cross of Christ, raised up to walk by the power of the Spirit in the way of Jesus.

We enact this justice, however, as embodied creatures, people whose lives are entangled with one another.

Social justice: God's relationship to us

Repeatedly through Paul's letters, we find Paul naming the churches as "one body" comprised of many bodies or as a single household in which many members of the family dwell.

The justice of God bears a corporate shape now, in which each person is given what he or she needs, and each gives to others what is owed to them. Where there are inequities, the people of God are to make those right. Where there are injuries, the people of God are to heal them. Where there are those without enough, the people of God are to share.

The justice of God cannot be, then, simply my possession; to deny our relation with one another in Christ is to deny that God is up to something bigger than my piety.

This righteousness—this justice of God—recognizes that in the world things are not equal, that there are rich and poor, weak and strong, oppressed and oppressor. To be of the people of God is not to begrudge giving or sharing, but to see giving, sharing and healing as fleshing out what God's justice among us looks like, making right these inequities. The justice which each person attests to—that we have been made right with God—has a corporate form, in which we set right the broken ways among one another.

Justice in the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount—among other places—sets the bar of God’s justice quite high. As disciples, we are to give and render goodness to those who are our friends *and* our enemies, the familiar *and* the stranger.

Accordingly, God’s justice, which creates a new people in the world, reaches out to make the paths straight and fill in the valleys, to welcome the coming of God’s just kingdom into the world, and to make sure we have not put barriers in the way of those who are meek, poor and humiliated.

This is not a kingdom which Christians construct or a justice which Christians began. But it is a justice which Christians are compelled to extend into the world, giving to each what is due them and what is needed that all might be able to join in the fullness of God’s vision for what our life together should be like.

In this way, God’s justice is always social. It is always for the broad scope of God’s creation, with God’s people as the witnesses and bearers of this justice, this vision of what creation should be like.

The question we must ask when faced with the multitude of suffering in the world is not, “In light of the good news of the gospel, why should Christians concern themselves with this?” Rather, the question is, “In light of the good news of the gospel, how can Christians *not* concern themselves with this?”

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