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A Doctrine of Social Justice

Biblical social justice is living in just and righteous relationships with one another. It does not simply require the righting of wrongs, but also generosity and social concern, especially for the poor and vulnerable.



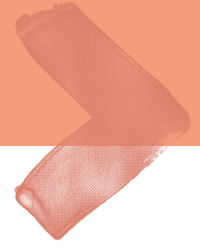
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Commission

Adventure Together



Executive Summary

Definition

Biblical social justice is living in just and righteous relationships with one another. It does not simply require the righting of wrongs, but also generosity and social concern, especially for the poor and vulnerable.

Application

The New Testament covenant community, the church, is to demonstrate and exemplify what the apostle James calls, “the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’” first, in and among its members, and also, as agents of the Kingdom, in and among the people and communities in which they live, and work.

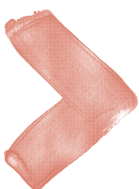
No-one is or can be saved by good works, but those who are saved will do good works.

As believers, one with Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, we are called to advance the Kingdom of God by engaging with the world around us to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is near, and indeed that it is within us; to show His power, love and mercy, and share the gospel by word and deed, in the places to which God has called us. This call to show as well as share can extend from simple acts of kindness, includes advocacy for and with individuals, to speaking up and standing up for powerless and oppressed people.

The church is not the government of an earthly nation, and therefore cannot legislate for the conduct, needs and circumstances of all its peoples. Yet as a type of embassy of the Kingdom of God, its members are called to preach the gospel in every nation, and bear witness to God’s justice, goodness and mercy by demonstrations of his love and power, and by standing for justice and against oppression.

The church is called to be a place where poverty is addressed and relieved, because of the radical love among its members. Local churches are called to bring support and material relief to churches where there is a lack.

In addition we are called to do good to all people in ways which are visible and unmistakeably good, which are free of discrimination, and value every person as made in the image of God, worthy of kindness, and in need of the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

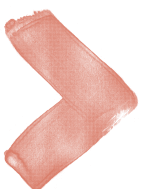




Theological position and breadth

- Salvation is by grace through faith alone, not by works.
- Good works and ministry with the poor are a natural expression of saving faith.
- “The ministry of the word [evangelism], though it does not function properly apart from deed ministry, addresses the most radical and foundational roots of human need.”
- “Word and deed are equally necessary, mutually interdependent, and inseparable ministries, each carried out with the single purpose of the spread of the kingdom of God”
- Word and deed are perfectly illustrated in the life and ministry of Jesus. As believers we are called to follow him in preaching good news to the poor, doing justice, and being merciful.
- The church is the body of Christ and the agent of the Kingdom of God, bearing the presence, authority and heart of God into our world and communities, demonstrating His love, power and kindness in every situation as we have opportunity.
- Individual believers are called to advance the Kingdom of God, bearing the presence, authority and heart of God into our world and communities, demonstrating His love, power and kindness in every situation as we have opportunity.
- Planting and discipling churches that express in word and deed the heart of God in remembering the poor is an indispensable element in the apostolic commission.
- Christians are called to bear witness to God’s love of justice, hatred of injustice, and to expose and stand against oppression and injustice.

Doing social justice in our everyday lives, in the context of a just, righteous and restored relationship with God, is a necessary expression of our faith, a means of advancing the Kingdom of God, and an effective context and means to evangelism





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Application

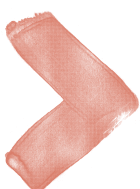
Social justice and ministry with the poor:

- Within the church
- Social justice through the church

Commission theological position and breadth

- Included
- Not included

Summary





A Doctrine of Social Justice: Introduction

Definition: A biblical doctrine of social justice.

Justice, biblically, is righteousness enacted. The righteous are those who are “right with God, and therefore committed to putting right all other relationships.”⁽¹⁾ Therefore:

A Doctrine of social justice

Social justice is living in just and righteous relationships with one another. “Doing justice includes not only the righting of wrongs, but generosity and social concern, especially toward the poor and vulnerable”⁽²⁾

... and its implications for us

A doctrine of social justice has to answer the question ‘How does God require us to relate to our neighbour?’

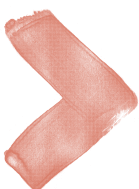
Conclusion

The answer, briefly, is - that we must love our neighbour as ourselves, and act accordingly.

In the Old Testament the term ‘neighbour’ was defined by those in the covenant community, Israel.

In the New Testament Jesus redefines our definition of neighbour to include anyone in need.⁽³⁾

The New Testament covenant community, the church, is to demonstrate and exemplify this radical love in and among its members, and also, as agents of the Kingdom of God, in the world around them.





Social justice: the Bible's big story

Our understanding of biblical social justice is founded on the biblical account of creation, the fall, redemption and consummation ⁽⁴⁾; thus on God's word, His revelation about Himself, including the ultimate revelation, Jesus, the Living Word; and is to be lived out in His body, the church.

The biblical framework

Behind the meta-narrative of the Bible lies an even more fundamental revelation, the revelation of God Himself: His existence; His nature; His character; His power; His love; His purposes.

God's revealed moral attributes (goodness, love, mercy, grace, patience, holiness, righteousness, justice, jealousy and wrath ⁽⁵⁾), together with other aspects revealed by Him to His creation, reflect why and how He created and redeemed us.

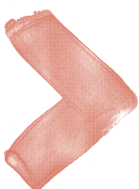
God's names in scripture reveal His character perhaps more succinctly than any other description. One of the fullest names ascribed by God to Himself, particularly regarding His character, is recorded in Exodus.

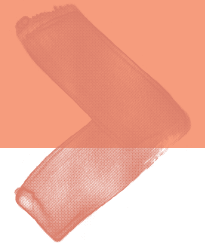
"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the father's to the third and fourth generation." ⁽⁶⁾

The totality of the bible reveals that God is a God of love and justice; and that His justice includes a fullness of mercy and generosity. ⁽⁷⁾

Who are the poor?

John Stott helpfully identifies four categories of poor people described in the more than 200 Old Testament references. "First, and economically speaking, there are the indigent poor, who are deprived of the basic necessities of life. Second, and behaviourally speaking, there are the indolent poor, who are responsible for becoming impoverished because of their own behaviour. Thirdly, and sociologically speaking, there are the powerless poor, who are oppressed victims of human injustice. Fourthly, and spiritually speaking, there are the humble poor, who acknowledge their helplessness, and look to God alone for their salvation." ⁽⁸⁾





A biblical view of the causes of poverty

The Bible tells of God's view of and response to poverty in all its manifestations. Tim Keller writes that "Poverty ... is seen in the Bible as a very complex phenomenon. Several factors are usually intertwined." However he summarises these as "oppression, calamity, and personal moral failure. Having surveyed the Bible on these texts numerous times, I have concluded that the emphasis is usually on the larger structural factors" ⁽⁹⁾.

Righteousness, justice and mercy in the Old Testament

A biblical understanding of these three words, or the word groups associated with them, is vital to an understanding of a biblical view of the term "social justice".

"The term for "mercy" is the Hebrew word *chesedh*, God's unconditional grace and compassion. The word for "justice" is the Hebrew term *mishpat*. ⁽¹⁰⁾ In Micah 6:8 "mishpat puts the emphasis on the action, *chesedh* puts it on the attitude [or motive] behind the action" ⁽¹¹⁾.

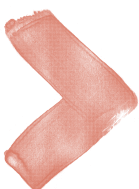
Alex Motyer defines the biblical word *tzadeqah*, commonly translated "righteous", as those "right with God, and therefore committed to putting right all other relationships." ⁽¹²⁾

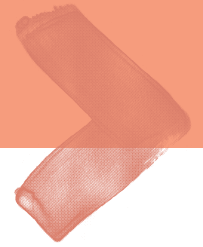
Thus, "Rectifying justice is *mishpat*. It means punishing wrongdoers and caring for the victims of unjust treatment. Primary Justice, or *tzadeqah* is behaviour that, if it was prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else." ⁽¹¹⁾
"When these two words, *tzadeqah* and *mishpat*, are tied together, as they are over three dozen times, the English expression that best conveys the meaning is "social justice" ... [e.g.] "The Lord loves social justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love" (Psalm 33:5)." ⁽¹³⁾

Social justice: the Mosaic Law

Contemporary Relevance

"Every command [from the Old Testament] reflects principles at some level that are binding on Christians (14)" Having quoted this from Craig Blomberg, Keller adds, in relation to how we conduct ourselves as citizens of a secular society, "It is clearly God's will that all societies reflect His concern for the weak and the vulnerable. So like the ceremonial laws, the civil laws have some abiding validity that believers must carefully seek to reflect in their own lives and practices, not only as members of the church, but as citizens of their countries." ⁽¹⁵⁾





Relief for the poor

The LORD gave Moses commands as to how the community was to operate in ensuring relief and help to the poor, i.e. the Levites (who had no inheritance or allotment of their own outside the walled towns), the indebted, the slave, the alien, the fatherless, and the widow.

The Sabbath Year

In addition, the Mosaic law made provision for ensuring that no-one was caught in a cycle of poverty and debt.

Debt relief every seven years, the Sabbath Year; Deuteronomy 15:1ff

Free bonded workers every seven years, the Sabbath Year; Deuteronomy 15:12-18

Fallow fields every seven years, the Sabbath Year; Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 25:1-7

The goal of the theocratic community was to be that “there should be no poor among you”. This would be achieved by living according to God’s commands, and therefore living under his blessing. This blessing would enable them to provide for all their needs, and the ability to restore all those who fell into poverty.

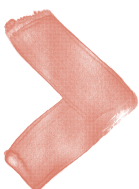
The Year of Jubilee

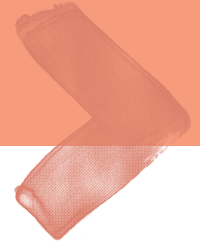
The Year of Jubilee was to be announced with the trumpet. Liberty was to be proclaimed over the whole land “to all its inhabitants”⁽¹⁶⁾. It included restoration of land to the traditional family inheritance, the relief of poverty, and redemption from debt. Its effect would be to prevent any member, and any family, of the community becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty, whatever the cause.

Social justice: The Old Testament prophets

Throughout the recorded words of the Old Testament Prophets, the theme of God’s judgement on His people for failing to show mercy and justice to the poor is second only to the theme of His judgment on their unfaithfulness to Him and His promise of redemption in the Messiah⁽¹⁷⁾.

The tone is set from the beginning of Isaiah. Having made His initial accusations against Judah and Jerusalem, and decried their hypocritical worship, the prophet concludes, “Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.”⁽¹⁸⁾ This exhortation is repeated throughout Isaiah, and other prophetic books (e.g. Hosea 6:6, Isaiah 11:4, 58:6-8, Zechariah 7:8-10).





Nor was God's judgment on idolatry and social injustice voiced through the prophets reserved only to Israel. This was expressed in judgement on the nations surrounding Israel by Amos ⁽¹⁹⁾; in compassion on Nineveh when they repented of their wickedness and violence (20); and in both judgement and hope for Egypt through Isaiah. ⁽²¹⁾

A verse from the book of the prophet Micah provides a helpful summary. "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly ["do justice" ESV], and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" ⁽²²⁾.

Social justice: Old Testament wisdom literature

In biblical "wisdom literature" righteousness, justice and mercy are prominent themes.

Proverbs 22:9 "A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor."

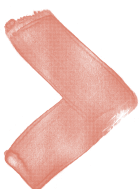
Proverbs 31:8-9 "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy".

Francis I. Anderson, in his commentary on the book of Job, writes that we are presented with a model of how the biblically righteous man was supposed to live. Anderson writes, "right conduct is almost entirely social ... In Job's conscience ... to omit to do good to any fellow human being, of whatever rank or class, would be a grievous offence to God."⁽²³⁾

The Psalms frequently reflect God's character, and His concern for justice, righteousness and mercy. The following verses are typical.

"But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" ⁽²⁴⁾

"Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man. Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice." ⁽²⁵⁾





Jesus, the Kingdom of God, and social justice

Jesus – God’s “indefinable gift”⁽²⁶⁾

Following the history of the constant failures of the kings of Israel and the people of God under the old covenant, God fulfils His promise to send one who forgives, saves, rescues, restores, and redeems all who will believe in Him under a new and better covenant.⁽²⁷⁾ In Jesus God demonstrates His love and compassion for the poor; the sinful poor, the oppressed poor, the materially poor, and the spiritually poor. In giving Jesus, the New Testament makes clear that His intervention is not in any way deserved or earned, but is a gift of grace, occasioned by His love.⁽²⁸⁾

In and through Jesus, God breaks in to rescue us from sin and all its consequences: guilt, shame, and judgement; but also from poverty, sickness, oppression, and death. The Kingdom of God heralds not only forgiveness but also freedom from the power of sin and death; healing, restoration, peace, and joy.⁽²⁹⁾

The Nazareth Manifesto

Jesus starts His ministry by declaring:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”⁽³⁰⁾

Commentators (e.g. Motyer⁽³¹⁾), Wolf and Stek et al.⁽³²⁾) agree that the references in Isaiah 49:8-9, 61:1-2, and Luke 4:18-19 to proclaiming “freedom” and “the year of the Lord’s favour” reference the Year of Jubilee as described in Leviticus 25:8ff.

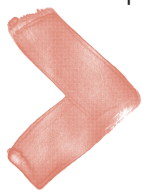
Jesus now declares “not a calendar year, but the period when salvation would be proclaimed, the Messianic age”, when Jesus announces there would be “liberation from sin and all its consequences.”⁽³³⁾

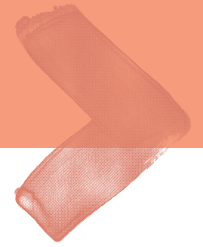
Jesus immediately begins to deliver His manifesto by teaching with authority, accompanied by delivering people from the power of the devil, and healing all the sick who were brought to Him.⁽³⁴⁾

When John the Baptist seeks confirmation that Jesus is the awaited Messiah, Jesus points to the physical evidence that He is fulfilling this mission.

“Jesus replied, ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.’”⁽³⁵⁾

Of this Keller remarks, “Here is the same care for the vulnerable that characterises the heart of God. While clearly Jesus was preaching the good news to all, He showed throughout His ministry the particular interest in the poor and the downtrodden that God has always had.”⁽³⁶⁾





Jesus's teaching on being righteous and doing justice

Jesus agreed with an expert in the law that to inherit eternal life – to be right with God – God requires us to: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind’, and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.” Jesus’s immediate response emphasised action, to do justice. “Do this and you will live.”⁽³⁷⁾ However the lawyer’s next question gave Jesus the opportunity to radically redraw the definition of neighbour. No longer was the command to love your neighbour limited to one’s own community, but stretched to a hated foreigner – anyone, in fact, who needs your help, and whom you have the power to help.⁽³⁸⁾

He taught His disciples, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, and praise your Father in heaven.”⁽³⁹⁾

In his teaching Jesus not only frequently told those with means to give to the poor, but urged a radical inclusiveness. “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed”.⁽⁴⁰⁾

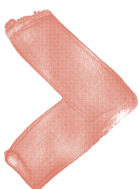
To the religious Jesus said, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kind of herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.”⁽⁴¹⁾

Jesus made repeated and devastating denunciations of religious practice that concentrated on form and appearance, and that neglected justice and acts of compassion. These echoed and expanded the prophetic denunciation and exhortation found in Isaiah Chapter 58, “Is this not the kind of fasting that I have chosen, to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry, and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?”⁽⁴²⁾

We are not saved by good works, but if we are saved, we will do good works.

What are “good works”? Jesus tells us that only God is good. Good works, therefore are those deeds that express the goodness of God as revealed in scripture; His kindness, generosity, compassion, mercy and justice. As the prophet Micah declares, “I have told you, O man, what is good ...”⁽²²⁾

The parable of the sheep and the goats⁽⁴³⁾ is a picture of God’s test of true faith. Keller writes, “This describes Jesus’s examination of humankind on judgement day. He distinguishes those who have true faith from those who do not by examining their fruit; namely, their concern for the poor, homeless, sick and prisoners ... By such deeds God can judge true love from lip service.”⁽⁴⁴⁾





The Kingdom of God

Theologian George Ladd writes: “The Kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God, and, derivatively, the sphere in which the rule is experienced.”⁽⁴⁵⁾

The terms the ‘Kingdom of God’ and the ‘Kingdom of heaven’ are synonymous.

Jesus demonstrated the authority and power of His kingship in many ways; over sin, over demons, over nature, over sickness, and over death. He also demonstrates the authority belonging only to God to forgive sins.

When Jesus sent the disciples out ‘on mission’ to the Jewish people in the towns and villages of Israel, He “gave them authority to drive out evil spirits, and to heal every disease and sickness”⁽⁴⁶⁾, and instructed them to “preach this message: the kingdom of God is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons”.⁽⁴⁷⁾

The disciples, armed with Jesus’s authority, were able to demonstrate the power of the Kingdom of God to liberate people from the authority of Satan and sickness. They demonstrated the nearness of the Kingdom of God.

Following the resurrection Jesus said to the disciples “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”⁽⁴⁸⁾ Prior to his resurrection Jesus had sent His disciples out to proclaim the kingdom of God, the fulfilment of the blessings of the “year of Jubilee”, among the towns and cities of Israel. His great commission to the disciples following his resurrection, is to go into the whole world to do the same, promising that His presence will always be with them.⁽⁴⁹⁾

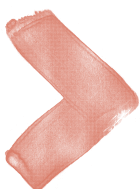
As believers, one with Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit, we are called to do the same. We are those commissioned to demonstrate that ‘the Kingdom of God is near’, since Jesus dwells in us, - to show mercy, and call people to the obedience of faith. We are to be those who bring Kingdom advance, and bring the presence of Jesus to the physically and spiritually poor in a suffering, unjust, and lost world.

Social justice: the book of Acts

The new born church, fresh from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the gathered followers of Jesus, demonstrated a remarkable new spirit of generosity and care for the poor from the beginning, and continued even when doing so became a large task.

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”⁽⁵⁰⁾

“There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”⁽⁵¹⁾





Care for the poor also necessitated the creation of the first ‘specialist’ role in the body of the church, “men who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom”, to be responsible for the daily distribution of food to the poor, including both Hebraic and Grecian Jews.⁽⁵²⁾

Social justice: the epistles

The teaching of Paul in the epistles once again underlines the fundamental point that salvation is a free gift received by faith that cannot be earned, and that good works, or even being law abiding, cannot save. However Paul is clear that, God Himself has prepared good works for every believer to do.⁽⁵³⁾

In the epistles we receive a graphic picture of what the first apostles considered vital in the churches they planted and oversaw.

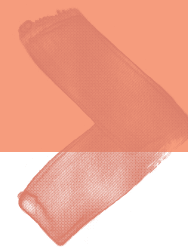
Paul’s stinging criticism of the conduct of the Corinthian church reflects his determination to teach a regard for the poor. “When you come together it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anyone else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God, and humiliate those who have nothing?”⁽⁵⁴⁾

James is even more direct. First, a general statement in the context of living a life free from hypocrisy and self-delusion. “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.”⁽⁵⁵⁾ James then identifies the hypocrisy of honouring the rich over the poor at public meetings.⁽⁵⁶⁾, and proceeds to denounce the rich, for their exploitation and harrising of the poor,⁽⁵⁷⁾ in a passage reminiscent of the prophets⁽⁵⁸⁾. James roots this back into “the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’”, and concludes that favouritism and deference towards the rich is sin.”⁽⁵⁹⁾

In a passage reminiscent of Matthew 25 James writes, “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement! What good is it my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes or daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”⁽⁶⁰⁾

Paul’s letter to the Galatian church records that James, Peter, and John, in commissioning Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles, “all they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing that I was eager to do.”⁽⁶¹⁾ Notwithstanding that the “Remember the poor” verse was the rallying cry powerfully used in Simon Pettit’s message to international Newfrontiers leaders in 1998⁽⁶²⁾, it is “arguably a reference to the poor in the Christian community”.⁽⁶³⁾ However others, including Martin Charlesworth, argue that in commissioning Paul to go to Gentiles in cultures with no tradition of care for the poor, it would highlight the need to include teaching on God’s heart for the poor in newly planted churches, and the expectation of Christians caring for the poor.⁽⁶⁴⁾ This charge, to remember the poor, was clearly an essential part of the apostolic commission given to Paul by James, Peter, and John.





The apostle Peter urges both personal holiness and good deeds. “Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.”⁽⁶⁵⁾

This apostolic teaching to the churches is well summarised in Paul’s letter to the Galatian church both what believers should do, and the sure outcome of doing so. “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”⁽⁶⁶⁾

Social justice: early church history

We learn from early church history that the early Christians were remarkably generous with economic aid to non-Christians.

Julian became emperor of Rome in AD 361.”⁽⁶⁷⁾ He wrote “It is disgraceful that ... while the impious Galileans [Christians] support both their own poor and ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us.”⁽⁶⁸⁾ Alan Kreider, referred to by Keller, makes “a strong historical case that what attracted nonbelievers was the Christians’ concern for the weak and the poor, their economic sharing, and their sacrificial love even for their enemies”.⁽⁶⁹⁾

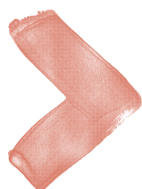
Social justice: The U.K. church in post-Reformation Times

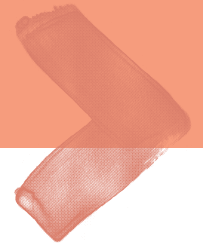
John Wesley, the father of Methodism, did not separate evangelism and social justice. His “New Room” in Bristol, founded in 1738 operated a food bank, ran a school to educate the children of the poor, organised visits to the local prison, and opened one of the first free medical dispensaries in the country.”⁽⁷⁰⁾

William Wilberforce believed that the Holy Spirit had called him to end slavery and improve society through political action.⁽⁷¹⁾

Anthony Ashley Cooper, 8th Earl of Salisbury (1801 – 1885), a devout Christian, was known as “the poor man’s earl”. He was a leading and tireless figure in the reform of lunatic asylums, working hours and conditions across many industries, education, and suppressing the opium trade⁽⁷²⁾

The early 20th century saw the Great Reversal “This happened mainly as a reaction to the rise of a ‘social gospel’. ... With the social gospel, the divinity of Christ had come under attack. ... Many evangelicals therefore began to use the term ‘social gospel’ as a means of labelling as unorthodox any views which highlighted the social dimension of the gospel. The result was that such defenders of the faith began to separate evangelism and social concern, word and deed, spirit and body.”⁽⁷³⁾





However from the 1960's a new consensus began to emerge that word and deed, the gospel and compassionate service, belonged together. John Stott wrote, "The turning point for the worldwide evangelical community was doubtless the International Congress on World Evangelisation held in July 1974".⁽⁷⁴⁾

The Lausanne declaration stated, "Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ".⁽⁷⁵⁾

Social justice and ministry with the poor: Applications for the church

Applications within the church ⁽⁷⁶⁾

The New Testament church will express God's concern for social justice in relief of poverty among members, including by sharing possessions, selling off unneeded assets to enable generous giving, and organising regular support for the needy, although families should bear first responsibility for family members. Fundraising and financial support for other churches experiencing material hardship can and should be an expression of our love for other Christians experiencing hardship.

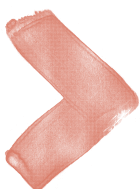
New Testament principles of Christian giving include generosity; freedom from pressure or manipulation; giving on the basis of relationship; and giving being an act of faith. The goal is to achieve equality, that everyone would have sufficient.⁽⁷⁷⁾

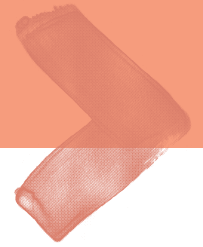
Biblically this is to be done with the oversight the apostles and church leaders.⁽⁷⁸⁾

Pursuing social justice through the church

We are to practise unconditional love towards our 'neighbour', as redefined and extended by Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan.⁽³⁸⁾

"Love your neighbour as yourself" is taught by the apostle James as "the royal law of scripture."⁽⁵⁹⁾ "Caring for orphans and widows", is an essential part of "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless."⁽⁵⁵⁾ A modern day application includes 'the destitute'.





As Gary Haugen writes, “Our calling does not stop with sharing the good news. All of us are also called to do something [Haugen’s italics] to care for the poor. If we aren’t, then, asks the apostle John, ‘how can the love of God be within us?’⁽⁷⁹⁾ And we are all called to do something to seek justice for the oppressed. Why? Because along with mercy and faith, justice Jesus said, is one of the ‘more important matters,’ one that none of us can neglect”.⁽⁸⁰⁾

The church also has a prophetic voice to society, just as James denounced the rich in the society of his day for hoarding wealth, and denying the harvesters their proper wages.⁽⁸¹⁾

Salt and Light

We as modern day Christians are called by Jesus to act as “salt and light” in our communities in ways that shine out, and cause everyone to “see your good deeds, and praise your Father in heaven”⁽⁸²⁾. Salt is activated by contact. Ministry with the poor requires us to get involved and build relationships with those in need.

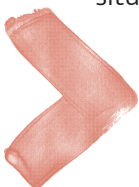
Light has to be put on a stand so that it can shine out, give light to everyone and be seen. Jesus makes it clear that what He wants to be seen is our good works – for His glory, not ours.⁽³⁹⁾

Opportunities abound in our neighbourhoods and work places to bring acts of kindness; to influence and indeed lead in public policy initiatives in seeking to address causes of poverty, disadvantage, and suffering; to do business that brings good to others; and to partner with those seeking the general good, such as local authorities.

Social justice: Commission theological position and breadth.

Included:

- Salvation is by grace through faith alone, not by works.⁽⁸³⁾
- Good works and ministry with the poor are a natural expression of saving faith, and deeds of kindness are an essential attribute of the Christian.⁽⁸⁴⁾
- “The ministry of the word [evangelism], though it does not function properly apart from deed ministry, addresses the most radical and foundational roots of human need.”⁽⁸⁵⁾
- “Word and deed are equally necessary, mutually interdependent, and inseparable ministries, each carried out with the single purpose of the spread of the kingdom of God”⁽⁸⁶⁾
- Word and deed are perfectly illustrated in the life and ministry of Jesus. As believers we are called to follow him in preaching good news to the poor, doing justice, and being merciful.
- The church is the body of Christ and the agent of the Kingdom of God, bearing the presence, authority and heart of God into our world and communities, demonstrating His love, power and kindness in every situation.





- Individual believers are called to advance the Kingdom of God, bearing the presence, authority and heart of God into our world and communities, demonstrating His love, power and kindness in every situation.
- Planting and discipling churches that express in word and deed the heart of God for the church and for the lost, and which remember the poor is an important element in the apostolic commission.
- Christians are called to bear witness to God's love of justice, hatred of injustice, and to expose and stand against oppression and injustice in the world.

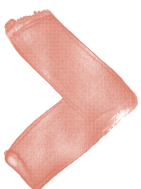
Social Justice: Commission Theological Position – Excluded

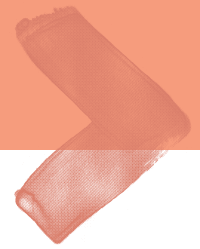
- Neglect of preaching of the gospel
- Minimising the offence of sin to God
- That we can be reconciled to God by good works
- That social or moral improvement are sufficient objectives
- Any abdication of call to advance the kingdom
- Faith without works is sufficient

Summary

Doing social justice, in the context of a just, righteous and restored relationship with God, is a necessary expression of our faith, a means of advancing the Kingdom of God, and an effective context and means to evangelism.

Peter Lyndon 2018
(4997)



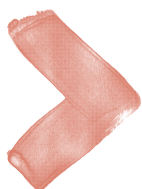


Notes on references

All notes on references relate to the main document.

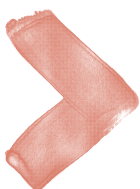
*The details of references and sources for the executive summary are all given in the main document.

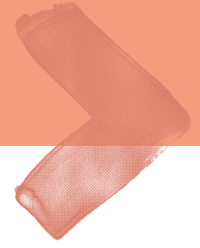
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