


POVERTY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Primer

*'For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity.'
(Isaiah 61:8)*



Challenges with seeking a Biblical view of social justice

- ◆ We bring baggage to the question
- ◆ What if there is no 'Biblical' view of social justice?
 - What is the Biblical view of *cement*?
 - What the Bible says is always TRUE, but not necessarily EXHAUSTIVE

Two general approaches

- ◆ The 'progressives'
 - Robin Hood economics
 - 'How did Jesus become pro-rich, pro-war and pro-American?'
- ◆ The 'conservatives'
 - Family values, law and order
 - 'Prosperous Christians in an age of guilt-manipulators'
- ◆ Where should we sit?

Social Justice

The image features a solid teal background. In the bottom right corner, there is a stylized, low-poly silhouette of a mountain range in a slightly darker shade of teal. The text "Social Justice" is centered in the upper half of the image in a light yellow-green color.

What is social justice?

- ◆ *Social righteousness*
 - Acting in love
 - Showing love at a societal level
 - ◆ Fair treatment of those with no voice
 - ◆ Equal legal standing regardless of gender, race, religion
 - ◆ Impartial administration of justice
- ◆ Not equality

The essential principles:

- ◆ Injustice is always deplorable, but sadly inevitable
 - Ps 97:10; Isa 61:8; Gen 3,4; Rom 8:22
- ◆ Those who seek justice do so at their peril
 - Amos 5:18
- ◆ We are to 'love justice'
 - Ps 97:10

Some topical examples

- ◆ Injustice against the unborn
 - Abortion
 - Embryonic cloning/experimentation
 - Gay adoption
- ◆ Injustice against the alien
 - Human trafficking
 - Treatment of refugees
- ◆ Injustice against the poor
 - Excessive rent, unfair pay
- ◆ Injustice against the victim
 - Lenient sentencing

What is the relationship between justice and poverty?

- ◆ The poor are particularly vulnerable to injustice (Exod 23:6, Luke 18:1-8)

What should our approach be?

- ◆ Scripture is clear in its condemnation of injustice, but less clear in how we should address it
- ◆ Most people share similar goals, but have different strategies
- ◆ JUSTICE (including economic justice) should be our goal – not equality
 - Lev 19:36, Pr 11:1, Mic 6:8

Poverty

The image features a solid teal background. At the bottom, there is a silhouette of a mountain range in a slightly darker shade of teal. The word "Poverty" is centered in the upper half of the image in a light yellow, sans-serif font.

Who are 'the poor'?

- ◆ Materially and spiritually impoverished
 - Widows, orphans, aliens (Ex 22:21-22)
 - The lazy (Pr 6:10-11)
 - God's people (Isa 3:14-15; Lk 6:20)
 - Those to whom the gospel is preached (Lk 4:17-19)

The God of the poor

- ◆ God is their defender, saviour
 - Ps 12:5; Ps 68:5
- ◆ Poverty is an elevated condition in God's sight
 - Jas 1:9
- ◆ The paradox of poverty
 - *Poverty is a blessing ...*
 - *... but not a blessing we should wish on others*

Poverty in Australia

- ◆ Wild overestimations
 - ACOSS: two million Australians living in poverty (10%)
 - 'Deprivation' a more useful word (3%)
- ◆ It's often not related to income
 - Substance abuse, gambling, stages of life
- ◆ More of a problem overseas
 - 40% of world on less than \$2 per day
 - 21% on less than \$1 per day

Some guiding principles

- ◆ Unlike eastern faiths, Christianity believes the material world *matters*
 - Care for the poor is an important part of Christian ethics
- ◆ But the Church's goal is NOT the eradication of poverty, any more than it is the eradication of diabetes

Our duty to the poor

- ◆ Hospitality (Isa 58:6-7)
- ◆ Lavish generosity (Lk 12:33)
- ◆ Justice (Isa 1:16-17)
- ◆ Institutionalised safeguards (Lev 19:9-10)
- ◆ The people of God the primary focus (Acts 6:1-4)

“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.” (Jas 1:27)

What about politics?

Christians should support policies that:

- ◆ Protect equality under law
- ◆ Favour wealth creation
- ◆ Lead to financial independence
- ◆ Pursue high (full) employment
- ◆ Support families

Christians should oppose policies that:

- ◆ Punish initiative
- ◆ Encourage laziness
- ◆ Leave the poor without help
- ◆ Leave the poor without a voice
- ◆ Cause inflation

International affairs

- ◆ Global poverty
- ◆ The persecuted Church
- ◆ Our brothers in Iraq

Conclusion

- ◆ An important distinction:
 - The **Church's** duty is to preach the gospel (Matt 28: 18-20)
 - The **Christian's** duty is to live out the gospel
- ◆ Importance of Christian civic groups
 - The Clapham Set, ACL, Saltshakers
 - Justice International
- ◆ The primacy of the gospel

DISCUSSION

Questions

- ◆ What is the role of the state?
 - To show compassion?
 - To show justice?
 - ◆ God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good: and, to this end, has armed them with the power of the sword, for the defence and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.[1]

Questions

◆ Generosity

- Sometimes it can be abused. Does this mean we shouldn't be generous? How discriminating ought we to be?
- Personal generosity
- Foreign aid