



RBC Connect group study for week of 13/9/20

Congregational Mission Part 3 - Justice

What comes to mind when you hear the word 'justice' or the phrase 'social justice'?

Within the Church there's often differing definitions and ideas about justice. It is also often seen as secondary, an optional extra to congregational mission or evangelism.

In our secular culture, there are four categories of justice theories:

- Libertarian – justice is basically about freedom;
- Liberal – justice is basically about fairness;
- Utilitarian – justice is basically about happiness;
- Postmodern – justice is basically about power.

All theories share two assumptions: there is no transcendent, moral absolutes on which to base justice and; they all see human nature as a blank slate that can be wholly reshaped by human means.^[1]

Since none of these theories include God, using them to inform Congregational Mission is limited. And with God missing, the idea that justice is secondary, an optional extra to the Church's mission, is only reinforced.

Fortunately, there's an alternative, Biblical Justice, a theory of justice which includes God and can inform Congregational Mission. Biblical Justice is grounded in several truths:

- We are created by God in His image [**Genesis 1:26, 5:2; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6**].
- We are created by God for loving Him as well as our neighbour as we love ourselves. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew, Mark and Luke when He identifies the greatest command as **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.”** [Luke 10:27]
- God is just, therefore, the Scriptures condemns injustice because **‘with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.’** [2 Chronicles 19:7; refer also Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 103:6; Romans 9:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:6] In fact, justice, doing what is right and just is identified as a most acceptable act of worship [Proverbs 21:3; Amos 5:21-24].

- Biblical Justice is rooted in seeking the welfare of those who are unable to fend for themselves; because these are the people who frequently get abused and treated unjustly. We're told to show concern and care to the poor, widows, orphans and foreigners; we're to defend and seek the welfare of those who are most vulnerable to suffer from injustice **[Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3]**.

What implications are linked to Biblical Justice for the individual follower of Jesus as well as for the collective followers of Jesus and Congregational Mission?

First, made in the image of God, all people must be treated equally and with dignity. Second, Biblical Justice is all about loving God and loving others. It's about our vertical relationship with God as well as our horizontal relationship with each other. Therefore, Biblical Justice demands a balanced approach, we must tell the gospel and confront sin, as we simultaneously stand against injustice.

In answer to the question: **"And who is my neighbour?"** Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan **[Luke 10:25-37]**. We're told of a man who was travelling on his own, minding his own business, when he was attacked, stripped naked, and left to die. Clearly, this man had been a victim of injustice in that his basic rights were violated, via the unprovoked violent attack by others. The attack was unfair and undeserved; through no fault of his own, he was beaten, naked, half dead; the man was disempowered, degraded, humiliated, pushed aside, left to die. Adding salt to the wound, two men, a priest and a Levite, who both held top roles within Jewish culture/society, (two men who should have known and done better), walked past him; their actions only reinforced – almost validated - the injustice already experienced by this man. Unable to help himself, the man became trapped within the circumstances into which he'd been pushed. The 'good Samaritan' saw the injustice - he did something, he acted, he gave the man a helping hand up and out of the unfair, undeserved circumstances.

Putting it in today's language... he stopped his car, jumped out, ran over to the man, picked him up, put him in his car, drove him to the nearest private hospital, paid for his care, checked on him a day later, and paid the remaining amount owed. The 'good Samaritan', the one who stopped, got his hands dirty, he literally got blood on his hands and dirt on his clothes. We need more people willing to get their hands dirty. More willing to show love and give hope; we need to be people loving God and loving our neighbour as ourselves! Remember, Jesus told this story in answer to the Jewish lawyer's question, **"Who is my Neighbour?" [Luke 10:29]**. In the end Jesus' answer is simple – EVERYONE – everyone is your neighbour, there are no exceptions. With this answer Jesus makes the point we need to treat ALL people equally, there's no exceptions. Jesus does this by making the Samaritan the hero in the story and by doing this He reinforces that we are to act justly, show mercy, to love and give hope, even our 'enemies' are included in the ALL; there's no exceptions, ALL people are our neighbour and potentially need us to show them love and give them hope. This includes people who are 'local' as well as people who are 'global'. This means we do need to think beyond our borders, we do need to think global, we do need to respond to the injustice being experienced by people we probably will never meet. Through the story of the Good Samaritan Jesus makes clear we are not to just talk about justice, we must do justice. He ends the parable with the instruction to **"Go and do likewise." [Luke 10:37]**

This means we need a balanced approach to Congregational Mission; we need to include justice. We need to dispense compassion and love into our broken world; and give those trapped in unjust circumstances freedom and hope. We need to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. **[Micah 6:8]**

QUESTIONS:

1. How did Jesus demonstrate a balanced approach between sharing the gospel while responding to injustice?
2. How can you 'do justice' in your life? List 1 or 2 practical things you could do this week.
3. What are some practical ways you can 'do justice' in your congregational mission?

Blessings, Paul Manning, Church Relationship Manager, Baptist World Aid